

# **MBTA Communities Working Group**

## **July 11, 2023**

### **Meeting Summary**

**Attending:** Mette Aamodt, Vince Baudoin (remote), Rebecca Gruber, Kin Lau, Sanjay Newton, Stephen Revilak, Laura Wiener

**Staff:** Marisa Lau, Teresa Marzilli (remote), Claire Ricker

**Guests:** Matthew Littell (Utile), Rahi Patel (Utile)

## **Approval of Meeting Summary**

The working group approved minutes from their June 27, 2023 meeting, by unanimous vote.

## **Outreach and Education Opportunities**

Ms. Marzilli wants to provide an update on outreach opportunities. We've talked about holding "office hours" at the Robbins Library, and the Library has given us four time slots for doing so. These are:

- Friday July 14th, 10:00 – noon. (Rebecca, Laura)
- Saturday August 5th, 10:00 – noon (Steve, Claire (tentative))
- Tuesday August 15th, 16:00 – 18:00 (Rebecca, Teresa)
- Friday August 25th, 10:00 – noon (Sanjay)

We also have an opportunity to hold a pop-up event for the Council on Aging, on Thursday July 13th. Ms. Marzilli and others will continue to table at the Arlington Farmer's market, on some upcoming Wednesdays from 14:00 – 17:00.

Ms. Marzilli and Ms. Gruber set up materials at the front table of the Robbins Library. We may add materials later in the month, like an invitation to the July 25th public forum.

We may have an opportunity to have popup events at Arlington EATS and the Arlington Housing Authority.

We have an open invitation to table at the Arlington Reservoir concert series. These events are held Friday nights at 18:30. Ms. Ricker asks about tabling during the Saturday beer gardens at the Jason Russell house. Ms. Marzilli will look into this.

Mr. Newton thinks our main issue is having enough people to cover all of these events. He says we'll continue to pursue outreach efforts after the July 25th forum.

Ms. Gruber informs the group that the outreach team has a meeting tomorrow afternoon, Wednesday July 12th at 15:00.

## Review Maps and Other Planning Products

Ms. Aamodt provided drawings of two concept maps, one in East Arlington and one in Arlington center. She and Mr. Baudoin worked on these maps with the following principles in mind:

- Four stories along Mass Ave, with a two-story bonus for including ground-floor commercial.
- Four stories along Broadway, with a one-story bonus for including ground floor commercial.
- A four-story medium density district set off the corridors, and in some existing B1 districts.
- Leaving room around existing commercial districts, to facilitate future expansion and opportunities for parcel consolidation.
- Having higher-density mixed-use (ground floor commercial and residential) in areas between the commercial centers, and possibly in some of the B1 and B4 parcels that aren't aligned with their district goals.
- Having medium density residential in existing R1 districts in East Arlington, and between Mass Ave and Gray St.

Ms. Aamodt says this approach is trying to work more at the scale of city blocks. She's presenting these maps to move the conversation forward, pointing out that there's still room to expand the commercial district and for parcel aggregation. She suggests avoiding large commercial parcels (e.g., Walgreens). Ms. Aamodt's map of Arlington center has medium density housing in areas that are under-developed, or very vehicular-oriented. She's tried to bump up density in a context-sensitive way, while avoiding R2 districts.

Ms. Wiener agrees with using higher density residential to fill in the areas between commercial centers. She suggests having a third type of multi-family district for lower density areas: three stories and six units/building. She's suggesting a lower density district to avoid push-back from neighborhoods. Ms. Aamodt says we could also do that.

Mr. Baudoin thinks that Ms. Aamodt is really furthering the conversation with the ARB, where new growth is concerned. He doesn't think it's practical to have commercial uses along the entire length of Mass Ave, which is approximately 3.5 miles. There are three multi-family districts, mostly differentiated by bonuses.

Ms. Ricker asks Utile how bonuses are counted in the state's compliance model. Mr. Littell says the base provisions are counted, not the bonuses.

Mr. Lau asks about the possibility of moving commercial districts around – moving parcels from one area to another. This wouldn't reduce the size of the commercial districts, but it would change where they're located. He sees this as a way to strike a better balance.

Mr. Newton suggests taking the East Arlington map and continuing the conversation there. He'd like to be sure we can get the ARB on board and be ready for our public forum on July 25th.

There's discussion about the maps, the timing of the process, and whether the things we're proposing will work well over the long run. Mr. Revilak recognizes that we're on a tight schedule, so that Arlington will be able to participate in the state's gas ban pilot. He asks the group if it would be preferable to wait until the spring town meeting. Another community would take our place in the gas ban pilot, but we'd have more time for planning and refinement.

Ms. Ricker asks how much time we should allow for DHCD to approve our district. Mr. Littell says communities should allow 30 days. He suggests doing this before the zoning changes go to town meeting. He thinks our proposals are straightforward, and we're not trying to do anything tricky. But we don't know what DHCD will say.

Mr. Baudoin asks about building height assumptions. Ms. Ricker says they're based on 60' along the corridors and 40' behind the corridors.

Mr. Lau agrees with waiting until the spring. He doesn't want to rush through the process. Mr. Lau thinks there are a lot of good ideas here, but they haven't fully coalesced. He'd like time to dive into different blocks and sections of town. Ms. Wiener doesn't want to give up the deadline, but she feels that Utile's map leaves a lot on the table.

Mr. Littell says the basic logic behind the maps is to preserve commercial districts, allow taller buildings on Mass Ave, and smaller ones behind. Along with the map, they've provided capacity calculations with a 30 dwelling/acre cap, and with no cap. The capacity calculations come from the state's compliance model; the table is actually a screenshot from their software. Mr. Littell says that most of the lots on Mass Ave are already over 30 dwellings/acre. The only dimensional limits they've applied are height, setbacks, and parking.

There's discussion about height limits. Utile had been working with limits of 40' and 60', which they translated to 3 stories for the lower density district, and five stories for the higher density district. Members of the working group had been thinking of the height in terms of stories – four stories for the lower density district, and six stories for the higher. Utile agrees to use stories for future capacity modeling. Members of the working group note that single- and two-family districts currently have height limits of 35' and 2.5 stories, where 2.5 stories means three stories tall with a reduction in floor area on the top story. Four stories is only an incremental increase from three.

Ms. Gruber thinks we'll need to reconsider the deadline if we don't think we can meet it. This should involve conversations with the Town Manager and Select Board. Ms. Marzilli encourages the working group to think about what we already know, based on what we've heard from the community. Ms. Gruber thinks we'll need to do the best we can, in order to make the date. Mr. Baudoin agrees that the deadline for participation in the fossil fuel ban is important, and he thinks we can make it work. For the next public forum, he thinks we should ask questions about height and parking bonuses. Mr. Newton also agrees that the deadline is important and should be taken into consideration. Ms. Aamodt doesn't want us to end up with a bad plan. Ms. Wiener doesn't think we should give up our slot in the fossil fuel pilot. Mr. Revilak says he asked the question because we're operating on a tight deadline, and wanted to see how the group is feeling about it. He believes there are pros and cons to meeting the deadline vs. taking more time to plan out the districts, and he wanted to discuss the tradeoffs.

Ms. Gruber makes a motion to continue as we have been, to try to meet the deadline, and do the best job we can given the time constraints. Motion passes, 5-1-1 (Mr. Lau abstained, and Ms. Aamodt voted in the negative).

Mr. Littell says the proposed district is simple, and there's nothing to preclude us from expanding it at a later point in time.

Mr. Lau would like to see future maps drawn at a larger scale. He'd like to have two maps: one that zooms in on East Arlington, and one that zooms in to the other parts of town. He thinks we'll need these

for July 25th. Ms. Wiener says she's uncomfortable with the amount of space that's been taken away from Mass Ave. Mr. Newton thinks the working group has gotten a fairly clear set of directions from the Redevelopment Board. There's discussion about the commercial districts, and what would be acceptable to the ARB. Mr. Newton suggests we continue to do our own refinements in East Arlington.

Mr. Newton would like to move to the topic of bonuses, and he asks the group what they feel would be appropriate. Mr. Lau proposes a parking reduction, and a two-story height bonus for ground floor commercial. Mr. Patel notes that the state's compliance model is based on what's allowed by right; bonuses are not included. Mr. Revilak suggests not having a parking minimum for the multi-family district. He suggests having a minimum of zero, and a maximum of one parking space per dwelling unit. Members of the group discuss this proposal. There's acknowledgment that reducing the number of cars on the road is the only way to reduce traffic congestion, and we could move in this direction by providing less of an incentive for car ownership.

Mr. Lau motions to endorse a minimum parking requirement of zero, with a maximum of one space per dwelling. Motion passes, 7-0.

Mr. Lau motions to endorse a height bonus for the inclusion of ground floor commercial, for parcels that touch Mass Ave and Broadway. The group discusses the height bonus. There's general agreement that a two-story bonus would be appropriate for Mass Ave. The group felt that a height bonus was also appropriate for Broadway but did not come to consensus on whether that bonus should be one or two stories. The motion to endorse a two-story height bonus on Mass Ave and an unspecified height bonus on Broadway, for the inclusion of ground floor commercial passes, 7-0.

Mr. Littell suggests having some controls on what counts as ground floor commercial, such as a minimum on floor area, or percentage of floor area.

Mr. Revilak notes that the working group received a letter from the Open Space Committee recommending that we "Incentivize the inclusion of publicly accessible open space in and around new development projects". He'd like to discuss what such an incentive might look like. For example, if a property owner took a few thousand cubic feet off the front of their building in order to provide a public plaza, we might allow them to add extra stories in order to put the volume on top, plus some extra for their trouble. Ms. Aamodt would rather encourage a more uniform streetscape; she'd like to avoid jagged edges. Another working group member notes that we'd have to consider how a height bonus for open space would interact with a height bonus for ground floor commercial.

Mr. Newton says he's hearing agreement that there should be some kind of incentive for providing open space, but he doesn't think we have clarity on what that incentive should be. Mr. Newton will try to meet with members of the Open Space Committee, to see if they had specific ideas in mind.

Mr. Lau suggests an incentive for providing parklets, or in-lieu-of payments if a property owner can't provide open space. Mr. Baudoin suggests using this as a question for our meeting on July 25th. Mr. Lau thinks we can try to incentivize other things, such as solar panels, installation of electric car chargers, net zero buildings, and street trees. Mr. Littell says it's easy to codify a bonus for ground floor commercial. Having a fund and in-lieu payments is more work. He suggests starting off simple and adding over time.

There's discussion about setbacks. Previous map iterations assumed a front setback of 0', and there's a question about whether that's the right amount. Utile clarifies that they're assuming a 0' front setback on Mass Ave and Broadway, but a 20' setback for the medium density district behind the corridors.

Members of the working group feel a 10' front setback would be more appropriate for the medium-density district, and Utile will use that assumption in future modeling. There's also recognition that larger setbacks will reduce capacity (or require a larger district), by forcing buildings to be smaller.

Ms. Aamodt recalls that we'd talked about preferring existing R1 parcels to R2 for the multi-family district, since the R1 parcels offer more development potential. She suggests avoiding streets like Foster and Adams, which are already built out. Ms. Aamodt requests that the Broadway district be extended eastward, to Silk Street.

Members of the working group ask that parcels in the proposed Arlington Heights Business District be excluded from the multi-family district. They'd also like the Mass Ave district to stop at Fairmont and Henderson Streets, since the area near the Alewife Brook is prone to flooding.

Mr. Lau would like Utile to provide some rough estimates for massing and building floorplates. There's discussion about building configurations. The ones we arrived at are:

- 65'x90' for a 24-unit building. This assumes double-loaded corridors and 30' of frontage per unit.
- 65'x45' for a 12-unit building. This is half the 24-unit building's dimensions.
- 50'x50' for a six-plex. This is based on a triple-decker, where 24'x50' is a common dimension.

## **Next Steps**

The next working group meeting will be Tuesday, July 18th.

Meeting adjourned.

## **Materials Discussed**

- "V5" draft map, provided by Utile
- "MBTA WG East Arlington Draft", provided by Ms. Aamodt
- "MBTA WG Mid Arlington Draft", provided by Ms. Aamodt

# Appendix

This appendix contains materials discussed by the working group, which have not been posted to the town website.

## MBTA WG East Arlington Draft



# MBTA WG Mid Arlington Draft

