

MBTA Communities Working Group

August 8, 2023

Meeting Summary

Attending: Mette Aamodt, Vince Baudoin (remote), Rebecca Gruber, Shaina Korman-Houston, Sanjay Newton (remote), Stephen Revilak, Laura Wiener

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

Guests: Matthew Littell, Utile (remote)

Approve meeting summaries from prior meetings

The working group approved the meeting summary from their August 1, 2023, meeting by a vote of 6-0-1 (Ms. Aamodt abstained).

Outreach

There are no outreach updates to report this evening.

Proposed map, dimensions, and bonuses

Mr. Newton says we have a tight timeline to submit a plan to the state for pre-review, and a lot to get through tonight.

Mr. Littell says that Utile was tasked with exploring alternative scenarios, which he'll present tonight. These scenarios adhere to the principles we've been trying to follow, but they tighten up and focus the districts. The map shown on July 25th will constitute our base scenario, and it's based on a 350' area centered around the Broadway and Mass Ave corridors. We discovered a complication with EOHLIC's compliance model, in that the model's capacity calculations don't respond to setbacks. After discussions with EOHLIC, Utile added open space requirements of 40% in the Mass Ave/Broadway District, and 60% in the Neighborhood Multi-family District, as a proxy for setback area.

Mr. Littell presents several alternatives using these proxy variables to account for setbacks. The base scenario with no open space or lot coverage gives a capacity of 20,123 units on 175 acres. The model arrived at this number by taking the size of each parcel and using a default open space requirement of 20%; the model assumed that buildings covered 80% of the parcel area and were built to the maximum height allowed.

Taking the base scenario and adding a 40% open space requirement to the Mass Ave/Broadway District and a 60% open space requirement to the Neighborhood Multi-family District yields a capacity of 10,957 on 175 acres. Maximum lot coverage could also be used as a proxy variable. Taking the base

scenario and adding 60% max lot coverage to the Mass Ave/Broadway District and 40% max lot coverage to the Neighborhood Multi-family District gives a capacity of 11,594 dwellings on 175 acres. The different values for the Mass Ave/Broadway and Neighborhood Multi-family Districts were chosen based on the average parcel sizes in those districts.

The model options available for this purpose are open space (all unbuilt area, including setbacks), max building coverage (which constrains the building footprint), max building coverage plus parking (the building footprint, plus space devoted to parking), and max lot coverage (a combination of the previous options, plus any additional ground-plane impervious area).

Mr. Littell proceeds to walk through the different scenarios that Utile prepared. Each of these assumes a proxy open space requirement of 40% in the Mass Ave/Broadway District, and 60% in the Neighborhood Multi-family District.

- Alternative A1 reduces the district size to a 250' transect across Mass Ave and Broadway, where both districts allow four stories by right. A1 provides a capacity of 7574 dwellings on 113.2 acres.
- Alternative A2 reduces the district size to a 250' transect across Mass Ave and Broadway, where the Mass Ave/Broadway district allows four stories by right and the neighborhood multi-family district allows three. A2 provides a capacity of 6463 dwellings on 113.2 acres.
- Alternative B1 is a tiered approach that includes four-story and three-story sub-districts. The four-story sub-district consists of parcels abutting Mass Ave and Broadway along with an adjacent parcel behind. The three-story sub-district consists of parcels behind the four-story sub-district. Relative to alternative A2, B1 has a larger Mass Ave/Broadway district, and a smaller neighborhood multi-family district. B1 has a capacity of 7,201 dwellings on 115.1 acres. Within the four-story sub-district, Mr. Littell suggests that height bonuses be available for only those parcels that directly abut Mass Ave and Broadway.

Mr. Littell believes that open space is the most accurate way to account for setbacks in the model. With the working group's preference for volumetric regulations, he suggests using an open space parameter in the modeling, but not in the actual zoning.

Mr. Newton asks for a reminder on what capacity means. Mr. Littell says that capacity is an estimate of the maximum number of dwelling units that could be constructed if every parcel in the district were made vacant, and then built-out to the maximum extent allowed by zoning. Capacity is not net-new construction; Mr. Littell believes that net-new is an important number to know, but they weren't able to calculate it in advance of this meeting. He says that all parcels are not equally likely to be redeveloped.

Mr. Baudoin thinks the working group is trying to find something that's in line with the values of the town, rather than working towards a target capacity. He asks about the possibility of estimating actual build out. Mr. Littell believes that would require an extensive economic study, because actual built-out would be heavily influenced by market conditions. He says that's beyond the scope of what Utile was asked to do.

Ms. Korman-Houston asks about the setbacks and modeled open space requirements. Mr. Littell says that 40% and 60% were emblematic of the new setbacks the working group adopted, based on an analysis of parcels in the district. Most parcels in the Neighborhood Multi-family District are around 5000 square feet, with dimensions of 50'x100'. Applying setbacks of 15' in front, 10' on the sides, and 20' in the rear gives approximately 40% developable lot area.

Mr. Revilak asks if the compliance model assumes 1000 square feet per dwelling unit. Mr. Littell answers in the affirmative.

In all of these scenarios, Ms. Aamodt sees too much concentration in East Arlington, due to having two corridors, each with a 250' strip in either direction. She notes that parcels in Arlington Heights were dropped off the map, and she'd like to pare down the Neighborhood Multi-family District in East Arlington. She thinks that East Arlington is already over-burdened compared to other areas of town with respect to the schools, traffic, parking, etc. It's almost entirely R2 and built out with two-family homes that are three stories tall, making it already the densest neighborhood in Arlington. Ms. Aamodt suggests removing the Neighborhood Multi-family District from East Arlington. Mr. Littell says we wouldn't have a contiguous district if we removed the neighborhood multi-family district from East Arlington. Ms. Aamodt thinks that's a design problem that Utile can solve. Ms. Korman-Houston disagrees. She thinks the question of how much of the Neighborhood Multi-family District should go in East Arlington is valid, but she doesn't agree with removing all of it. She thinks there's a benefit to having a mix of housing types and asks why we'd give up that opportunity.

Ms. Aamodt thinks that developers are unlikely to demo a two-family home in order to build a three-family. Instead she thinks they'll make unattractive additions to the buildings. Ms. Aamodt believes we'll end up with basement apartments and awkward add-ons, compromising the architectural integrity of the neighborhood. She thinks that will make the consistent fabric alien and produce sub-par architecture. As a developer, Ms. Korman-Houston thinks builders will identify larger lots next to business district parcels and build 12- to 15-unit apartment buildings. She acknowledges that many parcels aren't developable in that way, but it's not unheard of to combine parcels. She thinks there are appropriate lots scattered throughout the Neighborhood Multi-Family district in East Arlington.

Mr. Baudoin is hearing from Ms. Aamodt that by pulling Arlington Heights out, East Arlington is going to get the benefits and burdens of this change. He has faith that the Arlington Redevelopment Board will follow through on their promise to update zoning in the Heights. He asks if anyone can provide a progress update on that. Mr. Revilak says the ARB hasn't discussed the Arlington Heights Business District recently. Ms. Ricker says the ARB is planning to bring a suite of zoning changes related to the business districts. One of these would combine the patchwork of business districts in the Heights into a single district. A lot of work has been done on this, owing to the Arlington Heights Neighborhood Action Plan, but it's up to the ARB to decide whether to bring it forward in the fall.

Ms. Aamodt asks if people will support her proposal to remove the Neighborhood Multi-family District from East Arlington. Ms. Gruber thinks we haven't done things lot by lot before; we've taken a different approach. There's back and forth about Ms. Aamodt's proposal.

Ms. Wiener is concerned about losing contiguity. She likes the idea of combining lots, and wonders if we could include less. Ms. Wiener asks about contiguity. Mr. Littell says we'd have to reduce the East Arlington capacity by around half, in order to break it up. Mr. Revilak doesn't favor removing the district entirely. He suggests a different approach. During the June 8th forum, a number of people asked "Where's Broadway?", so we included it in the multi-family district. Maybe doing that put too much of the district in the east. He suggests removing a portion of the Broadway area instead.

Mr. Baudoin agrees we could do something different in East Arlington. Removing part of the district might still give us something that's technically compliant, but he's more interested in doing something meaningful. He thinks the Neighborhood Multi-Family District creates a buffer between the Mass Ave/Broadway District and what's already there. He's consistently heard people say that we need a broader range of housing options. He wouldn't support eliminating the neighborhood multi-family district from East Arlington.

Ms. Aamodt says that East Arlington has the biggest range of housing types in town; other parts don't have that. She thinks these maps put too much in a small section of town. Mr. Newton thinks that some of the imbalance comes from the concentration of commercial parcels along Mass Ave in Arlington Center. The way things worked out, due to industrial zones in the Center and Heights, the multi-family district wound up on one side of the street and not the other. He suggests adding parcels in the west side of town.

Ms. Aamodt suggests eliminating the Neighborhood Multi-family District from both sides of Broadway and relocating those parcels to the Heights. Mr. Baudoin thinks we're trading different parts of town. He thinks the principals are transit-oriented development, getting people close to transit, and in proximity to commercial. With that in mind, taking out Broadway doesn't make sense. He suggests the vision is to create development around transit.

Mx. Marzilli wants to circle back to the priorities we've heard from the community. As a group, we've worked hard on engagement, and we want to make sure we remember those voices.

Mr. Baudoin thinks the word "burden" is charged language when we're speaking about future residents. Mr. Newton asks if we could reduce the depth of the Neighborhood Multi-family District to one parcel in East Arlington, rather than eliminating it entirely. Mr. Baudoin asks if we could make more incremental motions.

Mr. Baudoin motions to keep the 350' width of the multi-family district west of Pleasant Street. Motion passes, 6-1 (Ms. Wiener voted in the negative).

Mr. Baudoin motions to reduce the width of the multi-family district in East Arlington to 250'. Motion fails, 3-4 (Ms. Aamodt, Ms. Gruber, Ms. Wiener, and Mr. Revilak voted in the negative).

Ms. Aamodt suggests a compromise. Scenario B1 has a larger blue (four-story) district. She suggests using this for East Arlington and eliminating the pink (three-story) district. There's discussion about this proposal.

There's a motion to use Scenario B1 for East Arlington, but remove the pink (three-story sub-district) parcels and add in blue (four-story sub-district) parcels as necessary to achieve contiguity. Motion passes, 5-2 (Mr. Baudoin and Ms. Korman-Houston voted in the negative).

Mr. Newton would like to have a vote on the SITES bonus. He recalls that SITES is a certification program that's similar to LEED. Last week, we discussed a proposal that would provide a one-story height bonus in the Mass Ave/Broadway district, for developments that met the criteria for SITES Gold Certified.

There's a motion to adopt the SITES bonus. Motion passes, 7-0.

Ms. Korman-Houston would like the working group to vote on the affordable housing bonus that she and Ms. Wiener presented last week. Under the proposal, the Town will need to request approval to use its existing affordable housing requirements: 15% at 60% area median income (AMI). There would be a one-story bonus for providing an additional 7.5% affordable units (22.5% total), and a second story bonus for an additional 2.5% affordable units (25% total). All of these would be at 60% AMI. This bonus would be available in the Mass Ave/Broadway Multi-family District.

There's a motion to adopt this proposal. Motion passes, 6-0-1 (Ms. Aamodt abstained).

Members of the working group discuss keeping the maximum of four stories by right, as agreed during a previous meeting. No changes were made to the previous vote to allow four stories by right.

Mr. Baudoin asks if we should have a height limit in feet, as well as a height limit in stories. Ms. Ricker says our zoning bylaw has both. She thinks we should consider a different height limit for the first floor when there's ground floor commercial. Ms. Aamodt agrees with having limits on both height in stories and height in feet. There's discussion about what the height limit in feet should be. Mr. Revilak proposes 13' per story, since that's used elsewhere in the bylaw.

There's a motion that the height limit in feet be 13' times the number of stories. Motion passes, 7-0.

Members of the working group agree to keeping the five-story maximum height on Broadway, and the six-story maximum height on Mass Ave, as discussed during previous meetings. Along similar lines, the maximum height of the neighborhood multi-family district will be four stories, with no bonuses available.

Ms. Wiener motions that there be no minimum parking requirements for the commercial portion of mixed-use. Motion passes, 7-0.

Ms. Aamodt makes a motion to extend the multi-family district to the Lexington line, by adding parcels to the south of the proposed Arlington Heights Business District. Motion passes, 4-3 (Mr. Baudoin, Ms. Korman-Houston, and Ms. Wiener voted in the negative).

Mr. Littell asks about front yard setbacks in the west part of town. Mr. Newton says we're going with 15' front-yard setbacks universally.

Working Group Report

Mr. Newton has been working with Ms. Gruber to write an outline for the Working Group's final report. He'd like the report to talk about the process, and what we heard from the community. He'll be contacting people and asking them to work on specific sections.

Next Steps

The working group will meet next week (August 15th), and we expect to look at the next iteration of maps. We do not expect to meet on August 22nd. We will need future meetings to finalize reports. During the fall, the working group's role will likely involve more advocacy work.

Zoning for the proposed multi-family district will go before the Arlington Redevelopment Board on September 11, 2023.

Meeting Adjourned.

Summary of Decision Points

This list of decision points reflects motions made and votes taken during the August 8, 2023 meeting of the MBTA Communities Working Group.

1. The working group voted in favor of keeping the 350' width of the multi-family district west of Pleasant Street, 6-1 (Ms. Wiener voted in the negative).
2. The working group voted against reducing the width of the multi-family district to 250' in East Arlington, 3-4 (Ms. Aamodt, Ms. Gruber, Ms. Wiener, and Mr. Revilak voted in the negative).
3. The group voted in favor of using Scenario B1 (shown on slide 21 of Utile's *Arlington 3A Zoning District Scenarios* presentation, dated August 8, 2020) for East Arlington, but modified as follows: removing all parcels designated as "3 Story Subdist" (shown in pink), and adding parcels to the "4 Story Subdist" sub-district (shown in blue) as necessary to maintain contiguity. Voted 5-2 (Mr. Baudoin and Ms. Korman-Houston voted in the negative).
4. The working group voted to extend the multi-family districts westward, around the proposed Arlington Heights Business district, to the Lexington line. Voted 4-3 (Mr. Baudoin, Ms. Korman-Houston, and Ms. Wiener voted in the negative).
5. The working group voted to endorse a one-story height bonus in the Mass Ave/Broadway district for projects that qualify for SITES gold certification, 7-0.
6. The working group voted to endorse a height bonus for providing extra affordable housing in the Mass Ave/Broadway district. The bonus is described as follows: one additional story for providing 7.5% extra affordable housing (22.5% total), and a second additional story for providing an addition 2.5% extra affordable housing (25% total). All affordable units will be priced at 60% of the area median income. Voted 6-0-1 (Ms. Aamodt abstained).

7. The working group discussed the maximum by-right height in the Mass Ave/Broadway and Neighborhood Multi-family districts and chose to keep the four-story by-right limit adopted earlier.
8. The working group voted to endorse a height limit in feet, in addition to a height limit in stories. The height limit in feet shall be 13' times the number of stories. Voted 7-0.
9. The working group discussed maximum height limits for the Mass/Ave Broadway multi-family district. They decided to keep the limits adopted earlier: a maximum of six stories on Mass Ave, and five stories on Broadway.
10. The working group voted to endorse parking minimums of zero for commercial uses in the Mass Ave/Broadway district, 7-0.

Documents Reviewed

- *Arlington 3A Zoning District Scenarios*. Slide presentation by Utile, dated August 8, 2023.