

# **MBTA Communities Working Group**

## **August 15, 2023**

### **Meeting Summary**

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

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

**Guests:** Matthew Littell, Utile (remote)

## **Approve meeting summaries from prior meetings**

The working group approved the meeting summary from their August 8, 2023, meeting, 5-0-1 (Mr. Lau abstained).

## **Outreach**

Mr. Newton notes that the working group has library office hours coming up on Friday August 25th at 10:00 am. Mr. Marzilli says that the outreach team is working on materials, stakeholder engagements, presentation slides, and a mailing.

## **Review revised map and summary of proposed recommendations to ARB**

Mr. Littell begins by summarizing the alternatives we looked at on August 8th. Alternatives A1 and A2 reduced the width of the multi-family district from 350' to 250' around the corridors. Alternative A1 used a maximum height of four stories in the Neighborhood Multi-family district, and Alternative A2 used a maximum height of three stories. Alternative B1 was tiered, to taper height down from the Mass Ave/Broadway District to the Neighborhood Multi-family District to the existing neighborhoods. These scenarios had unit capacities of 6463-7574 dwellings, on 113-115 acres. For comparison, the base scenario shown in the July 25th map had a capacity of 10,975 dwellings on 175 acres. Alternatives A1, A2, and B1 used open space as a proxy for yard setbacks.

Mr. Newton asks if the model we submit for compliance will use the proxy open space requirements. Mr. Littell says yes. The model assumes 20% open space for setbacks. This isn't correct for Arlington's lot sizes, and using it led to a capacity over-estimate for the July 25th map. He notes that the model is not a plan for development. Instead, it's an estimate of the number of units that could be created if every single parcel were wiped clean and rebuilt from scratch.

Last week the working group provided several directions to Utile: go back to the building heights used in the July 25th model (four stories), extend the district to the Lexington town line, and scale back the district in East Arlington. Utile reduced the width of the East Arlington district to a width of 150', which is 1-2 parcels on either side of Mass Ave and Broadway. They also used the Neighborhood Multi-family District for parcels not directly adjacent to Mass Ave and Broadway, in order to provide contiguity. When combined with the existing business districts, this has the effect of forming a more continuous mixed-use zone.

Mr. Littell notes a non-contiguity in Arlington Heights. There are now three sub-districts: East Arlington, Arlington Center, and Arlington Heights. Arlington Center is the one that meets the 50% capacity requirement. 51% of the unit capacity and 61% of the acreage is in the Center. The overall capacity is 7,268 dwellings on 109 acres. Mr. Newton believes these changes reflect the discussion we had last week.

Mr. Lau points out that there's a significant grade change in the Heights along Paul Revere Road, where the houses are almost two stories above the street level. He suggests looking at the other side of the road. Mr. Lau says that an earlier version of the map had a district around Belknap Street. He thinks that would be a good place to have part of the district near the bike path.

Ms. Aamodt says the district in the Heights doesn't seem to extend 350'. She asks if it's necessary for the East Arlington district to be contiguous, since the Center meets the 50% requirement. Mr. Littell says it's not necessary for East Arlington to be contiguous, but each sub-district has to be at least five acres. Regarding the extension of the district into the Heights, he says that Utile started with a rigorous 350' width, then adjusted to match block boundaries. Ms. Aamodt says she wants to see an equity of representation throughout the town. Ms. Gruber asks Ms. Aamodt a question about what she means as regards equity. Ms. Aamodt says that we agreed to a 350' width west of Pleasant Street at our last meeting, and she was expecting to see more of the district in the Heights. To her, it looks like some areas are less than 150'.

Mr. Lau wants to go back to the area around Paul Revere Road. It's on a hill, and the front doors of those homes are at least a story above the sidewalk. There's discussion about topography, and the need to consider it in different areas.

Mr. Newton asks about the area around Belknap Street. Mr. Lau says some of those parcels are adjacent to the bike-path, which is used as a transportation corridor. He'd like to see some of the district located along the bike path. Ms. Ricker asks about engaging the bike path somewhere in the Heights, perhaps the area south of Westminster Ave. Ms. Aamodt says she's supportive of having some of the district along Belknap and the area around Marion Road, since it's an R1 district. Ms. Gruber says the area around Westminster Ave is small and isolated. Mr. Baudoin says that one of the July maps had an area that touched Spy Pond. Including Belknap Street would treat that area differently than the rest of the

town. Mr. Baudoin isn't against this, but he'd like to understand the reasoning. Mr. Lau says he'd like part of the district to engage the bike path.

Mr. Newton suggests adding parcels around Orvis Road. There are small, isolated business districts in that area, and he suspects the ARB will want to remove some parcels around them. Mr. Baudoin says he'd be supportive of that. He thinks the Neighborhood Multi-family district is an important concept. Ms. Aamodt doesn't think the group should speculate about what the ARB might do. She thinks that the ARB can adjust the map in a way that maintains compliance. Based on today's interactions, Mx. Marzilli says there's a strong conversation about moving away from East Arlington. They suggest moving towards the bike path in another part of town, if that's something we decide to do.

Mr. Newton says he's not hearing concerns about adding parcels behind Mass Ave, maybe in the Heights. Mr. Lau suggests tabling the topic, until we can have a closer look at the area.

Ms. Gruber says she feels more comfortable with the map we're looking at today. Based on her conversations with people, there's a feeling that the district should be spread out across the town. She thinks we've spread it out nicely and she'd be reluctant to vote differently. Mr. Baudoin thinks that Utile has done a great job with the map. He thinks we can ask the ARB to consider additional parcels that aren't on the map, since the ARB is the body that formed the working group. He thinks the ARB understands the town and suggests giving them a list of things to consider. Mr. Newton thinks that could be section in our final report. Mr. Revilak likes the way this iteration of the map turned out. He agrees that Utile did a good job.

Mr. Lau has been working on a 3D architectural model, in order to provide visualizations of what some of these parcels might look like if redeveloped. He'd like to show a few examples to the working group. Mr. Lau shows a picture of a parcel at the intersection of Mass Ave and Orvis Road, a rendering of the same parcel with a four-story residential building, and a rendering with a six-story mixed-use building. He shows another example, using a parcel at the intersection of Broadway and Webster St. Mr. Lau thinks renderings like these will make it easier for the public to understand what buildings might look like under the new zoning.

Mr. Baudoin asks if there should be an upper-story step-back requirement that goes along with the height bonus. Mr. Newton says he'd like to review the regulations we've decided on. He's summarized these in a slide presentation.

The map consists of three sub-districts: Mass Ave, Broadway, and the Neighborhood Multi-family district. Each district allows four stories by right. The Mass Ave and Broadway districts have 15' front yard setbacks, 5' side yard setbacks, and a 20' rear yard setback. The Neighborhood Multi-Family District has 15' front yard setbacks, 10' side yard setbacks, and a 20' rear yard setbacks. In this proposal, stories are 13' high. Mr. Newton notes that four-story buildings require an elevator and trigger other accessibility requirements.

The proposal includes three kinds of height bonuses. One is for the addition of ground-floor commercial, the second is for providing more than 15% affordable housing, and the third is for bringing a proposal that's certifiable as SITES Gold.

The ground-floor commercial bonus allows 0' front yard setbacks, an additional two stories on Mass Ave, and one additional story on Broadway. The affordable housing bonus allows for 1-2 additional stories (two on Mass Ave, one on Broadway). The SITES Gold bonus allows one additional story. Bonuses may be "stacked", up to the district's maximum height: six stories on Mass Ave, and five stories on Broadway. Bonuses are not available in the Neighborhood Multi-family district.

Mr. Newton says we'll submit an economic feasibility analysis to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC), along with a request to use our existing affordable housing requirements. The existing requirements state that all projects of six units or more shall provide 15% affordable units. Affordable rental units are priced at 60% of the area median income (AMI), but available to households earning up to 70% AMI. Affordable ownership units are priced at 70% AMI, and available to households earning up to 80% AMI.

There are two tiers of height bonus for providing additional affordable housing, beyond the base 15% requirement. Applicants that provide 22.5% affordable units are eligible for a one-story bonus, and applicants that provide 25% affordable units are eligible for a two-story bonus. The two-story bonus is only available to parcels that directly abut Mass Ave (properties abutting Broadway are limited to five stories).

We've discussed parking requirements and agreed to recommend no parking minimums for residential or commercial, and a parking maximum of one space per unit.

From here, we will finish drafting the regulations for this proposal, and send the material to EOHLC for pre-adoption review. The Redevelopment Board will hold public hearings on zoning articles, and the special town meeting is scheduled to start on October 17th.

Mr. Newton says we have several things to decide this evening. The first involves upper-story step-backs. Mr. Revilak summarizes the existing upper-story step-back requirements in our zoning bylaw: 7.5' on each side of the building that faces a street, at the fourth story and above. Mr. Lau notes that the ARB interprets the 7.5' as being measured from the property line, and not the face of the story below. There's back and forth about different aspects of the existing step-back requirements.

Mr. Baudoin suggests having the step back apply above the fourth story, meaning that it would only apply where there's been a height bonus. Ms. Aamodt doesn't support a step-back requirement; she thinks they make for ugly architecture. She says that 100+ year old buildings don't have them, and they're only necessary in places like New York City, where the buildings are very tall. Ms. Gruber thinks that step-backs would make six-story buildings feel less tall in relation to existing shorter

buildings. Mr. Lau thinks an upper-story step-back requirement would work against the affordable housing bonus. We'd be requiring a developer to provide more affordable units but taking away the space to provide them. Mr. Revilak would prefer to have the step-back requirement on one side of the building, rather than each street-facing side. There's further discussion about what the step-back requirements should be.

Mr. Lau motions that when buildings have a 0' front-yard setback (i.e., for ground-floor commercial), that there be a 7.5' step-back on each street-facing side of the building, at the fifth and sixth floors. The 7.5' step-back would be measured from the property line. Motion passes, by a vote of 5-1 (Ms. Aamodt voted in the negative).

Mr. Newton asks if members of the working group are okay with having our existing affordability requirements apply to the multi-family district. Members of the working group are agreeable to this.

Mr. Newton asks if we should have a requirement to specify how much of the ground floor should be devoted to commercial. Mr. Littell suggests requiring that 60% of the ground floor's floor area be devoted to commercial; he believes that would be enough for a lobby. He also suggests a requirement that 80% of the front face of mixed-use buildings be devoted to commercial.

There's a motion to endorse a requirement that 60% of the ground floor area and 80% of the ground floor frontage be devoted to commercial use, in mixed-use buildings that provide ground-floor commercial. Motion passes, 5-1 (Mr. Lau voted in the negative).

Mr. Newton asks if there's further discussion about having a height limit of 13'/story. Mr. Littell believes that 13'/story will work for mixed-use buildings with ground-floor commercial. He says that some ground-floor uses need more than 13', but he expects the upper stories to need less. Mr. Littell thinks that 13'/story might be too tall in the Neighborhood Multi-family District and suggests something like 45-47' there.

Mr. Baudoin motions that the Neighborhood Multi-family District be limited to a height of 48 feet. Motion fails, 2-4 (Ms. Aamodt, Ms. Gruber, Mr. Newton, and Mr. Revilak voted in the negative).

Ms. Gruber motions that the Neighborhood Multi-family District be limited to a height of 46 feet. Motion passes, 4-2 (Mr. Baudoin and Mr. Lau voted in the negative).

Mr. Newton would like to move on to the SITES bonus. Ms. Ricker says that (Environmental Planner) David Morgan suggested SITES as a way to achieve something like an open space bonus. He reviewed the criteria and felt that a 100 point/Gold rating would be achievable in the multi-family districts. She notes that the recommendation was for SITES Gold certifiable, rather than SITES Gold certified. Mr. Baudoin asks who would determine if an application was certifiable. Ms. Ricker says this would happen through site plan review, Inspectional Services, and staff review in the Department of Planning and Community Development. Mr. Lau asks if there's such a thing as a SITES AP (accredited

professional), like the way we have LEED APs. Mr. Baudoin believes there is. He asks if having an accredited professional on an applicant's team would be acceptable. Ms. Ricker answers in the affirmative. Mr. Lau asks how much it would cost. Mr. Ricker thinks that developers who take advantage of the SITES bonus will be ones who are familiar with it in practice.

Mr. Revilak motions that Ms. Ricker and Ms. Wiener be authorized to work on the text of the zoning regulations, so they can be submitted to EOHLIC for pre-approval, along with the map and other materials. Motion passes, 5-1 (Mr. Lau voted in the negative).

Mr. Lau wants to return to the topography of Paul Revere Road. There's discussion about whether a four-story building on these parcels would be too tall, and whether part of the district could be moved to a different location, like south of Lowell St, or between Arnold St and Mass Ave.

There's a motion that staff and Utile look at the parcels on the south side of Paul Revere Road and prepare an alternate recommendation. Motion agreed to, without a formal vote.

## **Next Steps**

The working group's next meeting will be Tuesday, August 29th.

Meeting adjourned.

## **Summary of Decision Points**

This list of decision points reflects motions made and votes taken during the August 15, 2023, meeting of the MBTA Communities Working Group.

1. The working group voted 5-1 to endorse a modification of the ground floor commercial bonus provisions for the Mass Ave/Broadway Multi-family District as follows: buildings with a 0' front yard setback shall provide a 7.5' upper-story step back on each street-facing side, starting at the fifth floor. (Ms. Aamodt voted in the negative).
2. The working group agreed to endorse the existing affordability requirements in the multi-family districts (i.e., rental units shall be priced at 60% AMI and available to households earning up to 70% AMI, and owner-occupied units shall be priced at 70% AMI and available to households earning up to 80% AMI). This agreement was reached without a formal vote.
3. The Working Group voted 5-1 to endorse performance standards for ground floor commercial, as follows: at least 60% of the first floor's gross floor, and at least 80% of the first-floor facade shall be devoted to commercial uses (Mr. Lau voted in the negative).
4. The Working Group voted 2-4 against endorsing a 48-foot height limit in the Neighborhood Multifamily District (Ms. Aamodt, Ms. Gruber, Mr. Newton, and Mr. Revilak voted in the negative).

5. The Working Group voted 4-2 in favor of endorsing a 46-foot height limit in the Neighborhood Multifamily District. (Mr. Baudoin and Mr. Lau voted in the negative).
6. The Working Group voted 5-1 to authorize Ms. Ricker and Ms. Wiener to work on the text of the zoning language.
7. The Working Group asked Staff and Utile to look at the district placement along the south side of Paul Revere Road, and to suggest alternate locations with less topographic elevation.

## **Documents Reviewed**

- *8/15 Draft HCA Districts Update* presentation by Utile
- Rendering photos, provided by Mr. Lau