

MBTA COMMUNITIES

ZONING FOR MULTIFAMILY HOUSING IN ARLINGTON

September 11, 2023

Arlington Redevelopment Board Hearing

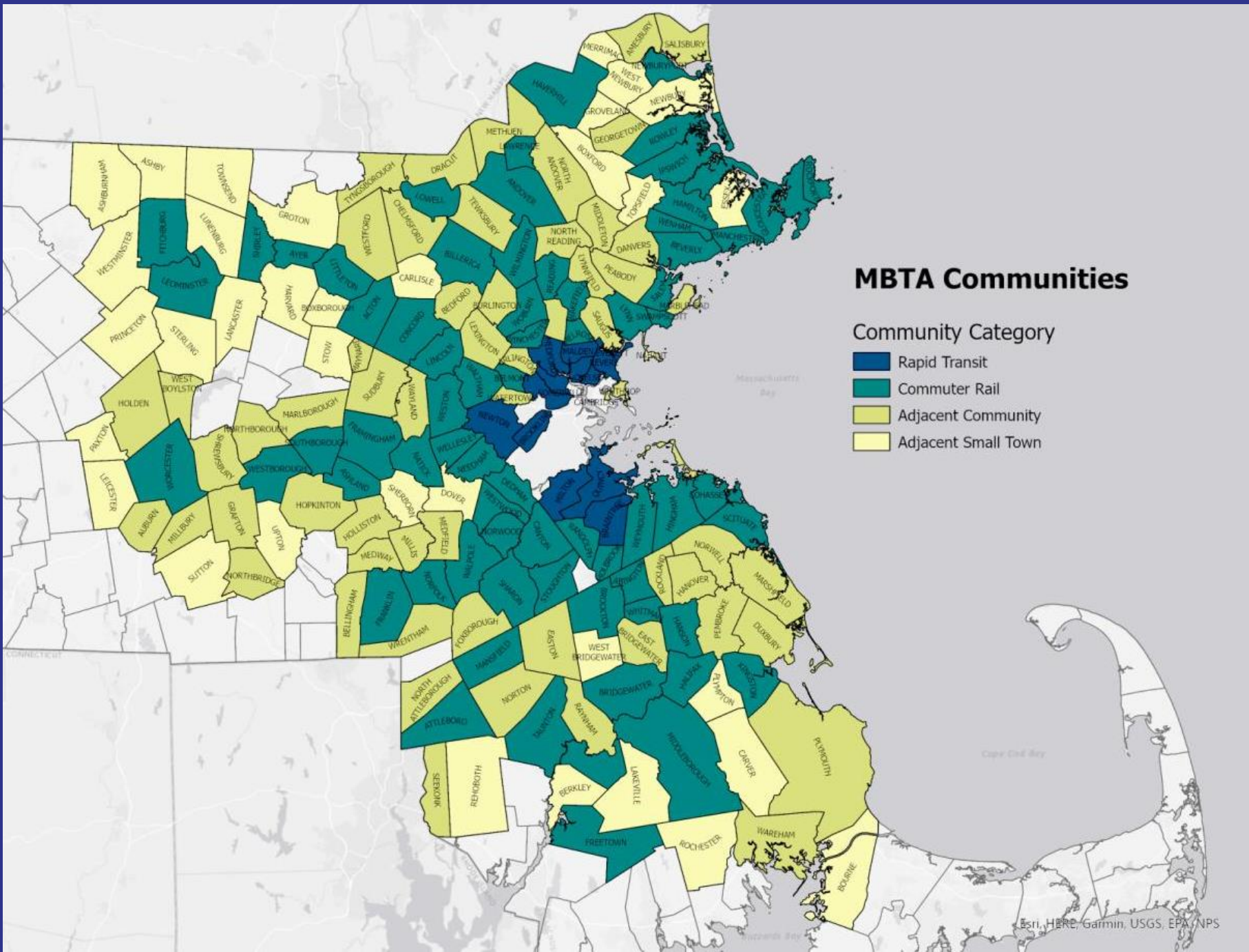
Town of Arlington Department of Planning and Community Development

MBTA Communities Working Group



LEGISLATION AND GUIDELINES

A refresher on our Section 3A assignment



What is Section 3A (The MBTA Communities Law)

All **177 MBTA Communities** must provide at least one zoning district where:

- multi-family housing (three or more dwellings) is **allowed by right**,
- housing is permitted with at least 15 dwelling units per gross acre,
- housing **cannot be age restricted**, and
- the district **allows housing that is suitable for families** with children

Capacity Modeling

The "Model" is a calculation method developed by the State to estimate the potential unit capacity of an area based on the rules of the zone. **It is a measure whether a zone is of 'reasonable size,' not how much new housing will be built.**

The state's compliance model calculates how many homes could exist in the proposed district if somehow:

- **every** existing home were removed,
- **every** lot was rebuilt to the maximum,
- and if **none** of the housing had any parking
- and if **every** home was a 1,000 square foot apartment

CORE CONCEPT: VISUALIZING DENSITY

Triple Decker
3 units
Gross density: 11-30 du/acre



Fourplex: Stacked
4 units
Gross density: 14-22 du/acre



Multiplex building
5-16 units
Gross density: 10-50 du/acre



Courtyard building
6-25 units
Gross density: 21-56 du/acre



CORE CONCEPT: VISUALIZING DENSITY

Downing Square
48 Units
45 Units per Acre



438 Mass Ave
134 Units
49 Units per Acre



389 Mass Ave
29 Units
117 Units per Acre





SPECIFICS FOR ARLINGTON

Multi-family Zoning in Arlington Today

Today in Arlington:

- Much of our current zoning dates to a major rewrite of our master plan, zoning map and zoning bylaw completed in 1975.
- All multi-family housing (3+ homes) requires a Special Permit.
- Districts that allow multi-family housing are located in pockets.
- Districts are mostly located where multi-family housing existed in 1975.

Other cities and towns around Boston enacted similar restrictions during the same period

What does the law say?

At least one district
of reasonable size

Multifamily housing permitted
as of right

No age restrictions; suitable for families
with children

Minimum gross density of 15 units/acre

Not more than ½ miles from a subway
station or bus station, *if applicable*



What does it mean for Arlington?

Minimum 32 acres

Building with 3+ residential
dwelling units

No age restrictions or bedroom
limits in zoning

Minimum capacity of 2,046 units

District(s) must be at least 5
contiguous acres; location
unrestricted, but recommended
location along transit corridors
and commercial centers

Benefits for Arlington

Arlington stands to benefit as we implement MBTA Communities zoning. We will:

- Make progress on the goals we share as a community: to be welcoming and inclusive, to be climate leaders, to give access to our open spaces, and to support vibrant businesses.
- Make progress implementing Arlington's Community Equity Audit, Master Plan, Fair Housing Action Plan, Housing Production Plan, Sustainable Transportation Plan, and Net Zero Action Plan.
- Remain eligible for millions of dollars in MassWorks infrastructure funding.
- Participate in the state's Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Program.
- Remain eligible for a number of other State grant programs.



ENGAGEMENT AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Engagement Activities

Public Meetings

- **November 17, 2022** staff presented an overview of MBTA Communities legislation to describe the basic requirements of MGL Ch. 40A, Section 3A & what it means for Arlington
- **March 9, 2023** Community Visioning Session held online to discuss community goals for neighborhood features, amenities, and potential locations
- **June 8, 2023** An in-person Community Presentation on size and scale of housing on the proposed Draft MBTA District Communities map
- **July 25, 2023** An in-person Community Presentation on size and scale of housing on the proposed Draft MBTA District Communities map

Surveys & Feedback Opportunities

- **March – April 2023 Community Survey** 1033 responses, including 2,325 comments from 506 distinct respondents
- **April – June Visioning Kits**
- **June 8 – July 17th Feedback Form** 213 responses, including 550 comments

Engagement Activities

Engaging with the Community

- Resource & Connections Fair
- Farmers Market
- Library Office Hours & Library Table
- Council on Aging Pop-Up
- Arlington EATS Pop-Up
- Collaboration with Housing Corporation of Arlington (HCA)
- Presentations to key stakeholders



Conversations & Presentations

- Arlington Chamber of Commerce
- Arlington Public Schools
- Assessors Office
- Interfaith Community
- Housing Corporation of Arlington
- Department of Public Works
- Arlington Police Department
- Historic Districts Commission
- Interfaith Coalition
- Arlington Human Service Network
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Division
- Affordable Housing Trust
- Open Space Committee
- Mystic River Watershed Association
- Mothers Out Front
- Residents
- **And more!**

Guiding Principles

- Encourage more housing in a variety of sizes and price points,
- Encourage housing located near public transit,
- Encourage housing to provide a customer base in support of local businesses,
- Encourage multi-family housing spread across Arlington, and
- Ensure compliance with MGL c. 40A § 3A (The MBTA Communities Act)

Encourage More Housing In a Variety of Sizes and Price Points

More housing in a variety of sizes benefits:

- Seniors having trouble finding appropriate housing to downsize into,
- Municipal workers who want to live in the community they serve,
- Young adults who grew up in Arlington but can't afford to return,
- Young families just starting out, and
- People who need housing with accessibility features

The proposed map has approximately 2,100 homes existing in it today.
Minimum compliance would not result in any new housing.

Encourage housing located near public transit

The Town's Net Zero Action Plan and the Connect Arlington Sustainable Transportation Plan include recommendations to **“continue to encourage and incentivize mixed-use, higher density development near transit and jobs”** because “people who live or work in or adjacent to mixed-use environments, and especially those served by transit, often drive less because it is more convenient to walk or bike to eat, shop, or hop on a public transit option.”

Encourage housing to provide a customer base in support of local businesses

Allowing more residents to live within walking distance of our businesses creates the potential for more commercial vitality by providing more customers, foot traffic, and patronage to Arlington's restaurants, shops, and services.

Our consultants from Utile provided the following as a rough guideline: it generally takes one household to support 30 square feet of retail space. **This equates to needing 100 households to support a 3,000 square foot store.**

Encourage multi-family housing spread across Arlington

The Working Group received suggestions and considered locations in almost all areas of town including:

- Park Ave
- Pleasant St
- Summer St
- Mystic Street
- the Route 2 Access Rd
- the Minuteman Bikeway
- Alewife

The proposal from the Working Group is spread across **the current catchment areas for all the elementary schools** and gives the school department flexibility to continue to use buffer zones to manage any future changes in enrollment.

Ensure compliance with MGL c. 40A § 3A (The MBTA Communities Act)

The proposal was developed with the support of the professional staff in the Department of Planning and Community Development and our consultant Utile.

The proposed map and zoning language have been submitted to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) for pre-adoption review.

We expect to receive results of the review before Town Meeting discusses the proposal.

Revised Guidelines

The guidelines from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) were revised by the state on August 17th, 2023, with **some limited options to require ground floor commercial.**

The Working Group believed **the new provisions did not offer an improvement over the current strategies** of:

- Incentivizing ground-floor commercial
- Placing the multi-family district outside of areas currently zoned for commercial use



MBTA COMMUNITIES PROPOSAL

Subdistricts

The properties included in the proposed map can be described in three subdistricts:

1. **Mass Ave:** properties with frontage on Mass Ave (shown in blue)
2. **Broadway:** properties with frontage on Broadway (shown in blue)
3. **Neighborhood:** properties without frontage on Mass Ave or Broadway (shown in gray)

Each of these subdistricts has distinct setback requirements and height limits. In the neighborhood subdistrict, the side setbacks are larger, and the height limit is lower.

The incentive programs for ground floor commercial, increased affordability and better open space usage also apply differently between the districts.

By-Right Dimensional Regulations

Table showing the required setbacks and height limits for **by-right** residential development:

Subdistrict:	Minimum Setback (in feet)			Maximum Height	
	Front	Side	Rear	Stories	Feet
Mass Ave (in blue)	15	5	20	4	52
Broadway (in blue)	15	5	20	4	52
Neighborhood (in gray)	15	10	20	4	46

The Building Code requires that buildings that are 4 stories or taller have an elevator and meet other accessibility requirements. This was a major driver behind the Working Group choosing to allow by-right residential up to 4 stories in all subdistricts.

Parking

The parking requirements for the proposal are:

- **Maximum parking:** 1 space per unit
- **No minimum parking** for residential or commercial uses

The parking recommendations in the proposal align directly with strategies from Arlington's **Net Zero Action Plan** and the **Connect Arlington Sustainable Transportation Plan**.

Land required for parking:

- drives up the price of housing,
- contributes to heat islands, and
- encourages the use of automobiles.

By capping the amount of parking and allowing the future possibility of little or no parking we reduce housing costs, encourage more sustainable transportation, and reduce heat island effects.

Incentive Programs

Table summarizing the proposed incentive programs:

Incentives	Mixed-Use	Affordable	SITES	Max Height	
Mass Ave	+2 stories 0 ft front setback	+1 story for 22.5% affordable +2 stories for 25% affordable	+1 story	78 ft	6 stories
Broadway	+1 story 0 ft front setback	+1 story for 22.5% affordable	+1 story	65 ft	5 stories
Neighborhood	N/A	N/A	N/A	46 ft	4 stories

For any stories above 4 (i.e. stories 5 and 6), the zoning requires a 7.5 foot step-back from the property line at street frontages.

Mixed Use Incentive

In order to qualify for the Mixed-Use Incentive, a project must allocate:

- 60% of the ground floor area to commercial, and
- 80% of the ground floor frontage to commercial

In return a project may:

- Come to the front lot line
- Add additional stories (1 story on Broadway, 2 stories on Mass Ave)

For any stories above 4 (i.e. stories 5 and 6), the zoning requires a 7.5 foot step-back from the property line at street frontages.

Affordable Incentive

- Single-story bonus for providing an added 7.5% (total 22.5%) affordable units
- Two-story bonus for providing an additional 10% (total 25%) affordable units

	Stories	Total Units	Required 15%	Bonus +7.5%	Bonus +2.5%	Affordable Units	Affordable %
Allowed by right	4	16	3	N/A	N/A	3	15%
+1 story	5	20	3	2	N/A	5	22.5%
+2 stories	6	24	4	1	1	6	25%

The by-right part of the proposal requires 15% affordable housing, matching our existing inclusionary zoning requirements.

Environmental Incentive

DPCD recommended SITES rating system as the best framework to apply to the proposal.

A Gold-level SITES certifiable project earns an additional floor.

SITES is a suitable system for this context because it incentivizes outcomes that the Town wishes to see but does not yet have the capacity to require.

For example:

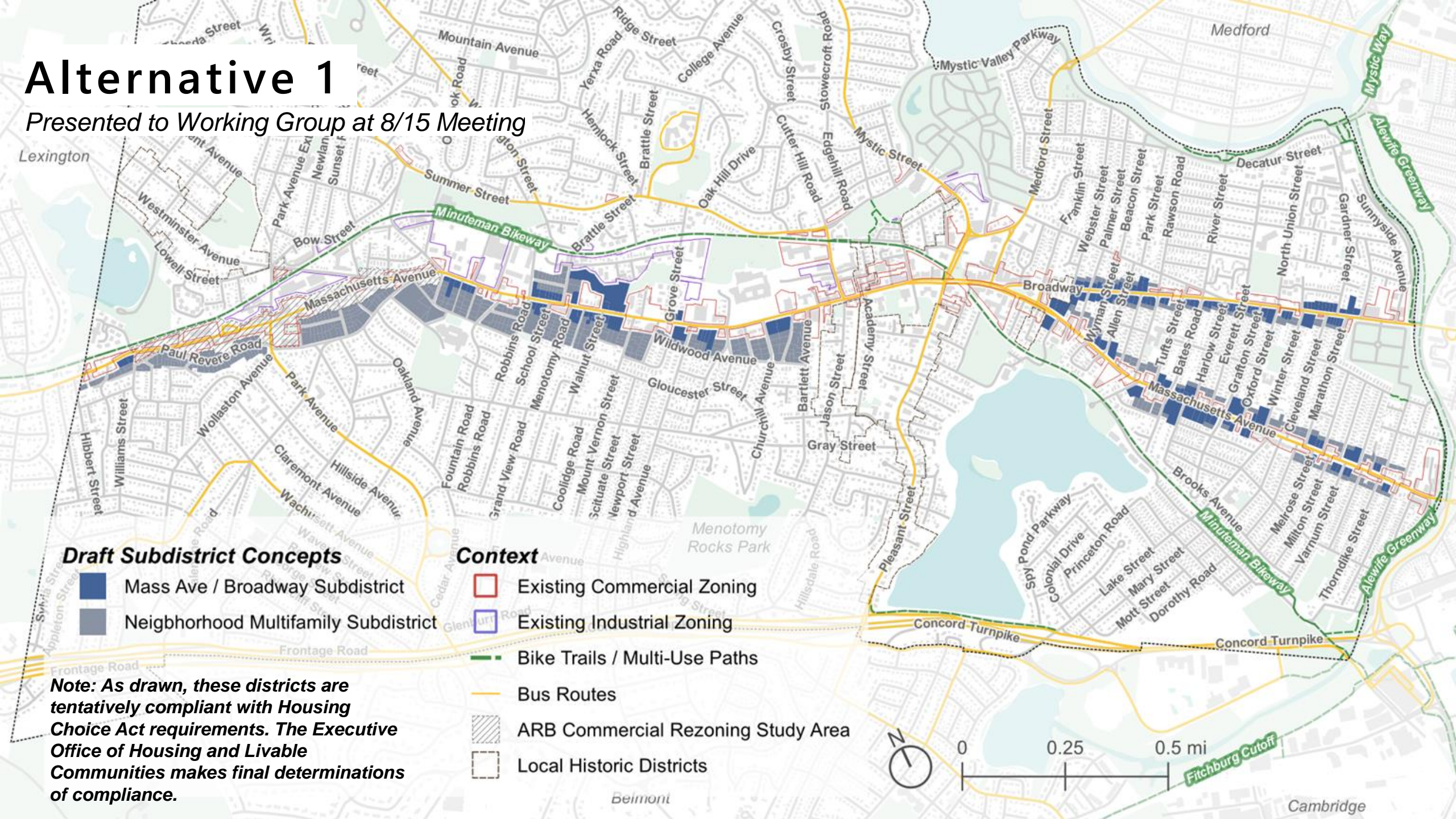
- **Publicly accessible landscaped outdoor areas**
- **Green streetscapes**
- **Additional stormwater management**

SITES is a companion rating system to LEED, run by the U.S. Green Building Council:



<https://www.usgbc.org/resources/sites-rating-system-and-scorecard>

Alternative 1

Presented to Working Group at 8/15 Meeting



Draft Subdistrict Concepts

-  Mass Ave / Broadway Subdistrict
-  Neighborhood Multifamily Subdistrict

Context

-  Existing Commercial Zoning
-  Existing Industrial Zoning
-  Bike Trails / Multi-Use Paths
-  Bus Routes
-  ARB Commercial Rezoning Study Area
-  Local Historic Districts

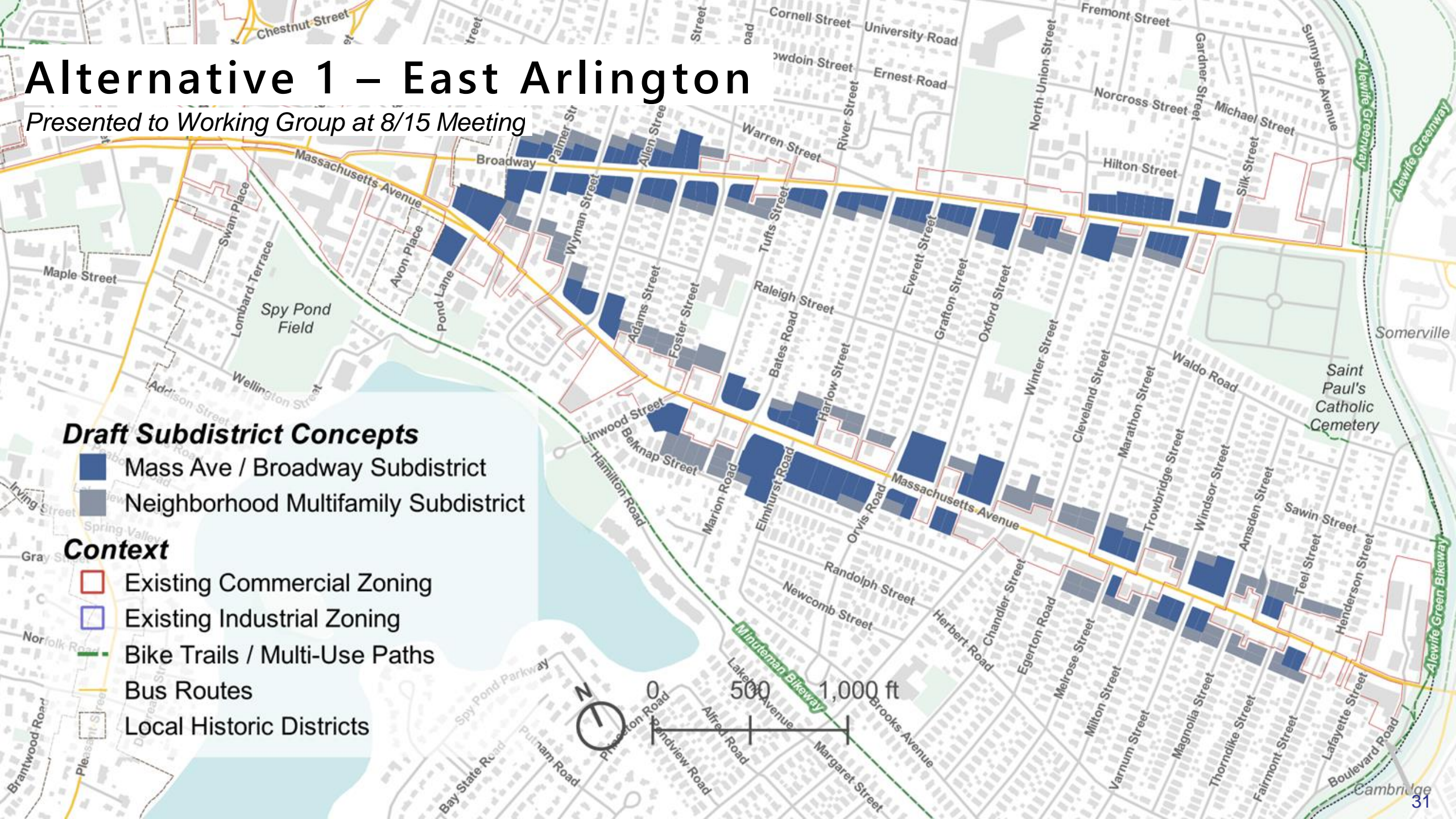
Note: As drawn, these districts are tentatively compliant with Housing Choice Act requirements. The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities makes final determinations of compliance.





Fitchburg Cutoff

Alternative 1 – East Arlington

Presented to Working Group at 8/15 Meeting



Draft Subdistrict Concepts

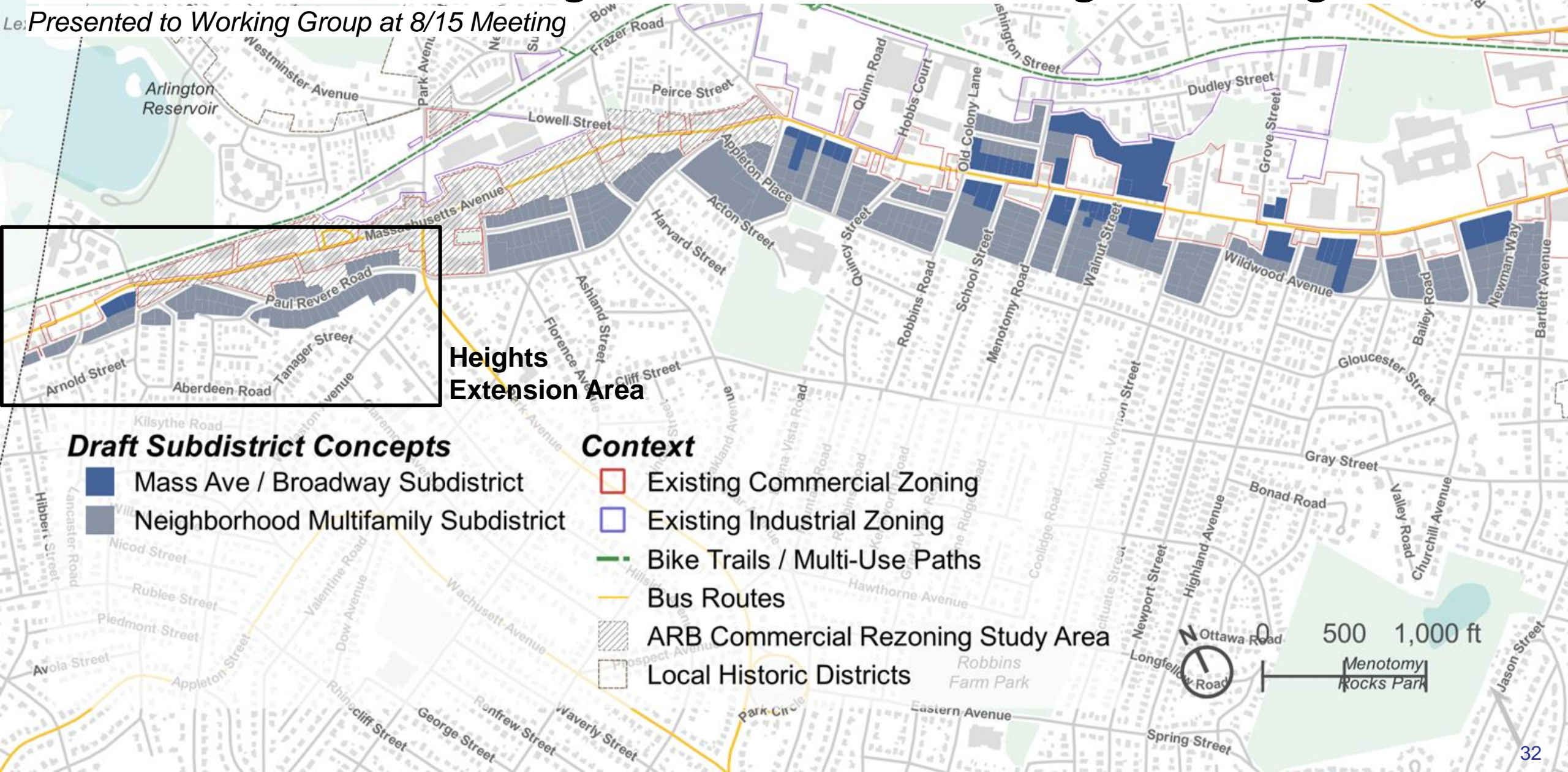
-  Mass Ave / Broadway Subdistrict
-  Neighborhood Multifamily Subdistrict

Context

-  Existing Commercial Zoning
-  Existing Industrial Zoning
-  Bike Trails / Multi-Use Paths
-  Bus Routes
-  Local Historic Districts

Alternative 1 – Arlington Center / Arlington Heights

Presented to Working Group at 8/15 Meeting



Draft Subdistrict Concepts

- Mass Ave / Broadway Subdistrict
- Neighborhood Multifamily Subdistrict

Context

- Existing Commercial Zoning
- Existing Industrial Zoning
- Bike Trails / Multi-Use Paths
- Bus Routes
- ▨ ARB Commercial Rezoning Study Area
- Local Historic Districts

Alternative 1 – Model Outputs

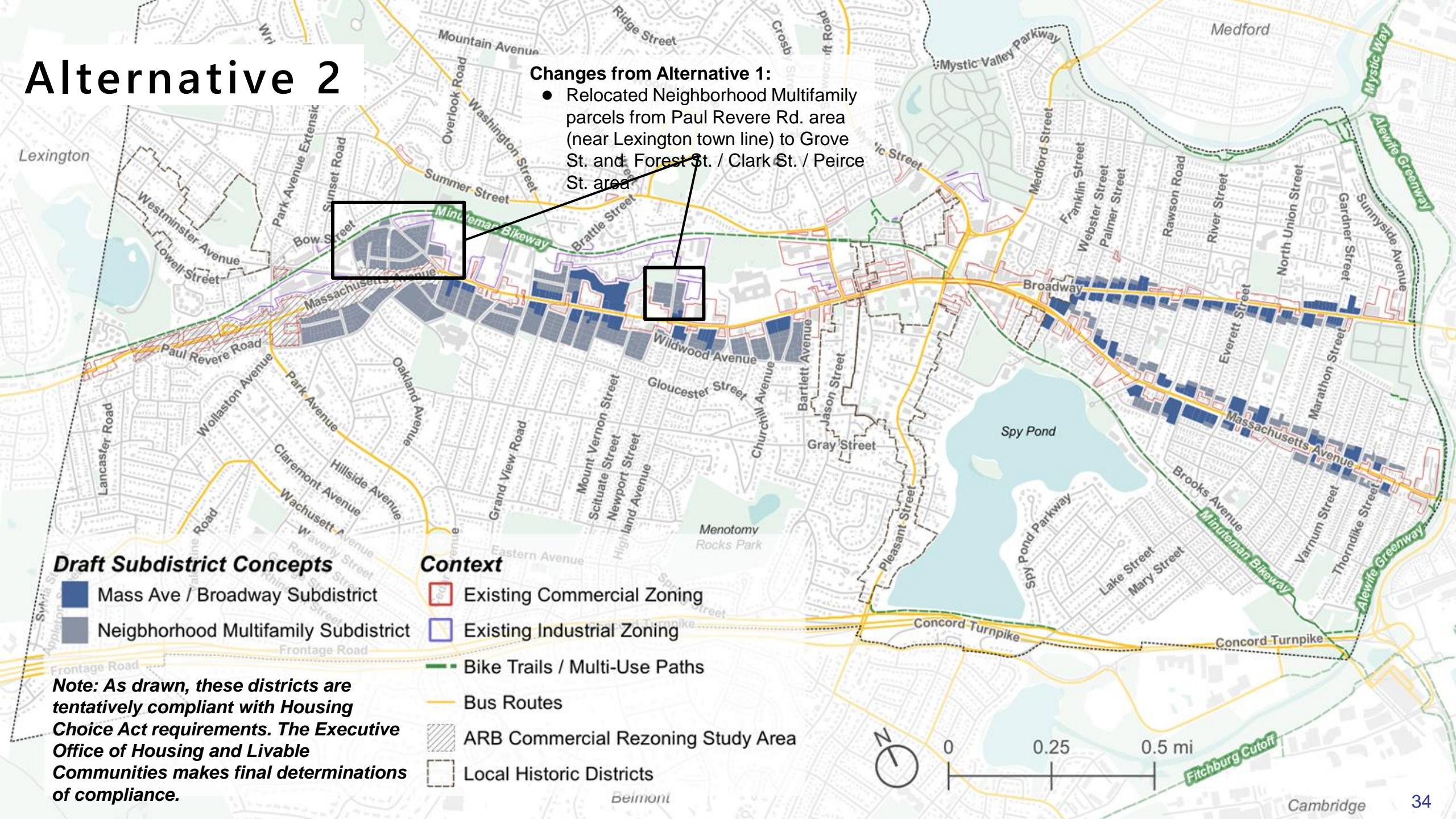
Subdistrict	Model Inputs					Model Outputs		
	Max. Height (stories)	Setbacks (feet)			Min. Open Space (to account for setback areas)	District Area	Modeled Multifamily Unit Capacity	Modeled Gross District Density*
		Front	Side	Rear				
Mass Ave/Broadway - East Arlington	4	15'	5'	20'	40%	26.9 ac	2,202	81.9 units/ac
Mass Ave/Broadway - Center/Heights	4	15'	5'	20'	40%	13.3 ac	1,123	89.1 units/ac
Mass Ave/Broadway - Heights Extension	4	15'	5'	20'	40%	0.5 ac	45	90 units/ac
Neighborhood MF - East Arlington	4	15'	10'	20'	60%	15.2 ac	872	57.4 units/ac
Neighborhood MF - Center/Heights	4	15'	10'	20'	60%	45.7 ac	2,569	56.2 units/ac
Neighborhood MF - Heights Extension	4	15'	10'	20'	60%	7.5 ac	457	60.9 units/ac
Modeled Totals						109.1 ac	7,268	67 units/ac
Target for Compliance						<i>32 ac</i>	<i>2,046</i>	<i>15 units/ac</i>

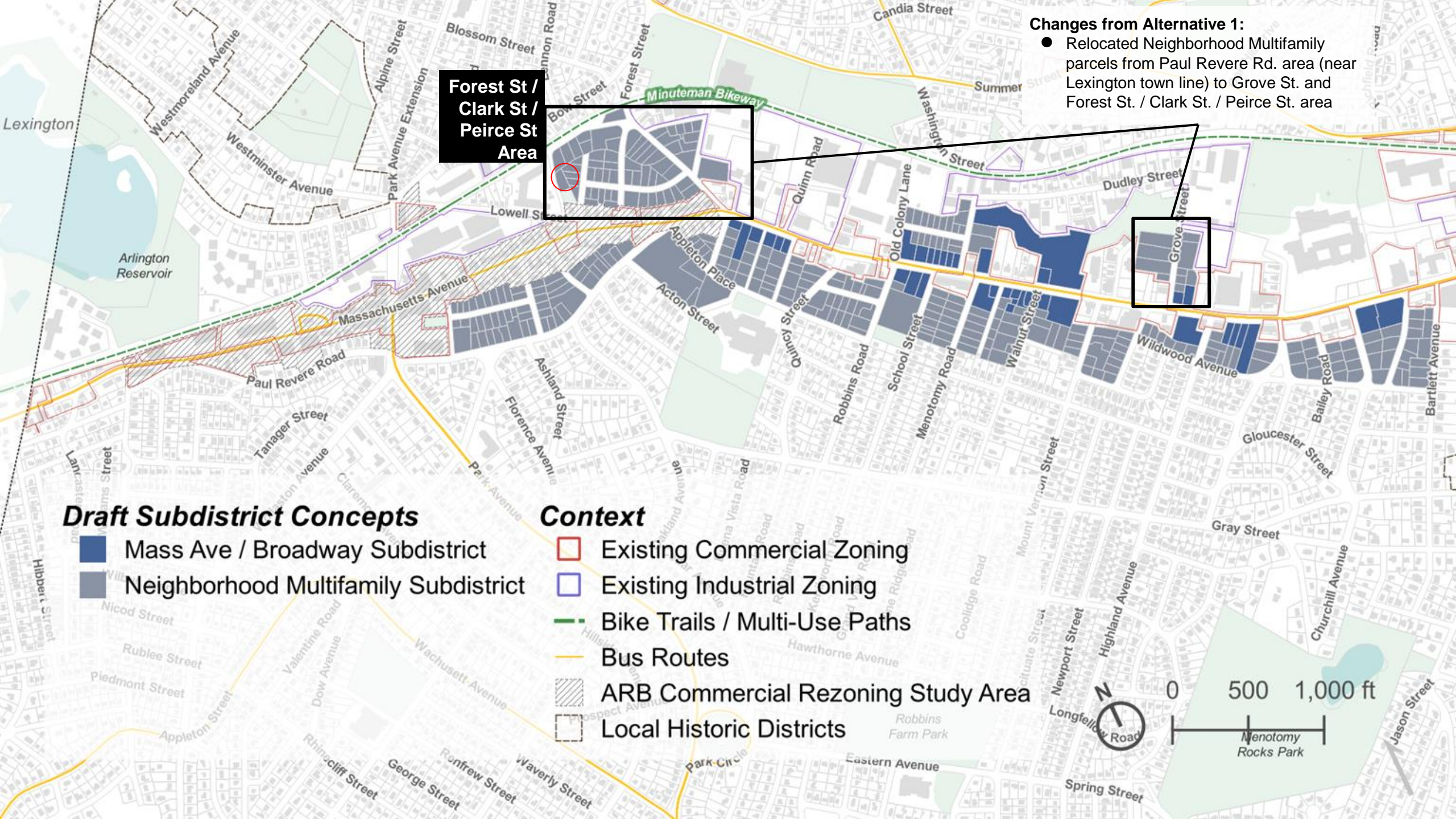
* Note: The denominator used to calculate District Density may be slightly different from the total district area. The Housing Choice Act defines types of land which must be removed from the density denominator (such as wetlands, Title V setbacks, water bodies, etc.) and types of land which must be included in the density denominator (such as rights of way, public lands, etc.) See <https://www.mass.gov/doc/compliance-guidelines-for-multi-family-zoning-districts-under-section-3a-of-the-zoning-act/download> for more information.

Alternative 2

Changes from Alternative 1:

- Relocated Neighborhood Multifamily parcels from Paul Revere Rd. area (near Lexington town line) to Grove St. and Forest St. / Clark St. / Peirce St. area





Changes from Alternative 1:

- Relocated Neighborhood Multifamily parcels from Paul Revere Rd. area (near Lexington town line) to Grove St. and Forest St. / Clark St. / Peirce St. area

**Forest St /
Clark St /
Peirce St
Area**

Grove St

Draft Subdistrict Concepts

- Mass Ave / Broadway Subdistrict
- Neighborhood Multifamily Subdistrict

Context

- Existing Commercial Zoning
- Existing Industrial Zoning
- Bike Trails / Multi-Use Paths
- Bus Routes
- ▨ ARB Commercial Rezoning Study Area
- Local Historic Districts



Alternative 2 – Model Outputs

Subdistrict	Model Inputs					Model Outputs		
	Max. Height (stories)	Setbacks (feet)			Min. Open Space (to account for setback areas)	District Area	Modeled Multifamily Unit Capacity	Modeled Gross District Density
		Front	Side	Rear				
Mass Ave/Broadway - East Arlington	4	15'	5'	20'	40%	26.9 ac	2,202	81.9 units/ac
Mass Ave/Broadway - Center/Heights	4	15'	5'	20'	40%	13.3 ac	1,123	89.1 units/ac
Neighborhood MF - East Arlington	4	15'	10'	20'	60%	15.2 ac	872	57.4 units/ac
Neighborhood MF - Center/Heights	4	15'	10'	20'	60%	48.6 ac	2,739	56.4 units/ac
Neighborhood MF - Forest St / Clark St / Peirce St	4	15'	10'	20'	60%	11.2 ac	455	44.6 units/ac
Modeled Totals						115.2 ac	7,391	65.1 units/ac
Target for Compliance						32 ac	2,046	15 units/ac

* Note: The denominator used to calculate District Density may be slightly different from the total district area. The Housing Choice Act defines types of land which must be removed from the density denominator (such as wetlands, Title V setbacks, water bodies, etc.) and types of land which must be included in the density denominator (such as rights of way, public lands, etc.) See <https://www.mass.gov/doc/compliance-guidelines-for-multi-family-zoning-districts-under-section-3a-of-the-zoning-act/download> for more information.

Summary of Proposed Alternatives

Scenario	Model Outputs		
	District Area	Modeled Multifamily Unit Capacity <i>(open space % used as proxy for setbacks)</i>	Modeled Gross District Density
Alternative 1	109.1 ac	7,268	67 units/ac
Alternative 2	115.2	7,391	65.1 units/ac
Target for Compliance	32 ac	2,046	15 units/ac





Thank you!