



Town of Arlington, MA Redevelopment Board

Meeting Minutes

Date: January 12, 2025 — 7:30 PM

Location: Arlington Community Center, Main Hall, 27 Maple Street

Members Present: Rachel Zsembery (Chair), Eugene Benson, Kin Lau, Stephen Revilak

Members Absent: Shaina Korman-Houston

Arlington Staff Present: Claire Ricker, Director of Planning and Community Development; Sarah Suarez, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development

Ms. Zsembery called the meeting to order.

1) Organizational Meeting

Mr. Benson nominated Mr. Lau as Chair, and Ms. Zsembery seconded. Mr. Lau accepted the nomination. The Board voted 4-0 in favor.

Mr. Lau nominated Mr. Revilak as Vice-Chair, and Mr. Benson seconded. Mr. Revilak accepted the nomination. The Board voted 4-0 in favor.

2) Review Meeting Minutes – December 15, 2025

Mr. Lau asked for a clarification of the difference between a drive aisle and driveway.

Ms. Ricker asked that a sentence be struck that reflected an incorrect statement made at the December 15 meeting.

Mr. Benson corrected the start time of the meeting.

Ms. Zsembery asked for a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Mr. Lau so motioned, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted 4-0 in favor.

3) Discussion of 1306-1308 Massachusetts Ave

Ms. Ricker explained that the windows were removed and plywood installed at 1306-1308 Mass Ave. At the previous meeting, the Board said that they would like the property owner Farina Roofing to paint the plywood and to attend the next meeting with a 60-day timeline for when the windows would be installed.

Farina Roofing was represented by Heladio Salgado and owner Ricardo Bautista. Mr. Salgado asked for clarification from the Board on what they would like to see done. Ms. Zsembery said that the Board is concerned about the plywood that has been covering the window openings for some time, which is a violation of the storefront bylaws. She asked when Farina would replace the storefront windows and move forward with construction. Mr. Salgado said that it will happen as soon as possible, but they are facing financial issues.

Ms. Zsembery asked if they have a specific time, and Mr. Salgado said it would likely be a few months.

Mr. Lau said that the plywood has a sign from a plumbing company on it, which should not be there. Mr. Salgado agreed to remove it. Mr. Lau asked how long it would take for them to install the windows and storefront. Mr. Lau noted that Farina had a building permit at one point, but it has expired, so they will need to reapply for a new permit, as well as order the windows and all the materials. Mr. Bautista said he was not sure that they could complete the work within 60 days. Mr. Lau asked Mr. Bautista if they still plan to follow through with the plans previously approved by the Board, and Mr. Bautista said that they do. Mr. Lau asked Mr. Bautista to reapply for a building permit within two weeks, and to install the windows and storefront as per the approved drawings within 90 days. Mr. Bautista said that he needs to order the window frames and windows, and he will speak with the manufacturer about how long that will take. Once he knows, he will create a schedule. Mr. Lau asked him to submit that schedule to DPCD. Mr. Bautista said that he would submit the schedule within a week.

Mr. Lau asked Mr. Bautista to install a timed light in the entryway that would come on after dark. Mr. Benson noted that when the Board previously discussed a light, they agreed that a light was not required.

Mr. Revilak thanked Mr. Bautista for promptly painting the plywood. He agreed with Mr. Benson that a light is not necessary.

Ms. Zsembery said that in addition to the installation of the windows, the Board would like a timeline for the completion of the entire project.

4) Public Hearing: Docket 3862, 126 Broadway

Ms. Ricker said that she received a letter from the applicant's representative on January 8, 2026, asking that the application be withdrawn without prejudice. The applicant intends to submit an application for a new project at some point in the future.

Ms. Zsembery asked for a motion to close the public hearing for Docket 3862 by accepting the withdrawal of the application without prejudice. Mr. Benson so moved, Mr. Lau seconded, and the Board voted 4-0 in favor.

9) New Business

Because the applicant for Docket 3867 was not yet present, Ms. Zsembery moved to Agenda Item 9, New Business.

Mr. Revilak asked DPCD staff about the status of the search for a Transportation Planner. Ms. Ricker replied that the Town interviewed a number of candidates in the fall and offered the job to one, but they were not able to agree to the terms of employment. The Town is currently under a hiring freeze, but she is working with the Town Manager on a timeline for reposting the position.

Mr. Revilak said that the MBTA is terminating the procurement process for the redevelopment of the Alewife station garage due to unfavorable economic conditions.

Ms. Zsembery asked for a motion to take a short recess until 7:35 pm. Mr. Lau so motioned, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted 4-0 in approval.

5) Public Hearing: Docket 3867, 9-11 Robbins Rd

Ms. Ricker explained that this Site Plan Review hearing is continued from December 1, 2025. The applicant proposes to demolish an existing two-family dwelling with detached garage and construct two three-story residential buildings with two units each on the property located at 9-11 Robbins Rd, Arlington, MA, in the Residential Two-Family District (R2) District and Neighborhood Multi-Family (NMF) Housing Overlay District. Six (6) residential parking spaces are proposed. The applicant submitted updated materials since the last hearing, including architectural plans and drawings, color renderings, a landscape plan, and a memo regarding the request for a second driveway. The applicant addressed the issues raised by the Board at the previous hearing.

The applicant was represented by attorney Mary Winstanley O'Connor, project manager William Mahoney, architect Charles Cochran, and general contractor Thomas Caccavaro. Mr. Cochran said that the updated plans include lowered roof heights of 8 feet in order to get better roof pitches. They have also widened some of the entryways, added details over the windows, widened the cornerboards, and reduced the overall height of the buildings. Ms. Winstanley said that they have also reduced two of the parking spaces to compact size and updated the landscaping. Mr. Caccavaro shared a materials board with samples of all the exterior building materials.

Ms. Zsemberly said that the gutters are not shown on the rendering. Mr. Caccavaro said that the elevations show the gutters and the downspouts, which will match the colors of the siding.

Mr. Lau said that the entryway of building B that faces the parking area is smaller and more cramped than the entryway that faces Higgins Street. He requested that they enlarge the door so that the entrances to each unit are comparable. Mr. Cochran said that he could make that change.

Mr. Lau also noted that the elevations show two small windows with no mullions. Mr. Cochran said that those windows will have mullions.

Mr. Lau noted that on the third floor of Building A, there is a large dormer with two windows in the center, directly above the entrance. Based on the floor plans, those windows look directly into closets. Mr. Cochran said that the windows were placed there for aesthetics, and they could be curtained off. Mr. Lau recommended rearranging the floor plan, adding the windows articulation somewhere else on the building, or making other windows larger, rather than using up window space on a closet, where it's unlikely to be enjoyed by the residents. Mr. Lau also noted that the rear elevation shows four dormers with windows, but the floor plans only show two windows. Mr. Cochran said they intend to build four windows. Mr. Lau noted that two of those windows are also in closets.

Mr. Benson said that the bicycle shed in the rear can only be 7 feet high, and the plans do not indicate the height. Mr. Cochran said that the pitched roof will be over 7 feet. Mr. Benson said they would need to lower that.

Mr. Benson asked if the applicant has consulted with the Tree Warden about the species of the street trees. Mr. Mahoney replied that they have, and he has approved the species.

Mr. Revilak asked how much of the square footage of the porch facing Higgins Street is within the setback. Mr. Cochran said that he is not sure. Mr. Revilak noted that the

maximum is 25 square feet, and Mr. Cochran said that if it is larger than that in the current plans, he will reduce the size of the porch.

Ms. O'Connor said that they are requesting a second driveway in part because the neighbors on Robbins Road, the side of the property which currently has the driveway, did not want parking for all six cars next to their property. In addition, because this is a corner lot with two buildings, it makes sense to have a driveway for each building, entering from each street. Ms. Zsembery noted that the Board would need to make a finding that a second driveway is appropriate and meets the requirements of Section 6.1.10.A.(2).

Ms. Zsembery opened the floor for public comment.

- Surub Rayamajhi, owner of 9 Higgins St, next door – His parents live there. His property does not have a driveway, so they are allowed two parking permits to park on the street. In a snow emergency, they have to park in front of the house or in the side yard, so he is concerned that they will lose access to the side yard. From the side of the house to the property line is 7 feet.

Ms. Zsembery asked Ms. O'Connor to confirm that all the work they are doing will be on the property belonging to 9-11 Robbins Rd, and it will not impinge on the property of 9 Higgins St. Ms. O'Connor said that is accurate. Mr. Benson asked Mr. Rayamajhi if he could still park on his property on the side of his house. Mr. Rayamajhi said that he is not sure where the property line is, because he has not seen a survey. Ms. Zsembery said that the property has been surveyed, and all the work will happen on the other side of the property line from his house. Mr. Benson noted that because a new curb cut will be put in on Higgins Street, there will be one less parking space there.

- Larry Brenner, 16 Higgins St – He appreciates that the applicant is including as much parking as possible, because otherwise residents will end up parking up the street. Most of the houses on Higgins St are two-family, with an average of two cars per unit, so a lot of people already park on the street. It is a narrow street, and there have been issues with emergency vehicles.

Seeing no one else who wished to speak, Ms. Zsembery closed the floor.

Ms. Zsembery asked the Board members for their opinions on whether the second driveway is appropriate. Mr. Lau said that he is fine with the two driveways, and it makes sense to have the parking somewhat spread out. He would like to see the curb cut narrowed, but he would accept it as is. Mr. Benson said that he believes that the second driveway meets all the requirements in the bylaw and would be appropriate in this location. Mr. Revilak and Ms. Zsembery both agreed.

Ms. Zsembery summarized the issues that the Board has raised:

- Increase the size of the portico for Unit 4, so that it matches the size of Unit 3's portico.
- Reduce the height of the bicycle structure to no more than 7 feet.
- Submit the dimensions of the porch on building B, confirming that the total area of the porch that projects into the setback is no more than 25 square feet.

Ms. Zsembery asked for a motion to approve Docket 3867, 9-11 Robbins Rd, with the findings that the project meets the requirements of the Site Plan Review criteria and that

the second driveway meets the criteria of Zoning Bylaw Section 6.1.10.A.(2), with the special conditions that the applicant increase the scale of the portico of Unit 4 to match the portico of Unit 3, that the bicycle structure cannot be higher than 7 feet tall, and that the porch projection into the setback on building B is 25 square feet or less. Mr. Lau so moved, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted 4-0 in favor.

6) Public Hearing: Docket 3881, 259 Broadway

Ms. Ricker explained that the applicant proposes to demolish the existing four-unit residential building with detached garage and construct a mixed-use building, containing fourteen (14) residential units and two (2) commercial units. A total of five (5) parking spaces will be provided. The applicant has submitted a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan which includes the following strategies: being located within a quarter-mile walk of a bus stop with scheduled bus stop at least every 30 minutes, charging for parking, providing electric bicycle charging, as well as additional strategies. Two affordable housing units are proposed in accordance with the Affordable Housing Requirements of the Zoning Bylaw.

The applicant was represented by architect Christopher Mulhern and attorney Robert Peterson. The project is located in the MBMF Overlay District, on the corner of Broadway and Palmer Street. The building currently on the property was originally built as a two-family but now has four apartments. Because it is a corner lot, it is considered to have two front yards, requiring a 15-foot setback. The applicant is choosing the side opposite Broadway as the rear yard, requiring a 20-foot setback, and the side opposite Palmer as the side yard, requiring a 5-foot setback. The front setback can be reduced to zero if one of the bonus requirements is met, and this project meets the requirement that 60% of the ground floor be commercial space, so they propose a 0-foot setback along both Broadway and Palmer Street. The proposed building is five stories, with mostly retail on the ground floor and residential units on the four floors above. The building steps back about 15 feet at the fourth floor, presenting a three-story façade to Broadway. The residential entrance is in the center of the Broadway façade. The retail level is clad in red brick, and the upper stories are clad in a variety of light-colored fiber cement panels, accented by aluminum cornices and sun shades. 92% of the ground floor frontage is commercial. Both spaces have access to the first-floor ADA bathroom. The residential portion is accessed from a lobby in the front or two doors in the rear of the building. The first floor also includes a laundry facility, a bicycle room with space for 24 bicycles, and a rear vestibule doubling as a trash and recycling center. The back hallway will house mailboxes and a real time transit display. The proposal includes five parking spaces, three full-sized and two compact, tucked under the overhang portion of the building, accessed from the existing curb cut on Palmer Street. The back center walkway has two short-term bicycle parking spaces. The sidewalk from the rear vestibule provides level access for moving wheeled trash carts. The electric transformer and the generator providing backup power for the elevator will be located along the side yard privacy fence. The second and third floor plans are the same, with three one-bedroom units and two two-bedroom units. The units are all small, meaning the rents will be at the low end of the typical range for new construction. The fourth floor steps back about 15 feet and has three one-bedroom units. The middle portion of the roof created by the setback is a common outdoor deck shaded by a pergola. The edge of the roof will be protected by a parapet. The fifth floor also has three one-bedroom units. All units have windows on two exposures, allowing cross-ventilation. The upper roof plan includes the elevator house, heat pumps, ventilation equipment, and space for a 35-panel

solar array. The roof has a parapet shielding the equipment from view. The basement level will house utility equipment and one storage cage per apartment. The retail storefront wraps around to Palmer Street, and that façade features three small bays with projecting tops. At the rear, the upper four floors project over the ground-floor rear parking. The left side steps back in a series of planes to accommodate the angled property line.

Three new street trees will be planted, and new concrete sidewalks on both facades will be accented by decorative pavers and benches in the façade recesses. The left side will have a six-foot privacy fence and will be planted with a vegetated buffer.

Ms. Zsembery noted that this property was previously before the Board with a much smaller project, preserving the current building with a small addition. Mr. Mulhern said that the owner felt that the complications around trying to renovate the existing building and the Board's resistance to the rear addition made their original plan not viable. Ms. Zsembery said that the Board did support the original plan with the enclosure of the rear stairwell, which was also successfully addressed at a meeting with the Historical Commission. Mr. Peterson said that he was not involved in the project at that point, but his understanding was that the owners looked into the financial requirements of renovating the current building versus building an entirely new building, and their long-term goals for the site changed.

Mr. Lau noted that the drive aisle accessing the parking spaces is only 12.7 feet wide, which is not wide enough to provide an appropriate turning radius for cars pulling in and out of parking spaces. He also noted that at least one space must be handicapped-accessible, which is not indicated on the plans. Mr. Mulhern said that his understanding is that a handicapped space is only required in lots of at least 15 spaces. If a future resident needs accessible parking, the last space on the left could be converted to a handicapped space, with the sidewalk as the access area. He acknowledged that the turning radius is tight, but he believes that a 12.7-foot access drive is sufficient.

Mr. Lau asked what percentage of the ground floor is commercial space. Mr. Mulhern replied that it was 63% of the usable area, which he defined as including all the interior space except the stairs and the elevator. Mr. Lau thinks that the commercial space is very small, and it will be difficult to find tenants for it. He recommended moving the residential entry to Palmer Street and combining the commercial space into one larger space on Broadway.

Mr. Lau noted that two of the upper floors are 11.2' high, while the others are 10.6' high. Mr. Mulhern said that the fourth-floor step-back requires additional insulation at the roof, which necessitates making the third floor taller. Mr. Lau said that the overall height of 61 feet seems too high for area. He suggested eliminating the parapet to reduce some of the height and replace it with screen walls further back from the edge. Mr. Mulhern said that doing so would significantly reduce the possible size of the solar array. Mr. Lau said that he would accept less solar because the building looks too massive. He thinks that can reduce the overall height by at least six feet. The parapets make the building look heavy. He would prefer a lighter, more transparent railing system. He also noted that the egress stairs could be lower, reducing overall height. He recommended lowering the floor heights while making the windows bigger, in order to make the space feel larger. Mr. Mulhern said that there are significant energy efficiency restrictions that limit the size of the glass.

Mr. Benson noted that the renderings include kitchen hood exhaust vents on the side of the building, but the Board does not allow any side wall venting.

Mr. Benson asked about the process of getting a demolition permit, given that the existing building is on the Historic Structures Inventory. Mr. Peterson said that they applied for a demolition permit in July 2025, at which point they were given a one-year demolition delay, so they will be able to begin demolition in July 2026.

Mr. Benson asked for clarification on their calculation of the percentage of commercial space on the ground floor. Mr. Mulhern replied that they took the entire interior space and deducted the square footage used by staircases and the elevator to determine the usable ground floor space. Mr. Benson noted that the word “usable” is not in the zoning bylaw, so the elevator and stairwells should be included. His opinion is that the ground floor area should be defined as including any area under an upper-floor overhang, although not all Board members agree. He noted that the applicant’s materials indicate that the total floor area is 2,932 square feet, 60% of which is 1,759.2 square feet, but they have only included 1,220 square feet of commercial space. Mr. Mulhern said that he believes that the area of the ground floor should be defined as only including the enclosed area of the ground floor.

Mr. Benson asked if the applicant has done any market research to see how leasable the two commercial spaces are. Mr. Mulhern said that they have not. He said that the smaller space could be used as an office. Mr. Benson said that previous market research has shown that there is no market for office space in Arlington right now, so he thinks it is highly unlikely that the smaller of the two commercial spaces, at only 337 square feet, will be appealing to tenants. Even the larger space is relatively small and may be difficult to rent. He noted that according to the bylaw, the bonus fifth floor is only available if the commercial spaces are actually occupied by eating and drinking establishments, business services, child care, or retail uses, not just available to rent. He would like to see a market survey indicating that spaces of these sizes at this location could reasonably be used by one of those types of businesses, which does not include offices.

Mr. Benson asked if the property owners have ever managed an apartment building with this many units and this few parking spaces. Owner Mike Bouboulis said that they have managed a similar building in Allston. Mr. Benson pointed out that Allston allows overnight street parking, while Arlington does not.

Mr. Benson noted that the TDM plan refers to the 2023 census data for that area, which indicates that 51% of people commute to work by car. If that is accurate, it would make sense to have 7 parking spaces for 14 units. Mr. Mulhern said that the purpose of the TDM plan is to try to change the behavior; if parking is limited and costs extra, that might prompt some residents to choose an alternative method of transportation. Mr. Benson pointed out that the Board decides whether or not to approve the TDM plan; it is not an automatic parking reduction. Mr. Benson also noted that covered bicycle parking and storage is required by the bylaw, so it cannot be used as a TDM strategy. In addition, proximity to a bus stop is only sufficient as a TDM strategy if the bus line runs seven days a week at a frequency of at least every 30 minutes. The TDM plan refers to the 87 bus, which does not run to Arlington on Sundays, and the 350, which does not run every 30 minutes on weekends. Mr. Benson also noted that the TDM plan refers to electric bicycle charging, but they have not indicated the location of the chargers on their plans. Mr. Revilak noted that the property is close enough to the 77 bus line, which does meet the requirements.

Mr. Benson asked how visitors arriving by bike will be able to find the short-term bicycle parking. Mr. Mulhern said that they can add signage.

Mr. Benson asked if they have spoken to the Tree Warden about the species of trees. Mr. Mulhern said that they have not, but they are happy to plant whatever species he recommends.

Mr. Revilak said that his interpretation of the 60% commercial requirement is different from Mr. Benson's, and he thinks that 60% of the enclosed ground floor area is sufficient. The two commercial spaces total 1,220 square feet, which is 60% of 2,034 square feet, so if the enclosed ground floor area, including elevators and stairways, is larger than that, they do not have sufficient commercial space for the bonuses.

Mr. Revilak said that 14 units requires 21 long-term bicycle parking spaces. Because they are providing 24, he believes that their extra spaces qualify as a TDM strategy. Ms. Zsembery said that the Board needs to address that issue, but she does not believe that including three extra spaces would justify the size of parking reduction they are requesting. Mr. Benson agreed.

Mr. Revilak said that the windows on the fifth floor on the Palmer Street side look much nicer than the fifth-floor windows on the Broadway side. He would appreciate having the windows look more similar.

Mr. Revilak said that the upper stories create a large blank space with a lot of emptiness. Part of that is the parapet, so if that is removed, it will decrease that massing. He suggested also adding a horizontal band of some sort under the cornice to break up the massing.

Ms. Zsembery agreed that the parapet is too high, both at the fourth-floor setback and on the roof. She also said that the top two stories currently look like a box stacked on top of the building; they should be more tied into the rest of the building. The fifth-story windows facing Broadway need more articulation so they don't appear so flat. The color palette appears quite stark for this residential neighborhood; the white is too bright. The architectural style doesn't have any connection to the neighborhood. It also includes too many different materials. It needs a stronger datum between the commercial and the residential.

Ms. Zsembery opened the floor for public comment.

- Gerry Leonard, 44 Palmer St – He is speaking on behalf of a group of neighbors. They support increasing housing, but they do not believe that this building is a good fit for the neighborhood. The proposed building is nearly twice the height of nearby buildings. Having setbacks would soften the visual mass of the building, but they are seeking a zero-setback bonus. It would also bring many cars to local streets. They agree with Mr. Benson's interpretation of the 60% commercial requirement; interpreting it differently incentivizes developers to minimize the actual commercial space by minimizing the ground floor size. They are concerned about the lack of parking, which will likely push more cars onto already congested streets, especially Palmer, which is narrow and frequently poses challenges to emergency vehicles. The building's height would reduce sunlight for neighboring homes, gardens, and solar installations. A three- or four-story building would reduce these impacts. They would like to reconsider what can be done with the existing building. The project is dominated with one-bedroom units, which runs counter to the spirit of the MBTA Communities Act, which emphasizes families with children.

- Carl Wagner, Edgehill Rd – This is the first project that will have bonuses in the Multi-Family Housing Overlay, so it is setting precedents that will impact future buildings. This building does not fit in with its neighborhood. It will have a negative effect on the neighbors. The MBTA Communities process resulted in a requirement of one parking space per unit, which the Board should require. Allowing TDM plans undermine the agreed-upon parking requirement and reduce parking to ridiculous levels. Over 96% of multi-adult households in Arlington have cars. Even people who use other means of transportation to commute to work usually have cars.
- Jeffrey Yee, 261 Broadway – The proposed building will be taller than any other building on Broadway or Palmer. Based on the shadow diagram, his home and others will be completely overshadowed, which will affect gardens, lawns, children playing outside, and the ability to install solar. It's good that new buildings are required to have solar, but if it blocks many other houses from getting solar, that will be a net negative. He noted that the term Gross Floor Area is not used in the bonus provision, and most people would interpret parking under an overhang to be on the ground floor. So the proper square footage for the calculation would use the area underneath the second floor. Removing the fifth-floor bonus and maintaining the 15-foot front setback would go a long way towards making this property fit into the neighborhood. A zero-foot setback is dangerous; crossing Broadway from Palmer is difficult already because sightlines are difficult, and giving this building a zero-foot setback will exacerbate the problem.
- Rebecca Peterson – She thinks that builders and architects are failing Arlington. Every project is the same bland box of gray and white with maybe a little color around the windows. It doesn't blend in with the neighborhood. She does not understand how there can be so much confusion around the bylaws. Developers keep trying to claim bonuses with questionable math. She can't think of a single new project with commercial space on the ground floor that has a vital retail use that draws foot traffic. The commercial space should benefit the residents of Arlington.
- Michelle Nathan, Robin Hood Road – Most people don't understand the role of pollinators, but studies have shown that when lights are not shielded and not pointed downward, pollinators end up getting disoriented, and it leads to early death. The bylaw says that lighting in residential buildings should be shielded and pointed down, but many buildings have much more glaring lights.
- Aram Hollman, 12 Whittemore Street – Five parking spaces for 15 units is inadequate. Roughly 90% of Arlington's units own at least one car, with an average of about 1.5 cars per unit. 73% commute to work via car. Charging for parking as a TDM strategy is inappropriate. Arlington already has a lot of inadequate storefronts that cannot attract tenants and are left vacant. The idea that a 337-square-foot space that is useful for anything is ridiculous. That will not help us gain businesses in Arlington.
- Steve McKenna – A parking space is 8.5 x 18.5 feet, and the proposed turning radius will be extremely difficult. There has been no discussion of snow removal. The six-foot buffer fence on the side is a concern for exiting vehicles; it should be lower closer to the sidewalk. How will trash be removed from the inside if parking spaces are blocking access?

- Mellela Marx, Pine Ridge Rd – This project seems extremely out of character for the neighborhood. The house next to it will be completely dwarfed by it. We can build something that fits in the neighborhood and provides affordable housing without building something that will tower over the neighborhood. This is a dangerous corner in terms of traffic and people crossing. Whether we like it or not, people in Arlington have cars, and the residents of this building most likely will as well. There are a lot of very narrow streets that make parking difficult.
- Joanne Cullinane – She submitted a letter with 210 signatures about respecting the bonus rules for the affordability bonus at 126 Broadway. All the bonus rules should be respected. The request to get a commercial bonus does not respect either the letter or the spirit of the law. The bylaw says that commercial space in 60% of the ground floor at street level is required for the bonus; that was discussed and voted on by Town Meeting, not Gross Floor Area. The spirit of the law was to promote commercial use that will be viable that will create foot traffic and contribute to vibrant communities, not under-sized spaces just to get more size and height.

Seeing no one else who wished to speak, Ms. Zsembery closed the floor.

Ms. Zsembery summarized issues for the applicant to discuss:

- Address parking – width of the drive aisle, visibility from the perimeter fence, ability to convert a space close to the main entrance to be accessible.
- Show the calculation of the percent of retail space. The Board would prefer a single, larger commercial space. Provide a market survey regarding possible tenants for commercial space, noting that office space is not a permitted use.
- Reduce parapet heights, both at the fourth floor and the roof, using a more transparent railing system.
- Address the height of the egress square.
- Address the size of the windows on the fifth floor.
- Remove side wall venting.
- Revise TDM plan. Covered bicycle parking cannot be counted. Look again at bus routes. Show location of at least two bicycle charging stations.
- Address location of short-term bicycle parking and its location requirements.
- Contact Tree Warden for approval of street tree species.
- Revise architectural style so that it is more in context with the neighborhood, including the color palette as well as the massing and articulation.
- Add a stronger horizontal datum between commercial and residential.
- Simplify number and types of cornices.

Mr. Robertson said that the rezoning was enacted to address concerns about vehicle dependency and encourage development that has access to other means of transportation. He understands the concern about not having one-to-one parking, but part of the purpose of new zoning rules and TDM plans is to change the assumption that everyone must have a car.

Ms. Zsembery asked for a motion to continue Docket 3881, 259 Broadway, to February 23, 2026. Mr. Lau so moved, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted 4-0 in favor.

7) Discussion of potential Warrant Articles for 2026 Annual Town Meeting

ADUs

Ms. Ricker explained that DPCD received comments from the Attorney General's office about changes it would like to see made to Arlington's ADU bylaw. We can move forward with our bylaw as written for the time being, but the AG's office does expect that we will make some changes, next year if not this year. Mr. Benson suggested moving forward with proposing a 2026 warrant article to make one specific change about approving non-conforming ADUs with a finding rather than a special permit. Mr. Revilak agreed. Other issues raised by the AG's office could be addressed at a future Town Meeting. Ms. Ricker said that DPCD would draft warrant article language.

Certified Mail Requirement

Ms. Ricker said that the Board has found that the certified mail requirement is cost-prohibitive for citizen petitioners who seek a zoning map change. Certified mail is not required by state law. The Board members agreed that this is a simple change and should be pursued this year. Ms. Ricker said that DPCD would draft warrant article language.

Flood Plain District update

David Morgan, Environmental Planner and Conservation Agent, explained that the proposed changes are required by FEMA for eligibility to remain in the National Flood Insurance program. The changes include the stated local purpose, where the flood maps can be accessed by the public, definitions of terms, designation of the Community Flood Plain Administrator, requirements regarding permits for the Flood Plain District, prohibition of flood plain encroachment, requirements for elevation and anchoring of recreational vehicles, requirement to notify appropriate officials of alteration of a watercourse, requirement to notify FEMA of data that changes the base flood elevations, variances for building code flood plain standards, and changes to legal language. These changes have all been approved by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, whose Floodplain Manager oversees the implementation process for the new language. None of the changes will substantively alter the way that Arlington deals with flood plain issues. The Board agreed to proceed with this proposed amendment. Mr. Morgan will draft warrant article language.

Light pollution

Mr. Morgan explained that Section 5.6.2.D.(4) includes lighting regulation that applies only to Industrial districts. The proposal is to create Section 5.3.23, Lighting, which would apply to all districts, and move the existing language into the new section. The proposal would provide consistency with the requirements of Title 5, Section 14, the Dark Skies bylaw, including having all lights be downcast, minimizing overspill onto adjacent property, and ensuring that lighting for walkways and parking lots is adequately spaced. Mr. Morgan noted that a change to the Dark Skies bylaw is likely to be proposed at Town Meeting, which could supersede part of this proposal. Mr. Benson said that he, Mr. Morgan, and Mr. Revilak had not previously determined whether it makes more sense to change the zoning bylaw or defer to the Dark Skies bylaw, so he suggested waiting until after Town Meeting to see if any changes are made. The other Board members agreed. Mr. Morgan said that even in the absence of a zoning change, it would be useful to have a process for how commercial, residential, and industrial applications are evaluated with regard to lighting.

Sign Bylaw

Ms. Ricker explained that Katie Luczai, Economic Development Coordinator, wrote a memo to the Board proposing several changes to the sign bylaw to make it easier for business owners to use and understand. Proposed changes include reducing the area in which signs on corner buildings are prohibited for traffic visibility, allowing cabinet signs, allowing exceptions to the prohibitions on electronic displays for Mass Lottery signs, allowing digital marquees, allowing canopy and projecting signs, allowing freestanding projecting signs, and limiting A-frame signs.

Ms. Zsembery said that she does not think that cabinet signs are appropriate in Arlington, but she is open to considering the other elements of the proposal. Mr. Lau asked what is prompting the proposed changes at this time. Ms. Luczai said that the proposals are based on issues that have come up multiple times over the years that she has been reviewing sign applications.

Mr. Benson said that this is an opportunity to make some rational changes that will help businesses without harming the overall look of Arlington. He suggested allowing existing buildings on corners to put signs on their walls rather than reducing the visibility area. He noted that there are already some cabinet signs in town, and he does not think they are a problem. He does not think that that exceptions can be allowed for Mass Lottery signs because it is a potential first amendment issue to allow electronic signs for the purpose of one specific type of advertising but nothing else. He is in favor of allowing marquees to be digital as long as they do not flash or change images. He is willing to allow projecting signs, but they should be allowed in all business districts. He agrees that businesses should be limited to one A-frame sign, but only on private property; none should be allowed on the sidewalk.

Mr. Revilak agreed that allowing Mass Lottery signs is potentially a problem. For the traffic visibility issue, he suggested rewriting Section 6.2.3.A.(3) to read like 6.2.3.A.(2), which prohibits signs that obstruct the view of traffic signs or signals. Alternatively, 6.2.3.A.(3) could be rewritten to prohibit protruding signs between 3 and 7 feet high.

Mr. Lau said that these are all good points, but he does not think that it should be a priority at this time. Ms. Luczai said that the issue of marquees has come up in the last year with the Regent Theater, and Mr. Benson suggested moving forward with that specific provision. Ms. Zsembery suggested moving forward with changes for theater marquees, projecting signs, and A-frames. Ms. Luczai will provide draft language for the warrant articles.

Funding for Compliance Officer

Ms. Ricker said that she has repeatedly requested funding for an additional position, and it has not been supported as part of the general budgeting process. She does not think it makes sense to propose funding as a warrant article. Ms. Zsembery said that the Board has identified this as a priority, and it should continue to be requested as part of the budgeting process going forward.

Funding for Consultant for Arlington Heights Business District

Ms. Ricker said that the Board could request an appropriation for this purpose. DPCD has pursued grant funding for this project, which has been unsuccessful, and it has not been included as part of DPCD's budget. Mr. Lau noted that the Town is under a hiring freeze

and is facing a budget crisis, so it may not make sense to request funding at this time. The other Board members agreed.

Affordable Housing Overlay District

Ms. Zsembery said that the Affordable Housing Overlay Committee (AHOC) has sent a memo to the Board and will be scheduled to meet with the Board in February at which point the Board and AHOC can discuss many of the details. She does not think that AHOC's proposal is ready to be brought to Town Meeting, because the Board still has a lot of questions and would like to see a number of changes made.

Mr. Benson said that AHOC's proposal has a lot of good ideas but needs more discussion. He agrees with some of the proposed locations, but others are too far from transit. He is also concerned about the proposed heights allowed in residential districts, some of the locations in the industrial districts, and the parking requirement of 0.5 spaces per unit. He has a few other questions he would like to discuss with AHOC. He is concerned about limited setbacks given that the hope is that families with children will be able to use these properties. He suggested adding parcels owned by Arlington Public Schools to the list, as at least two school properties have been sold and used to build housing in recent decades. He would prefer to have the process be by special permit, rather than as of right, because that is the best way to work with projects that need a lot of work to be appropriate for Arlington.

Mr. Revilak addressed some of the questions raised by AHOC. He recommended removing the phrase "but not limited to," because the Attorney General's office flagged that as problematic when reviewing the MBTA Communities language. He noted that the proposal includes the properties occupied by Leader and Brookline Banks at 856-870 Mass Ave, all of which are owned by the same LLC. Two adjacent properties behind the banks are also owned by the same LLC, so he suggested they be included in the overlay. He thinks that the mixed-use provision is fine as is, and a mixed-use bonus is not necessary. He is fine with the requirement of 0.5 spaces per unit, because it is the current utilization rate for the Housing Corporation of Arlington. He thinks that the proposed limit of 6 stories along the major corridors makes sense; the Board should discuss the proposed limit of 4 stories in residential neighborhoods. It makes sense to use setbacks as a dimensional governance for yards; a separate open space requirement is not necessary. It would make sense to redo side setbacks when a parcel abuts a business or industrial district. He thinks a 10-foot setback makes sense along the major corridors.

Ms. Zsembery agreed with Mr. Benson that a special permit process would be preferable. She is also concerned about some of the business and industrial locations. She thinks that the current proposal allows buildings that are too tall. In February, the Board can begin to address some of the details to move toward a future warrant article.

Multi-Family Housing Overlay Districts

Ms. Ricker said that the proposed amendments to the MF districts came out of the Board retreat, but they have not been discussed in detail, so perhaps should wait until 2027 Town Meeting. Mr. Benson said that we should move forward with removing the language in Section 5.8.4.G referring to EOHLC approval, as that has already occurred. DPCD staff will prepare warrant article language.

Mr. Revilak noted that the Board has had differences of opinion about the bonus provisions, and he would recommend amending the bylaw to clarify those provisions. Ms. Zsembery noted that because the Board is not in agreement about how to interpret the bonus provisions, it may not be possible to agree on clarifying language.

Change of Minimum Drive Aisle

Mr. Benson suggested reducing the minimum drive aisle requirement to 22 feet, as the Board has previously approved reductions to 22 feet. Mr. Revilak reviewed the bylaws of neighboring communities, some of which have a 20-foot requirement, some 22, and some 24. Melrose uses 20 feet for residential and mixed-use and 24 for all other uses, which he thinks makes sense. Mr. Benson said that many personal vehicles are very large, so he would not be in favor of reducing the requirement to 20 feet. Ms. Zsembery noted that the specifics can be worked through at the warrant article hearing, but it makes sense to move forward with a warrant article modifying the parking drive aisle requirements in Section 6.1.11.C.(3). DPCD staff will draft warrant article language.

Parking Rules

Mr. Benson suggested minor changes to the parking rules to make it clear that they apply in the Multi-Family Overlay Districts. Mr. Benson will draft warrant article language.

Definition of a Half-Story

Christian Klein, Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) Chair, said that the intent behind the definition of a half-story is to convert an attic with a traditional roof by adding a small dormer. The ZBA is seeing more projects with roof structures that meet the technical definition of a half-story while effectively creating an entire additional story. The ZBA has struggled with what specifically to recommend. Ms. Zsembery said that the Board has talked about the possibility of providing design guidelines and diagrams, but that would not be possible for this year's Town Meeting.

Option for Additional Height or Stories for houses in FEMA Flood Zone

Mr. Klein said that houses in the FEMA flood zone must have their lowest level of habitation above the mean flood elevation, meaning that basements cannot be habitable. The ZBA is interested in modifying the definition of building height such that within the flood zone, the mean flood elevation would serve as the base elevation rather than the mean grade of the site. Mr. Klein will draft warrant article language.

Fair Housing Law

Mr. Klein recommended addressing this issue at 2027 Town Meeting. He also noted that it is not strictly a zoning issue, and it might make more sense to address it as an issue of Town policy.

Application of Tree Bylaw when Requesting Second Driveway

Mr. Klein said that this is already in the zoning bylaw, and there needs to be a discussion with the Select Board about whether it should be added to the Tree Bylaws as well.

Enclosure of Porches

Enclosure of front porches used to be allowed by right, but it now requires a special permit, so the ZBA is receiving a number of requests. The porches are in the front yard setback, and the ZBA is trying to determine the difference between enclosing a porch and building an addition in the front yard setback. Mr. Klein said that this issue needs more discussion and study to determine what the Town wants. He suggested creating a committee to study the issue.

Rezoning 0Lot Concord Turnpike, St. Camillus Site

Mary Winstanley O'Connor represents HYM Investments, which would like to build an assisted living development on the large lot near St. Camillus Church, a 4.5-acre site currently zoned R1. HYM proposes a three-story assisted-living development that uses pitched roofs to blend into the neighborhood and would need to be 50 feet tall. Currently, the R6 district allows assisted living as a use but not 50 feet of height, and R7 allows the height but not the use. One option would be to rezone the property as R6 and amend the dimensional and density section to include assisted living residences of more than 20,000 square feet. The other option would be to rezone the property as R7 and change the use regulations to add "assisted living residence, by special permit." Mr. Revilak and Ms. Zsembery both said that it would be more appropriate to use R6.

Adding Uses to the Business District

Ms. Luczai proposed adding animal daycare and health and fitness uses to business districts. Mr. Revilak noted that the bylaw includes a definition of health and fitness clubs and a parking requirement, but no use table entries associated with it, which should be rectified. Ms. Zsembery said that the Board will consider animal daycare use language at the next meeting. Ms. Luczai will draft warrant article language.

8) Open Forum

- Carl Wagner, Edgehill Road – He was disappointed that members of the public, many of whom have left, did not get a chance to speak on a number of issues, especially the Affordable Housing Overlay District. He hopes that the Board will not advance that as a warrant article, because the community was left out of the process of determining what such an overlay should be. A plan for an overlay needs to include a broad variety of stakeholders in the planning and decision process.

Ms. Zsembery clarified that the Board will not be moving forward with the Overlay District because there has not been enough time for the Board to work with the committee to come to agreement.

- Joanne Cullinane – The current bylaws for bonuses in the Multi-Family Housing Overlay Districts do not allow for excluding anything from the definition of ground floor at street level. Redefining it so that there would be no minimum because it is not clear what can be excluded would not be compatible with the bylaws that we currently have.

Mr. Revilak noted that people can read the same law but come up with different interpretations, which is why the Board is made up of multiple members, and why decisions are appealable. That is what courts are for, and even there judges sometimes disagree on the interpretation of laws. The Board does not always agree on their decisions, but it does not mean that they are redefining the law.

10) Adjourn

Ms. Zsembery asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Lau so moved, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted 4-0 in favor.

Documents used:

- Agenda Item 2** Draft Meeting Minutes – February 15, 2025
- Agenda Item 3** 1306-1308 Mass Ave windows photos – updated
- Agenda Item 4** 126 Broadway – Withdrawal Letter 1-8-26
- Agenda Item 5** 9-11 Robbins Rd – Architectural Plans & Site Plan UPDATED 01-02-2026
9-11 Robbins Rd – color renderings – UPDATED 01-01-2026
9-11 Robbins Rd – Landscape Plan UPDATED 12-30-2025
9-11 Robbins Rd – Driveway Memorandum – NEW 12-15-2025
01082026 UPDATED DRAFT SPR memo Docket 3867 9-11 Robbins Rd
- Agenda Item 6** 259 Broadway – Site Plan Review Application – rec'd 12-09-25
259 Broadway – 259 Impact Statement – rec'd 12-09-25
259 Broadway – Certified Plot Plan 06-03-24
259 Broadway – Plans & Drawings – 12-05-25
259 Broadway – Landscape Plan – 11-25-25
259 Broadway – Civil Plan – 11-07-25
259 Broadway – Existing Conditions, Topography, Underground Utilities – 10-20-25
259 Broadway – shadow diagrams – 12-05-25
259 Broadway – Traffic Demand Management Plan – 12-04-25
259 Broadway – Solar Assessment – 11-21-25
259 Broadway – Photometric Plan – 11-17-25
SPR memo Docket 259 Broadway 01-08-2026
Docket 3881 259 Broadway – SPR Legal Notice 12-25, 1-1
- Agenda Item 7** Potential ATM26 Zoning Warrant Articles – UPDATED
AHOD Package for ARB Discussion 01122026
Sign Bylaw Proposed Amendments Memo
Sign Bylaw Amendments Visual References
Business Uses Proposed Amendments Memo
ADU Memo and AG Comments
Proposed Zoning Amendment – 0Lot Concord Turnpike
Proposed Zoning Amendment – Norcross & Gardner Streets
- Correspondence** 126 Broadway:
- R. Peterson, 11/17/25
 - M. Popova, 11/17/25
 - C. Valentine, 11/20/25
 - J. Cullinane, 1/9/26 A
 - J. Cullinane, 1/9/26 B
 - J. Cullinane, 1/12/26
- 259 Broadway:
- G. Leonard, 1/12/26
- Affordable Housing Overlay District:
- M. Marx, 12/12/25
 - L. English, 12/22/25
 - C. Wagner, 1/11/26
- Multiple:
- D. Funkhauser, 1/11/26
 - C. Wagner, 1/11/26
 - E. Cahill, 1/12/26
 - K. Fanale, 1/12/26
 - M. Marx, 1/12/26