

Arlington Redevelopment Board
March 18, 2019, 7:30 p.m.
Senior Center, Main Room, First Floor
Meeting Minutes

This meeting was recorded by ACMi.

PRESENT: Andrew Bunnell (Chair), David Watson, Eugene Benson, Kin Lau

STAFF: Jennifer Raitt, Director, Planning and Community Development, Erin Zwirko, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development

The Chair opened the meeting at 7:30 pm and turned to the first item on the agenda, Articles 10-14. He stated that the March 25 public hearing will focus on Articles 15, 16, 23, 24, and 25. That night will conclude public comments. No public comments will be allowed on March 27 until after votes are taken. The Chair stated Andrew West is no longer on the Board and recognized and congratulated him for his years of service on the Board and to the town.

Ms. Raitt presented a slide show on the articles, followed by public comments.

Anne Thompson offered her assistance with the articles, some of which she has issues with. She is a professional in the field.

Shanna Cleveland stated her support and explained that there had been a detailed planning process. The articles are good for the environment and to help address climate issues. This has been a multi-year process and advances goals in the Master Plan to address affordability. These articles will help address people's ability to access the community. She is very supportive of the articles.

John Worden favors walkability and public transportation; he stated bus service is not good.

Article 10: setbacks should apply to entire elevation.

Article 11: height buffers are a nonstarter -- residents need protection from excessive shadows; bylaws should be written in a balanced way between developers and nearby property owners.

Article 12: setbacks should not be less than the average setbacks of the block adjoining the corner lot;

Article 13: If there is only space for 1.4 cars per unit, where is the .4 car going to go?

Article 14: Since the Redevelopment Board already has authority to reduce the quantity of parking required, Article 13 is redundant.

Wynelle Evans repeated her previous comments from 3/11 regarding her concerns that displacement would result from the new zoning. She also stated there are empty storefronts in Arlington Center, and asked what the town is doing to draw new business.

Steve Moore stated that residents are not quite ready for the proposed changes to be put into action. He suggested that, to prevent a fight during Town Meeting, the town wait a year to better inform the residents.

Mark Kaeppelein stated the parking study shows how the town will deceive the public in order to advance its agenda, and is a complete sham -- they should be counting households, not population, against the number of vehicles.

Pam Hallett stated the amendments are the result of community input into the Master Plan, and a small group is now trying to control the outcome. She also stated that residents from the surrounding neighborhood are using the otherwise unutilized parking spaces at one of their properties. She stated the parking study is accurate. She stated in order to have fewer empty storefronts the community needs to support the businesses, regardless of the number of parking spaces.

Beth Melofchik stated she is horrified by the proposals, which do not protect green space and trees across all districts,

and will lead to canyonization.

Don Seltzer addressed Article 11, height buffers. He stated the bylaw is a modest protection for homeowners who live near the business districts. He stated the MAPC wants to slash the buffer zone by seventy-five percent, which will not provide reasonable relief. He stated the visual and shadow studies are useless and represent fictional neighborhoods. He presented his own visual study of a business district and surrounding area. He asked the Board to apply the same standards when reviewing the warrant articles as they do when reviewing developer applications for single buildings on a single lot.

Steve McKenna read passages from the Master Plan and stated the town planning department is promoting these goals. Planning and Community Development – they are not a developer but are here for everyone in town, for growth and economic opportunities. He stated the ARB has never steamrolled anything, and there is fearmongering concerning “walls of darkness.” He stated the town would be devastated without the development.

Sharon Prizant stated her concerns about upper story setbacks and reductions in open space, and that there are ways to promote growth without turning Arlington into Cambridge.

Jo Anne Preston suggested putting fearmongering to an end with facts. She stated that studies show that upzoning or density zoning resulted in no significant increase in housing production but speculation that led to zero affordable housing and that increased housing does not mean lower rents, and low-income residents might be driven out. She then stated that the Master Plan offers suggestions for development but is not set in stone. She is concerned about the process. The Chairman advised she stay in scope, as there were many more speakers. An audience member protested that this is censorship. She proposed putting aside the density plan that she thinks came from outside consultants and develop a new process with neighborhood planning.

Carol Curcio spoke in favor of the articles stating that they are amazing. She is excited for the town and for future generations.

Chris Moore stated it is unclear why the changes were proposed, as opposed to other alternatives; and what impact is the town trying to achieve, and there needs to be justification for the proposals.

Jonathan Nyberg stated the proposals would affect only a small segment of Arlington; while some residents may not like the decisions and there may be an impact, the changes proposed are in the best interest of the majority.

Janice Broadman stated there is a divergence between what ARB envisions and what many residents envision. They might agree on the objectives, but the proposals will not fulfill these and the process is wrong; once the ARB makes a decision, Town Meeting usually agrees; rather, there should be a townwide ballot.

Recess

Carl Wagner reminded those present that only the Town Meeting members will get to vote on the articles. He objected to the portrayal of “15 people who are making a lot of noise” to defeat the proposals. He stated there are more than 15, and there is a lot of interest in his precinct among residents who were not informed about the proceedings. He is concerned about Article 11, height buffer area – smaller lot sizes may mean even taller buildings, up to five floors. Article 13, parking restrictions – 1.5 spaces will result in parking spillover. He stated Article 13 is unnecessary. He stated residents were not involved in drafting the articles.

Pasi Miettinen stated that from a principled point of view, the ARB should support the articles in order to let Town Meeting decide on them. From an economic point of view, there will be an opportunity to reduce taxes substantially in the future.

Park Wilde favors the proposals because they would provide more modest-sized, affordable, and pedestrian-friendly

housing. He also stated the articles would help the climate by encouraging public transportation in the future. He stated one car space per unit is not mandated but is a minimum suggested.

Aram Holman responded to a previous comment that Arlington's business spaces are too small; he stated that businesses can knock out walls and combine units – a restaurant in Arlington Center was able to build out, rather than up. He stated increasing the number of affordable housing units will not exempt the town from the 40B "blackmail" -- not enough housing can be built. He also stated Mass Ave is too narrow to support buildings taller than three stories. He stated his opposition to reduction of parking to one space per unit, as it is simply a way for developers to build additional units rather than parking.

Asia Kepka addressed reducing the carbon footprint. She stated that additional bike racks will not increase the number of bikers, because biking is not safe in Arlington. She asked rhetorically where the excess parking is – in East Arlington, there is insufficient parking. She lives near a congested, dangerous intersection and stated the town needs to plan around this.

Julia Mirak supports the articles, citing her family's contributions to in the town since the 1930s.

Chris Loreti stated the Master Plan contains a lot of contradictory items and lacks vision; Town Meeting is not leading the charge for these changes, which should not be made until a clear vision is established.

Marion King is concerned with the parking restrictions, especially for low-income households. People need cars.

The Chair moved to the next item, Article 21, bicycle parking. Erin Zwirko reviewed the goals and details of the amendment, and the Chair invited public comment.

Steve Revilak spoke in favor of the proposed increase in bicycle parking, and thanked the Board for certain technical specifications in the article.

John Worden stated the town needs some regulation as to where the dockless bikeshare bicycles are left, and hopes this might be addressed under bicycle parking.

Christian Klein stated the article is a great improvement over current regulations. He cited Stop & Shop as an example of unusable bike parking, because the rack is not fixed to the ground. He hopes this amendment will be able to address that kind of problem before it happens in the future.

The Chair invited comments from the Board.

Mr. Benson stated the bicycle parking article needs more work, though it is headed in the right direction. He stated some locations that should have bicycle parking are excluded; he also cited a contradictory passage. He would like the article to differentiate between residential and nonresidential parking requirements; and one space per dwelling unit makes no sense. He would prefer starting with more bicycle parking spaces, which can then be reduced as needed.

Mr. Lau requested that the article contain the square footage needed for a bicycle parking space. Mr. Watson replied that this information can exist outside of the bylaw or can be added to the ordinance. He stated putting too much detail in the bylaw would hamper flexibility in design across different facilities.

The Chair tabled the discussion until March 25. He closed the public comments and moved to the meeting minutes, which were tabled pending review.

The Chair requested a motion to adjourn; Mr. Lau so moved. Mr. Watson seconded; the Board voted in favor.

Meeting adjourned.