

Dear Steve:

Please find attached correspondence regarding the Town Clerk's proposal to reduce the number of pre-arrests in Arlington. I would be pleased to comment on this matter in the public participation section of the Select Board meeting if the opportunity arises.

Kind regards,

Charlie

Charlie Foscett

101 Brantwood Road

Arlington, MA 02476-8005

1.781.492.0800 (Mobile)

1.781.646.5882 (Home)

1.781.641.4769 (Fax)

Email: charlie.foscett@foskettco.com

Skype: cfoscett

CHARLES T. FOSKETT

September 12, 2020

Stephen w. DeCoursey, Chair
Arlington Select Board
Town Hall
Arlington, MA 02476

Re: Town Clerk's Proposal to Reduce the Number of Precincts in Arlington

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Select Board:

The current proposal by the Town Clerk to reduce the number of precincts from 21 to 16 is deeply troubling for a number of reasons.

1. This is a matter upon which the general electorate should have a say. I do not recall this being a matter brought up during the election for Town Clerk. It is therefore hard to conclude that there is a voter mandate behind this proposal.
2. The proposal to reduce the number of precincts to 16 from 21 represents a significant 24% decrease in the number of precincts and neighborhood representation in Town government.
3. While the proposal suggests that an increase in the number of Town Meeting members per precinct from 21 to 15 dilutes this to "only" a 5% impact, this radical change means that TM candidates and TTM's have to reach out to 31% more voters over a larger geographic area in a manner that can only serve to make voter-representative communications more cumbersome and complicated. I have been a Town meeting Member for 45 years, and I can attest that it is challenging to serve a constituency of current magnitude without increasing it by 31%.
4. In some discussions the Town Clerk intimated that there might be a financial savings, which I estimated to be about \$18,000 per year at best. This about 0.0095% on our annual expenditures. In subsequent discussions, I heard the Town Clerk imply that there would be no savings, but that personnel would be "repurposed". Repurpose for what was left unsaid.
5. Very troubling to me, as Chair of the Finance Committee, is the impact on the Finance Committee. By itself, the impact on the Finance Committee should not stand in the way of any reorganization that would be of significant benefit for the Town. Many Town

Boards and Committees, especially the Select Board and School Committee, make enormous contributions of time and effort to the Town. However, in light of the largely detrimental effects of this proposal (reduction of democratic representation for voters, increased burden on Town Meeting Members, lack of financial benefit) the proposal moves to wreak the havoc of a much larger workload on Finance Committee members who already put in a huge amount of effort with the support of only a part-time Executive Secretary. Please allow me to explain.

Finance Committee Members, each year, review (by line item) and report on 76 budget categories and numerous warrant articles for an annual Town Budget of \$180 million. To accomplish this the Committee meets twice per week from the end of January to the end of April (approximately 26 full Committee meetings) to review and determine the status of these items. The 76 budgets and various warrant articles are divided over the members in specific budget working groups. All of the members serve on working groups to become subject matter experts for individual Town and School department budgets in order to report their findings back to the full Committee. These working groups meet three to five times each, bringing the number of meetings to 30 or more for each member. In addition, the Committee meets each night of Town Meeting (usually four to six weeks long), for another 12 meetings, so that is about 42 meetings. If there is a fall Special Town Meeting, one could add another two to four meetings, getting up to 44 or 46 meetings. In addition, all the members put in time at home in preparation for many of the full Committee and working group meetings. Further still, many members participate as Finance Committee representatives on or liaisons to other groups such as the Capital Planning Committee, the Long-Range Planning Committee, ITAC, etc.

Reducing the number of precincts will reduce the number of Finance Committee members and increase their workload a third. It is already difficult to recruit citizens to join the Finance Committee, because despite the personal and emotional rewards of civic participation, the work is heavy and long. The Town Clerk's proposed precinct change will make the workload heavier and recruiting much more of a challenge. I fear that if this precinct change were to take place, the Committee would be pushed in the direction of seeking more professional paid support, which to me and most Committee members would be an anathema.

Our Representative Town Meeting system is a vibrant, exciting, and successful endeavor which has nurtured Arlington for almost 100 years. The current configuration has been operating for more than a half century, and is a resounding success led by a series of dedicated Town Moderators and guided by the policies of thoughtful Select Boards. It is not broken, so there is no need to fix it. I urge you to take no action on this proposal.

Respectfully,



Charles T. Foskett

TMM Precinct 8

Chair, Arlington Finance Committee

Cc: Arlington Select Board

From: Don Seltzer <timoneer@gmail.com>
To: Ashley Maher <amaher@town.arlington.ma.us>
Date: 09/13/2021 09:58 AM
Subject: Fwd: Critique of Precinct Boundary Options

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the Town of Arlington's email system. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the REAL sender (whose email address in the From: line in "< >" brackets) and you know the content is safe.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Don Seltzer <timoneer@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Sep 13, 2021 at 9:55 AM
Subject: Critique of Precinct Boundary Options
To: Marie Krepelka <mkrepelka@town.arlington.ma.us>,
<SDeCoursey@town.arlington.ma.us>, <DMahon@town.arlington.ma.us>,
<JHurd@town.arlington.ma.us>, Len Diggins <LDiggins@town.arlington.ma.us>, Eric
Helmuth <EHelmut@town.arlington.ma.us>

To: Arlington Select Board

Attached is my response to your request for public comment on the proposed changes to precinct boundaries. Among the key points of my comments are that inaccurate data was used to generate these maps, and that insufficient consideration was given to options that would minimize disruption of the Town Meeting Member election process.

Don Seltzer
Irving St

Critique of Precinct Boundary Options Presented to Residents

In response to the request for public input, I offer the following comments on the options offered.

Only two maps have been presented for the 21 precinct option. The State suggestion is based upon only population totals. The Town version is claimed to have been derived by applying 'equity' goals to achieve fairer boundaries. The equity factors attributed to this map include racial and ethnic distributions, age, ownership vs rentals, and household income.

This is an ambitious list, and it is difficult to comprehend how all of these equity factors can be achieved simultaneously. Moreover, it has not been explained to the public just what constitutes equity in precinct boundaries. Are we seeking to achieve an even balance of all of these factors throughout all of our precincts? Or are we attempting some sort of benevolent Gerrymandering to create specific precincts where certain minority groups or interests have greater influence? Has there been any identification of past boundary drawing processes where either bias or bad intent was involved?

To make an informed choice, the public needs to receive a clear explanation of just which special interests are actually protected by these two map options and how that protection is achieved. It would be useful to cite specific examples of neighborhoods where the new maps are fairer or more equitable than the current precinct lines.

The second point of concern arises from the several 'Equity Maps' that were included during the presentation. A close look at them suggests that they were drawn up with flawed data and do not accurately depict the demographics of Arlington.

My attention was first drawn to the map that is intended to show the distribution of racial minorities by Census Block Groups (Block Groups generally have about 1000

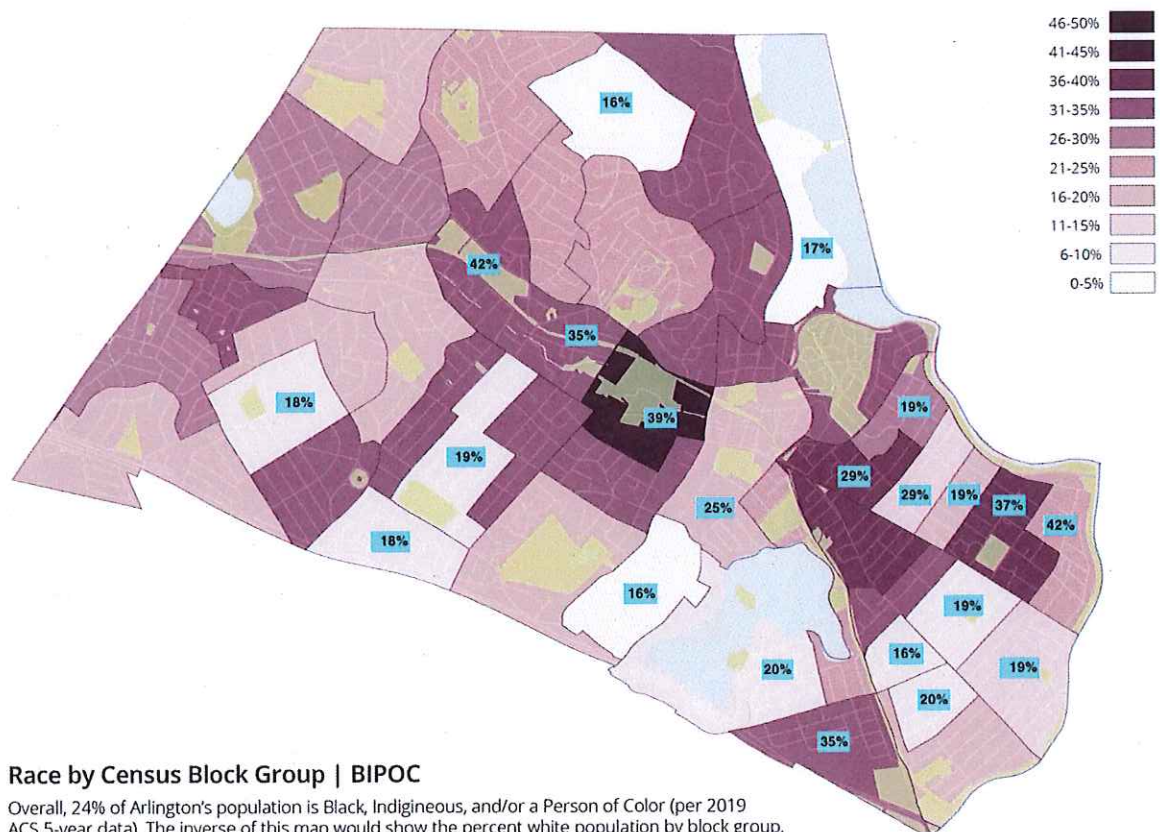
residents each. Arlington had 45 such BGs). Having been working with the August data release of the 2020 Census, I could see that this map was fundamentally incorrect. It claims that there are a dozen or so Block Groups with less than 10% minorities, including several of less than 5%. This is just wrong. The actual Census data shows that most of these BGs have about twice the minority population as indicated on the map. The range for Arlington runs from 15% to 42%.

The map also badly misrepresents the neighborhood of Menotomy Manor and the surrounding streets including Sunnyside and Silk. This BG has the highest minority population in town at 42%. Yet according to the map in the presentation, it is well down the list, behind a dozen or so other neighborhoods.

Something is very wrong with the data used. Presumably, this same data was used for achieving 'equitable' boundary lines, casting more doubt about that process.

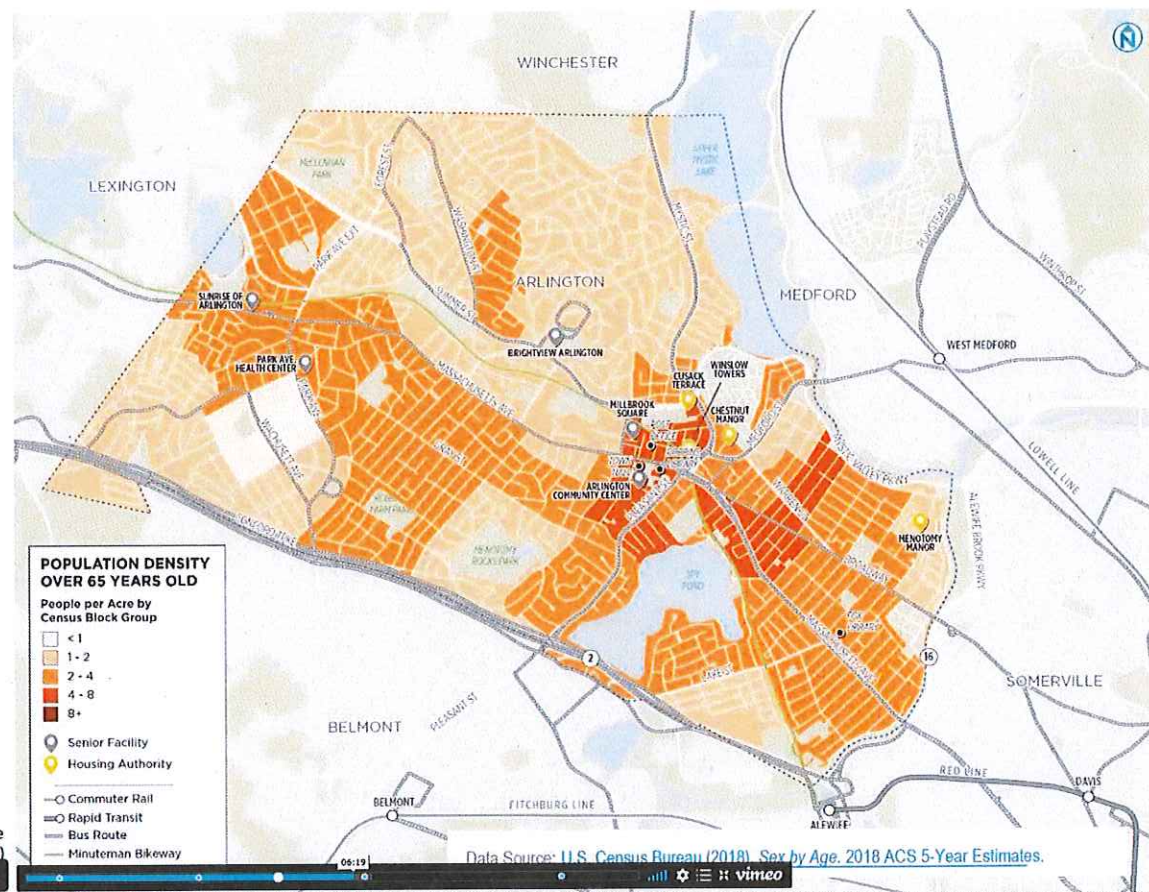
I have annotated this map with the actual Census data for about half the neighborhoods in town, representing the areas of greatest and least minority populations.

EQUITY MAPPING



Similar concerns arise when looking at the map for our Senior population. It is a particularly unusual one in that it displays Seniors per acre, a very odd metric. But it is immediately apparent that something is amiss when looking at the neighborhood around Chestnut Manor. That small triangular area is three acres, and it is well known that more than 100 seniors live in the housing there. The density is not 2-4 Seniors per acre, as indicated on the map, but an order of magnitude greater.

EQUITY MAPPING



Our Senior population in public housing is arguably the population group most affected by the actions of town government. Chestnut Manor is just three blocks away from Winslow Tower. They are currently located in the same precinct, where their combined numbers perhaps have some weight in electing Town Meeting Members. Yet both maps proposed by the Committee seek to split these apart, putting them into separate precincts, thereby diluting their voting power and representation.

The last objection to the choice of precinct options offered to the public is that none of them are realistic. Our precinct lines must be consistent with whatever the State legislature decides to do with the boundary between the 23rd and 24th Middlesex districts. None of the four map options even comply with the current district lines, and it is wishful thinking to expect that they will comply with what the legislature eventually comes up with.

What is conspicuously missing from the limited options presented is any attempt to achieve the least amount of disruption to our elected Town Meeting Members. Running for election is a major commitment of time and money. Just the mailing of a single postcard to every household in a precinct will cost hundreds of dollars for each candidate. Why has no effort gone into minimizing this disruption, instead of deciding that every TMM must run again? There are only five precincts that are out of balance, and there are multiple solutions for balancing that would affect only eight or nine precincts.

These minimally-disruptive options should be on the table for the public, and particularly Town Meeting Members, for consideration.

Don Seltzer