



Arlington Redevelopment Board

Urban Renewal Planning in Arlington/ Blighted Properties –
A Brief History, Plans, Possibilities

October 4, 2021

Urban Renewal Planning

ARB history, past and current plans, process

Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB)

First board in Massachusetts with combined Planning Board (c. 40 and 41) and Redevelopment Authority (c. 121B)

- ❑ Unique body of limited, but special jurisdiction. Formed by Home Rule petition. Authorities derived from Town Manager Act (in 1971) and Arlington's Zoning Bylaw (in 1973, 75)
 - ❑ Town Meeting approval required for the ARB to move forward with any urban renewal project or rehabilitation project, to acquire real property by eminent domain or otherwise, to borrow or agree to borrow money.
- ❑ The board reviews applications for certain projects to ensure that specific zoning criterion are met under Environmental Design Review Special Permits.

About Urban Renewal

“A strategy for redeveloping and revitalizing substandard, decadent and blighted open areas for residential, commercial, industrial, business, governmental, recreational, educational, hospital or other uses. Under M.G.L. Chapter 121B, urban renewal agencies are authorized to take a range of actions to address disinvested and underutilized neighborhoods and substandard, decadent and blighted conditions in order to create the environment needed to promote sound growth and attract and support private investment in designated urban renewal areas.”

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/urban-renewal-ur>

Creation of ARB and Arlington Urban Renewal project history

Redevelopment authorities can buy, sell, and hold property to undertake urban renewal. In Arlington, Town Meeting action is required to undertake these activities.

- The Arlington Center Conservation and Improvement Project was the first Urban Renewal Plan
 - Revamped Arlington Center
 - Gave ARB authority to manage and lease three buildings: the former Central School at 20 Academy Street/ 27 Maple Street, 23 Maple Street, and the Jefferson Cutter House at 611 Massachusetts Avenue

Arlington Urban Renewal History

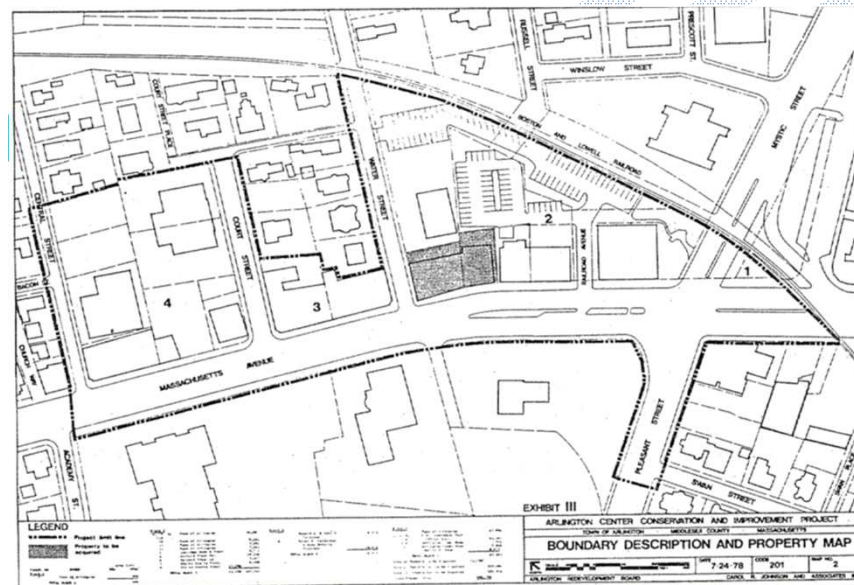
The Arlington Center Conservation and Improvement Project
(1978-1984)

- 1978: 9.4 acres designated urban renewal project and funding plan approved and established under MGL c121B, based on Mill Brook Valley/Arlington Center Comprehensive Plan
- 1979: Draft URP and maps approved by Town Meeting
- 1980/ 81: Budget approved under MGL c 121 B, ss 56 + 57

Arlington Urban Renewal project history

The Arlington Center Conservation and Improvement Project (1978-1984)

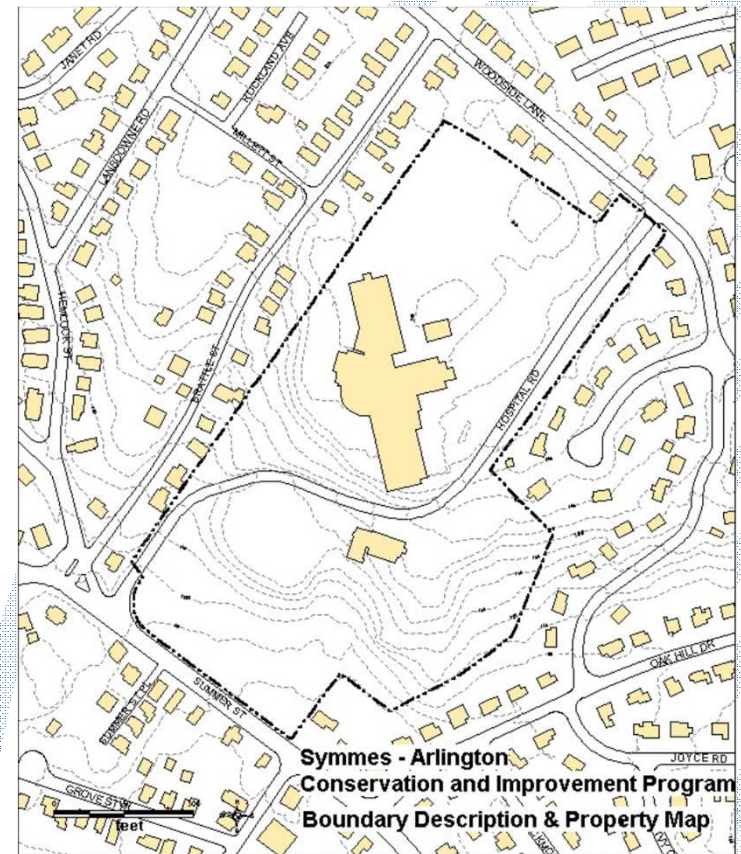
- 1982 – Plan amended to include and transfer Central School to ARB, amended zoning to allow conversion to public and private spaces (Uses were to be offices for social service agencies, Town offices, Senior Center), and 23 Maple St.
- Commercial Area Revitalization District Plan for Arlington Center effective '86-'88
- Urban Renewal Plan expired in 2011



Arlington Urban Renewal project history

The Symmes, Arlington, Conservation and Improvement Project approved to redevelop the former Symmes Hospital Property. It is now home to Arlington 360 and Brightview

- Approved January 2002, amended May 2003
- Land Disposition Agreement accepted 2004-5
- Plan expires in January 2022



Urban Renewal eligible activities

- Prepare and implement Urban Renewal Plans
- Carry out planning studies
- Establish rehabilitation and design standards
- Acquire real estate, including acquisition by eminent domain*
- Demolish and/or rehabilitate structures
- Undertake site preparation and environmental remediation
- Assemble and dispose of land for private development*
- Relocate displaced businesses and residents
- Issue bonds and borrow money
- Receive grants and loans

* Arlington Town Meeting approval required

Criteria for Urban Renewal Approval

MA Department of Housing and Community Development approves Urban Renewal Plans based upon the following determinations:

- Without public action the project/site would not be developed
- Project will promote desired private investment
- Plan for financing the project is sound
- Project area is a substandard, decadent, and/or blighted open area
- Urban Renewal Plan submission is complete
- Urban Renewal Plan includes a Relocation Plan (c. 79A), as appropriate.

Urban Renewal Plan components

- Project Area - proposed boundaries
- Description of Conditions – conditions must align with urban renewal conditions and describe proposed redevelopment activities, including any public actions to address conditions
- Project Objectives and Anticipated Impacts of Proposed Redevelopment Activities – on immediate area and community (including job creation and/or retention, business expansion, housing development, traffic and infrastructure improvements and a description of the resulting public benefits)
- Proposed Relocation for displaced persons/businesses

Urban Renewal Plan components

- Proposed Public Improvements to accomplish objectives and potential project impediments and how they will be addressed
- Parcel Description, including property owners, current zoning, land use, and proposed zoning amendments
- Financial Plan: Funding Sources and Uses
- Project Implementation Timeline
- Citizen Participation
- Municipal Approvals: c. 121B, section 48, including Town Meeting
- Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act review and approval (status must be noted)

Blighted Properties

Potential strategies, funding sources/ options

Blighted Properties

Successful revitalization planning processes include:

- Strong leadership that engages diverse constituencies
- Articulates a clear and compelling vision
- Recognizes and finds a way to capitalize on assets
- Assembles resources to strengthen commercial areas/ neighborhoods
- Apply a range of tools and policies to promote assets and revitalization needs, including zoning amendments, overlay districts, incentives/ bonuses, tax abatements

Blighted Properties

Funding options depend upon specific development scenarios, some possible funding sources include:

- Arlington Community Development Block Grant Program (economic development/ historic preservation) and Community Preservation Act (historic preservation)
- MassDevelopment Underutilized Properties Program (FY22 only)
- Mass Historical Commission Preservation Projects Fund (historic preservation)
- Other sources contingent upon proposed uses, for example housing trust funds, environmental remediation, tax credit programs, and other state sources

Arlington Affordable Housing Trust Fund

Per G.L. c.44, §55C*, the Trust may:

- accept and receive real property
- purchase and retain real or personal property
- sell, lease, exchange, transfer or convey any personal, mixed, or real property at public auction or by private contract
- manage or improve real property
- hold all or part of the Trust property uninvested for such purposes and for such time as the Trustees may deem appropriate

*This list is abbreviated to focus on real property development

ARB legal references

Arlington Town Manager Act, Article 17

www.arlingtonma.gov/Public_Documents/ArlingtonMA_TownMgr/townmanageract

Redevelopment authority, urban renewal

www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVII/Chapter121B

Planning board authority, responsibility, MGL Chapter 41 Sections 81A, B, C, D

www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleVII/Chapter41/Section81A

Master planning authority, responsibility

www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleVII/Chapter41/Section81D

Special Permits and Environmental Design Review

<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/43413/637533162693430000>

Zoning, Special Permits, MGL Chapter 40A, especially sections 5, 9, 11, 15

www.malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleVII/Chapter40A

Urban Renewal Planning 121B, Section 48 and DHCD Regulations

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVII/Chapter121B/Section48>

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/05/23/760cmr12.pdf>