

Arlington Redevelopment Board
Monday, December 16, 2021, 7:30 PM
Meeting Conducted Remotely via Zoom
Meeting Minutes

This meeting was recorded by ACMi.

PRESENT: Rachel Zsembery (Chair), Eugene Benson, Kin Lau, Melisa Tintocalis, Steve Revilak

STAFF: Jennifer Raitt, Director of Planning and Community Development and Kelly Lynema, Assistant Director

The Chair called the meeting to order and notified all attending that the meeting is being recorded by ACMi.

The Chair explained that this meeting is being held remotely in accordance with the Governor's March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c. 30A, Section 20. This order from Governor Baker allows for meetings to be held remotely during this time to avoid public gatherings.

The Chair introduced the first agenda item, Draft Housing Plan discussion and vote. Ms. Raitt explained that as with the current Housing Production Plan, the Board and Select Board would need to adopt this plan prior to submission and approval by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Ms. Raitt said the Department partnered with Barret Planning Group and Horsley Witten Group to conduct robust community outreach to update the existing plan. The Department has been receiving ideas and feedback from members of the public. Judy Barrett, President of Barrett Planning Group, presented the Housing Plan to the Board.

Ms. Barrett explained that there is a team working on the draft Housing Plan including Horsley Witten Group, which provides data regarding environmental constraints. Ms. Barrett said the plan was intended to identify problems, create goals to respond to the identified problems, and strategies for implementation. Ms. Barrett reviewed the three key Housing Plan components: Housing Needs Assessment (demographics, housing stock, development constraints and plans to mitigate, infrastructure capacity), Housing Goals (mix of housing types, housing production goals), and Implementation Strategies (proposed zoning or policy changes, site identification for housing, desired characteristics of development, and regional partnerships). The plan must qualify for approval by the DHCD, be realistic in Arlington's market area, must help address the needs of affordable housing, be equitable across all income levels, and discourage concentrations of affordable housing in on area. The process included a community engagement plan, interviews and focus groups, community outreach, and community forums to elicit community input in order to create needs assessments and develop goals.

Ms. Barrett said in order to understand the dimensions and causes of the problems her team must understand what has contributed to the problem and what can be done to overcome those barriers. As determined by the Needs Assessment the problems identified were: a shortage of affordable homes, impediments to housing choice, and limited capacity. Shortage of affordable homes: Arlington has a significant shortage of safe, decent, affordable homes, especially for extremely low and very low-income renters. Arlington has few or no viable options for first-time homebuyers that they can afford to buy, many older households in Arlington are housing cost burdened. Arlington does not have the regulatory or financial tools needed to reverse these conditions. Ms. Barrett gave an overview of rent for moderate and low income and the much higher prevailing rent prices in Arlington.

The proposed housing goals include: increase rental and homeownership housing options for extremely-low to middle-income households, create maintain and preserve permanent supportive housing that is affordable, accessible, and available to people with disabilities, preserve and improve Arlington's existing supply of affordable homes to provide healthy, safe, and stable living environments. Strategies to address affordability goals include: Arlington Affordable Housing Trust Fund, enhanced homebuyer assistance, low or no-interest loans or grants for purchase price write-downs or write

down affordable rents to very low affordability, Arlington Housing Authority housing choice vouchers for homeownership, capital grants for AHA, ARPA, CPA, DHCD preservation/modernization, short-term rental tax, CPA funds to acquire and support development of group homes for people with disabilities, provide architectural barrier removal grants for property owners to address disability access, work with organizations like CASCAP, Inc. to develop and manage supportive housing for people in recovery, general obligation bonds as funding source, provide financial support for multifamily development.

Impediments to housing choice include: existing inventory of affordable housing in Arlington tends to be concentrated in areas once described as “definitely declining” areas near town’s borders with Somerville, Medford, Lexington, and Mass. Ave., housing choices for lower-income buyers or renters are rare in Arlington’s single-family neighborhoods, Arlington’s existing zoning all but freezes in place the inequitable residential land use pattern that existed 50+ years ago, leadership for equity and affordable housing are not broadly recognized or well received, housing insecurity disproportionately affects people of color, older people and those living on low incomes, in the fair housing action plan from 2010-2019 - disability status was the most commonly reported basis for discrimination, high-quality, stable housing is central to the health and wellbeing of families with children. It helps foster relationships and opportunities in communities, limits chronic stress, and reduces food insecurity. Housing prices are out of sync with wage levels paid by local employers (including the Town). Arlington’s housing prices are no longer affordable to families with modest incomes. As the town becomes more affluent, housing choice declines. Arlington has not yet used tools like Chapter 40R or updated its zoning to deal with market reality and use the market as leverage to create affordable housing.

Fair housing goals of the plan are to: provide equitable access to affordable homeownership and rental homes suitable for a variety of household types, including senior households and families with children. Intergrade affordable homes in all neighborhoods through reuse of existing structures and redevelopment of underutilized properties, particularly within walking distance of schools, public parks, services, amenities, and transit. Review and update Arlington’s zoning and other housing policies to encourage development that increases affordable housing and fair housing choice. Improve development opportunities along major corridors to include a greater mix of housing options, make equitable access to shared green spaces and a healthy living environment a priority for siting affordable homes.

Strategies to address fair housing goals: Conduct a racial impact study to evaluate whether current rules disproportionately affect **Black individuals and individuals of color**. Expand SHI information to include details about number of bedrooms, disability access, age restrictions, age and condition of units to support targeted program/subsidy design. Make two-family dwellings an allowed use as of right in all residential neighborhoods. Change the Zoning Map to consolidate districts and create realistic options for parcel assembly along the major corridors in town. Designate areas for “missing middle” housing (including 3, 4, and 6 unit housing) interspersed with commercial centers. Remove regulatory barriers to multifamily development. Develop zoning for multifamily housing near existing and planned T stations. Arlington’s minimum multifamily development capacity under the “Housing Choice Bill” is 5,115 units. Adopt 100% affordable housing overlay (similar to Cambridge) along designated streets in lower-density areas and in nodes near Mass. Ave and Broadway. Partner with non-profit, faith-based, and for profit developers to site eligible developments in 100% affordable housing overlay. Establish reserve account for Affordable Housing Trust to acquire existing single-family homes and redevelop them as two-family dwellings with affordable unit, or make those funds available to the Housing Corporation of Arlington to do those kinds of activities. Preserve existing parks and conservation land throughout town, especially in areas with existing concentrations of lower-income and minority households, and ensure long-term access to recreation facilities. Conservation land and designated open spaces will not be candidates for affordable housing development but everyone should have access to the green space. Where limited opportunities exist for on-site green space, require new/better sidewalks, bike paths, or trails to access the nearest park or open space. Audit current parking requirements and parking design standards,

often these standards are a hidden impediment affordable housing development. Increase use of green infrastructure to minimize storm water runoff, reduce flooding, and heat island effect.

The advocacy for affordable housing development is fragmented and not well organized in Arlington. There is considerable misinformation about housing affordability, housing development, market conditions, and local government's responsibility for housing affordability and housing justice. There does not appear to be a consistent generally understood and respected policy framework for increasing the supply of affordable housing. Increase capacity to produce housing through leadership development, advocacy, staffing funding, and relationships with nonprofit and for-profit developers. Build awareness of affordable and fair housing needs within Arlington and the larger region, as well as Arlington's role in addressing broader inequities in the Boston area. Build relationships with and encourage more non-profit housing organizations and CDCs to build in Arlington to have more capacity in the community. Establish a Community Land Trust to take the value of land out of the economic equation, Martha's Vineyard's Land Trust is a good example. Work with CEDAC and LISC to identify potentially interested CDCs. Sponsor roundtable for non-profit/CDC/for profit developers and subsidizing agencies to provide public education about the cost of developing and managing affordable housing. Support advocacy and tenant organizing efforts in AHA, HCA, and other affordable housing developments. Appoint affordable housing advocates to Town Boards and Commissions. Strengthen public education through Town website, and other online resources. Schedule periodic, predictable community conversation meetings with the Arlington Redevelopment Board, Housing Plan Implementation Committee, Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and Select Board to set and annual housing implementation agenda consistent with the Housing Plan. People need to get together and get on the same page. Ms. Barrett said that unlike other Commissions where people are appointed to Commissions because they support the Commission's efforts, Ms. Barrett said she has worked in towns where people have been appointed to Affordable Housing Commissions because they oppose Affordable Housing. To build a knowledgeable and persuasive conversation as a community about housing needs, responsibility of local government, fair housing, and racial justice you need to think carefully about how a Housing Committee is populated and how to make serving on a Housing Committee competitive and high visibility positions. Encourage people to speak at town meetings to speak about affordable housing. Strengthen public education about affordable and equitable housing in Arlington. Help people make the connection that real people have these needs. That people working in the community in the workforce that can't afford to live in the community where they work. Engage Town elected officials to confront and address disinformation.

The next steps for the Housing Production Plan are a Presentation to the Select Board in early January (date to be confirmed) and a target date of February 2022 for submission to the Department of Housing and Community Development. The Chair asked Ms. Lynema to review any questions submitted by the Board. Ms. Lynema said that there was a question about the inclusionary zoning bylaw and how that can be addressed by the plan. Ms. Barrett said that the inclusionary zoning bylaw was not addressed specifically because Ms. Barrett's team wanted to review efforts that in the team's experience are known to have been successful in the past. Ms. Lynema said there was also a question about the "missing middle" housing with the recommendation about two family homes and what that does in terms of affordability. Ms. Barrett said unless a development is 100% subsidized development have to use the market to create affordability and have to have enough units to offset the cost. That would yield a few affordable units here and there and create more choice. That could create 6-8 units with a few affordable units or moderate income units that pay towards the Housing Trust and use those resources to create deeply affordable units.

Ms. Lynema said the Board asked Ms. Barrett to elaborate on what the 100% affordable housing overlay really means, and if there have been options in other communities of less than 100%. Ms. Barrett said absent subsidy you will not get affordable units at 30%, some of this is about housing choices and some is it is about affordability, they are both issues. Ms.

Barrett said that you do not need to create an overlay if you spread out enough. Do something through the regulatory system to streamline the process for developers presenting plans for 100% affordable housing. Ms. Lynema said there was a question about the new Accessory Dwelling Units bylaw and if any ADUs had been built since the bylaw adoption. Ms. Lynema said that there have not been any ADUs built as of this time. Ms. Lynema said there were questions about the suggestions for industrial zones. Ms. Barrett suggested monitoring the housing created due to the zoning changes in industrial zones, if it does not do as much as hoped to affect change then change the zoning.

Ms. Tintocalis asked Ms. Barrett to explain the difference between 40R and 40B. Ms. Barrett said that 40R was an effort by the State that is a type of zoning a town can adopt as an overlay district with higher density zoning limits. Ms. Barrett said that this allows developers to use 40R as an alternative to Chapter 40B. 40R is an as of right system, so there is no Special Permit and it makes it harder to file an appeal. Ms. Tintocalis asked if the Town has identified any locations for 40R. Ms. Raitt said that staff has identified some possibilities, included in the current Housing Production Plan, but it has not pursued any further. Ms. Tintocalis asked if there is a way to compare Arlington to other communities to know how Arlington is doing. To understand the employment piece and review the commuting factor to acknowledge that that is a factor of the regional housing issues. Ms. Barrett said while working on Hingham's Master Plan Ms. Barrett compared the 2001 commuting data with the data from 2021 and found way more people are coming into Hingham to work now. People who work there cannot afford to live there and the town's residents/labor force is now commuting into Boston, where the higher end jobs are. Lack of housing the labor force can afford leads to issues with traffic congestion since people have to come into the community to work. Ms. Barrett said we have to think about what type of environment is being created to live and work in the town.

Mr. Lau said that private development does not cluster housing and leads to a more diverse community but asked about the 100% affordable housing overlay. Ms. Barrett said that the overlay is a policy choice and mixed-income is a good approach for housing. Ms. Barrett said Chapter 40R is a mixed-income approach that gives developers the option to make building affordable housing work.

Mr. Benson said his comment about the industrial zones portion of the report lacks the appropriate nuance and other options given in the report are labeled as strategies instead of options. Mr. Benson said that exclusionary zoning still needs to be part of the strategy and he is concerned that exclusionary zoning is not included with the plan. Mr. Benson said he does not understand how one and two-family zoning gets us more affordable or "missing middle" housing. Ms. Barrett said that not everything in the plan is about affordable housing; the plan also includes options for more choice. Mr. Benson said he felt that the zoning changes to improve housing choice and for "missing middle" housing was missing from the report. Mr. Benson said that he found it interesting that in the comparable communities Arlington had the third lowest percentage of single family homes and the third highest percentage of two-family, so these suggestions look to move Arlington further to one end of range. Mr. Benson would like the plan to match the Board's direction regarding FAR updates.

Mr. Revilak stated that he had not considered equitable access to green space in the context of housing production so he thanked Ms. Barrett for including those requirements. Mr. Revilak said he realized there is a mismatch regarding wages and housing costs in Arlington. Mr. Revilak asked if affordable housing in areas formerly defined as "definitely declining" areas and if that refers to the "yellow districts" on the home owners loan corporations old maps. Ms. Barrett confirmed that was correct and it is interesting to look at those old maps and compare how the zoning lays today. Mr. Revilak said that it is a legacy of red lining lives on today. Mr. Revilak asked for more information regarding the racial impact studies. Ms. Barrett said it is a way of looking at who may be harmed or benefit by zoning or policy changes and to what extent would race be a factor. The Chair opened the meeting to public comment.

JoAnne Preston said she is on the Board of the Arlington Housing Authority, and said she would like to suggest that the report give a more complete description of the long-term contributions of the AHA towards affordable housing and diversity in the town of Arlington. Ms. Preston said that the AHA is an organization that offers the largest number of low-income housing. The AHA's average rent was \$480.00 per month last year. The current AHA housing locations do not have surplus land for large-scale building projects and would be contrary to the health and well-being of the residents. Ms. Preston said that studies have found that large buildings are unsuitable for family public housing and seniors need outdoor space. Tearing down housing for large-scale building projects would have great social and emotional impacts on the residents. Ms. Preston also wanted to share the upcoming plans for AHA that she would like to share with Ms. Barrett.

Jonathan Nyberg thanked Ms. Barrett for the report and said it shows the truth about our community, what type of town Arlington has evolved to, and what some of the issues are. Mr. Nyberg said that one of the issues in Arlington is that we think left but do not live left, we want to be all inclusive and all affordable but the reality is that this is an expensive community. If we want to progress in the future we have to accept the current realities. Arlington has a lot of land that we do not want to share. We don't provide options in Arlington between 40R and 40B to create affordable housing; we should use developers as a stream for affordable housing. For most towns change is scary. More people under 30 should be involved in this conversation because they are the future of Arlington. With fewer options Arlington becomes more expensive and exclusive; we should not miss this window of opportunity to make changes.

Patricia Worden said she is the longest serving member of the Housing Plan Implementation Committee. Ms. Worden said that this plan has not been approved by the Housing Plan Implementation Committee to be sent to the Board or the Select Board. Ms. Worden said she hoped that this plan would be a beneficial blueprint for the town's affordable housing but this is a blueprint to attract developers to maximize their profits and build as few affordable housing units as possible, subsidizing 40b projects, and reducing the town's diversity. Much of the plan shows a way to build no housing to those who need it the most and it is an attack on our Town Bylaws and seeks to displace many families in favor of higher income residents. Ms. Worden asked the Board to improve this plan and avoid the three ways the plan is designed to achieve massive density increase using false promises of affordability: the recommendation for creating many 40b projects, multiple changes in zoning bylaw to enable cramming more expensive residences throughout town, and disregard for the Arlington Housing Authority. The plan is full of unsubstantiated claims and errors, lacks necessary studies, lacks competent cost benefit analysis, what is recommended recycles failed and unworthy initiatives from the past, and some very dangerous concepts including introduction of multi-family structures in single family zones.

Jordan Weinstein asked if someone could explain what the MBTA Communities is and what that would be required of the Town. Mr. Weinstein said that renting and buying affordable units is very different. If the focus is on ownership then affordability would be much harder to achieve. Ms. Raitt said that the MBTA Communities is part of the zoning 40a, the draft details were just released and MBTA Communities are still learning about the regulations. Ms. Raitt said that she feels that it will not just include the Alewife Station area but also the Arlington Heights Bus Depot and that as information is released there will be outreach to residents to discuss how to create compliant zoning. The Town can use the Affordable Housing Trust fund to leverage grant opportunities from the state to assist Affordable housing purchases in Arlington. There is a lack of homeownership particularly for people of color and low-income opportunities.

Don Seltzer said the state guidelines for housing production plans should accommodate future growth and the analysis should include the impact of future housing development. This is not included with this plan and is not acceptable. The report does not include school growth or changing demographics due to new housing. Arlington's population is growing faster than predicted. The plan attacks the existing affordable housing units in favor of tear downs and development of

expensive condos.

Jennifer Susse said that the residents she speaks with are sad because Arlington is becoming less diverse due to lack of Affordable housing. Ms. Susse said it is important to know how the current zoning is creating these issues. Ms. Susse would like to see more housing diversity by right. Building up in the corridors makes sense with changes to height requirements. Cambridge allows double the zoning if the units are 100% affordable, Arlington should think about other possibilities. Ms. Bennett said Cambridge allows, in the overlay district, double the FAR and height.

Rebecca Peterson said that she is not in favor for increasing the density in town. Multifamily homes are not more affordable in town. One of the Arlington's draws is the suburban feel and there is a lot of demand for single family homes. Ms. Peterson asked not to abolish single family zoning.

Wynelle Evans said that there are so many worthy goals in this plan. Ms. Evans said that those who disagree with the aspects of redevelopment are described as fearful but concerns about costs of increasing infrastructure should be addressed in future discussions. Ms. Evans said that Arlington is spending substantially beyond its means. Lower income residents will be forced out of town. When existing single family homes are demolished to build a two family the cost of each new unit is more expensive than the original single family structure. Allowing open space regulations to include balconies and roof gardens is privatizing open space. We are sacrificing our tree canopy to development. We need to look at the cost to our community for increased growth.

Kristin Anderson said it is nice to see the focus on the shortage of affordable homes for low-income and extremely-low income people. Cambridge is able to have the 100% affordable housing overlay because they have a healthy commercial tax base to subsidize housing. The benefits to live and work in the same town are immense and it is a better way to live. Arlington needs more businesses and jobs.

Elizabeth Dray asked if the zoning changes to support two-family homes also support affordable housing and what would Ms. Bennett like to see leadership do in order to hit goals. Ms. Bennett said that two-family homes provide choice not necessarily affordability. Ms. Bennett said that the Select Board and the Redevelopment Board can begin to change the messaging about housing. Both Boards should include goals to implement aspects of the housing plan with their annual goal setting. The Boards should make the case why this public service is important and make sure those who oppose affordable housing not making decisions about the plan.

Robert Radochia asked Ms. Bennett how she defines underutilized property. Ms. Bennett said she defines underutilized properties as a partial vacancy, not appreciating in value, might be put to more valuable use and therefore a more valuable tax use.

Karen Kelleher said affordable housing is a math problem that does not work, it must be subsidized and the town of Arlington has limited resources for raising revenue. The Town could use the local subsidy to attract the things that qualify for federal and state subsidy and that will get affordable housing. Or the use the market and cross subsidize using 40b to build with no cost to the town. Ms. Bennett said that the Community Preservation Association should provide funding through the tax levy for affordable housing development. Ms. Kelleher asked to think about using inclusionary zoning to produce income for the housing trust and use those funds to create deep affordability.

John Worden said that this plan would destroy the town of Arlington as we know it and would not be affordable. Mr. Worden said that this plan should be amended.

Mr. Lau said that CPA has been funding affordable housing every year but funding is limited by law. Mr. Lau said he would like to make a few more changes to the plan before approving. Mr. Lau said he would like to modify the suggested overlay district to avoid clustered affordable housing. The Chair said that the Board will be able to make changes to the plan in the future. Mr. Benson said that once the plan is adopted it will take a life of its own and Mr. Benson would like to have a more nuanced plan. Ms. Tintocalis said the plan is sound and well thought out and that she would like to prioritize the strategies. Mr. Revilak asked Ms. Barrett about Cambridge's 100% affordable housing overlay income restriction levels and suggested that Arlington use a more general term like general affordable housing overlay. Mr. Revilak would like to see some refinement done to the plan and would like to see another draft before voting. Ms. Barrett said she will have an updated version of the plan to Ms. Raitt by January 5, 2022 and will use her professional judgement regarding which comments and suggestions are included with the update. The Chair said that the Board will review the updated draft and discuss during the January 24, 2022 meeting. Ms. Barrett said that the town qualifies for a safe harbor rating if it meets what is considered the regional fair share of creating/providing affordable housing in the region which allows the town to manage affordable housing production.

Mr. Lau moved to adjourn, Ms. Tintocalis seconded, approved 5-0.
Meeting adjourned.