



Clean Energy Future Committee (CEFC)

MEMORANDUM

To: Rachel Zsembery, Chair, Arlington Redevelopment Board
Cc: Claire Ricker, Director, Planning and Community Development
Talia Fox, Sustainability Manager, Planning and Community Development
Sanjay Newton, Chair, MBTA Communities Working Group
From: Ryan Katofsky, Chair, Clean Energy Future Committee
Date: September 1, 2023
RE: Clean Energy Future Committee Letter on MBTA Communities Zoning

The Arlington Clean Energy Future Committee (CEFC) voices its strong support for the Arlington Redevelopment Board's (ARB's) finalizing of a proposed local zoning amendment that aligns with both the requirements and the spirit of the MBTA Communities law, or Section 3A. Passage of such a zoning amendment will help Arlington meet state requirements for multi-family zoning while also advancing our community's goals around sustainability.

Specifically, the CEFC wishes to express to the community the urgency of passing an MBTA Communities-compliant zoning amendment this fall. Passage of the MBTA Communities zoning amendment at this fall's Special Town Meeting is the only viable pathway for Arlington to participate in the State's Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Program (Demonstration Program), which would allow implementation of the Clean Heat bylaw and home rule petition passed overwhelmingly by Arlington Town Meeting in 2020. Participation in the Demonstration Program will allow the Town to prohibit the installation of natural gas, oil, propane, and other fossil fuel infrastructure in new buildings and major renovations. **Town Meeting sent a clear message in 2020 that enacting the Fossil Fuel Bylaw was a priority, and we—the CEFC, Town administrators, and elected and appointed bodies—have an obligation to act upon that priority;** passage of the MBTA Communities zoning amendment is an essential step to carrying out the will of Town Meeting.

Participating in the Demonstration Program is also an important step beyond the recently adopted Specialized Stretch Energy Code, which was approved overwhelmingly by Town Meeting earlier this year. While the Specialized Stretch Energy Code disincentivizes the use of fossil fuels in new construction, **the Specialized Stretch Energy Code does not prohibit the use of fossil fuels,** and crucially it also **does not apply to major renovations,** which are more common in a built-up community like Arlington. Ultimately, it is only the combination of these two policies—the Specialized Stretch Energy Code and the Demonstration Program—that puts Arlington on a firm path to phasing out the use of fossil fuels in buildings.



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Furthermore, it is critical that Arlington be one of the ten communities to participate in the Demonstration Program. The goal of this Demonstration Program is first to pilot, then to scale, approaches to the challenging and crucial transition to a fossil fuel free future. Arlington has not only a responsibility but also a unique capability to meet this challenge. Arlington has long been a leader when it comes to climate action; in fact, we are first on the list of the ten Prioritized Communities in the regulations for the Demonstration Program, precisely because we were the first community in the state to submit a home rule petition to the legislature requesting local authority to ban fossil fuels. Arlington was also one of the first communities in the state to set ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets. Builders in Arlington are already becoming accustomed to constructing efficient, all-electric homes, including affordable housing. **Thus, the Town is well-positioned to develop and share learnings from the Fossil Fuel Free Demonstration Program, ensuring widespread success in the pursuit of state and regional climate change mitigation goals.** It is also worth noting that there is currently no ability to enter the program later; if we do not qualify to participate now, it may be several years before we could join an expanded Demonstration Program or what may follow it. The time is now.

Importantly, we also support passage of an MBTA Communities zoning amendment because it offers other significant environmental benefits. In fact, **the introduction of denser, transit-oriented housing is an explicit priority in the Town's Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP).** Denser development is generally more energy efficient and encourages lifestyles with lower carbon footprints. Allowing for increased density near public transit will enable more residents to commute sustainably and reduce vehicle miles traveled. Walkable neighborhoods close to retail shops and services reduce automobile dependence. Furthermore, increasing our housing stock close to Boston addresses regional needs for more infill development rather than greenfield development which threatens natural habitats and farmland. Enabling sustainable and transportation-centric density that is fossil fuel free will be a significant step towards reaching the Town's and the region's net zero goals. Finally, if we do not pass an MBTA Communities zoning amendment, the State has made clear that the Town risks the loss of important funding sources, including Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Planning and Project Grants, which continue to provide the Town with funds for critical climate mitigation and resilience initiatives that get us closer to our goals.

For these reasons, the CEFC strongly supports the objectives of the MBTA Communities law and the Town's passage of an MBTA Communities-compliant district, this fall. We appreciate the thoughtful effort on the part of the MBTA Communities Working Group to develop these recommendations, and we look forward to reviewing the final proposal the ARB submits to Town Meeting.

Sincerely,

Members of the Arlington Clean Energy Future Committee