

September 10, 2023

TO: Arlington Redevelopment Board, Department of Planning & Community Development, MBTA Communities Working Group, Select Board and Town Manager

FROM: Deb & Peter Bermudes  
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We are writing regarding the proposed MBTA Communities Overlay District which is being presented to the Arlington Redevelopment Board on Sept. 11, 2023 at Town Hall.

We are NOT in favor of the current proposals presented by the Working Group. Please know that we are pro-housing and pro-affordability, and are not “afraid” of change; however, there remain far too many unanswered questions for us to support the proposal presented by the working group at this time, no matter how well intentioned.

### **2046?**

Why has there been no proposal showing a density plan that meets the expectations of the law for 2046 units? This would allow us to be in compliance with the law AND able to take advantage of state incentives while not making huge broadstroke zoning changes that can't easily be walked back. It might even get passed by town meeting.

- Our opposition has nothing to do with not wanting increased housing, or not having density “in our backyard.” It has to do with not wanting to rush through an excessive plan without considering the significant impact on various aspects of the town. To our knowledge, there have been no studies looking at the effect of this plan on schools, finances, unit/rental costs, liveability, pollution, congestion, or taxes.
  
- When this question has been brought up in previous meetings, the Working Group pointed out that it won't be built all at once, that we are just talking about “potential capacity.” If we are simply talking about providing ‘opportunity’ for more development, and there is no guarantee that housing will be built or be built with actual affordable options, then what is the harm in submitting a plan that would meet, and not exceed, the MBTA Communities requirement at this time? Let's see if THAT amount even gets built, and its impact on town services before expanding those numbers threefold.

- **We as a town can adjust zoning further, outside of the purview of this MBTA Communities act, after giving due diligence to the potential impacts on town services and we need not be afraid of a more moderate approach.**

### **Impact on Current Residents**

To our knowledge, there have been no studies looking at the demographics of people currently living in the areas on the proposed map, including income level, household size, owner occupancy, etc. Would people with similar income be able to afford to rent or purchase a newly built unit in the same area, or are we just looking to bring in new folks with higher incomes? **How many people would be potentially displaced by this process?**

### **Details: heights, setbacks, solar, oh my!**

We have serious concerns about changing the story height from 10 feet to 13 feet and allowing for 4 story buildings in neighborhoods abutting Mass Ave and Broadway, that are currently max'd at 2.5 stories.

In addition, the impact of shading on properties with solar panels needs to be **seriously considered and mitigated** if we are truly concerned about getting off fossil fuels and moving toward our net zero goals as a community. Neighboring properties that generate their own power, and likely push excess energy into the grid, should be protected from overshadowing from possible 46-78 foot tall buildings! **We encourage the ARB to work for the neighbors and residents of Arlington to ensure that the height and massing of buildings in the density zone do not dominate and tower over our streets, homes and businesses, and further that the ARB place clear limitations on the height of buildings that would shade existing or potential solar arrays.**

Allowing for 0 foot setback on Mass. Ave & Broadway is concerning. How does this support accessibility standards or safety? Will folks be able to pass safely if a door is opened onto the sidewalk? How will this affect those with mobility challenges? Where will snow from the sidewalk be removed to? What about open space & trees?

### **Proposed Modifications to Current Zoning Bylaws re: dimensional controls etc.**

We would request that the ARB look closely at each of the items on the WG list for modification and edit to ensure appropriate oversight. For example it states, in part, that:

- § 5.3.12(A) Traffic Visibility Across Street Corners does not apply in the MBMF district. - **is traffic visibility no longer important? Even if we were all on bicycles it would be necessary to consider visibility - we have children walking and biking to schools up and down our main corridors, folks with**

**accessibility issues, elders, etc. Considering traffic visibility will be necessary for each project that comes before the ARB.**

- §5.3.19 Height Buffer Area shall not apply.
- There shall be no requirements for minimum lot size, lot area per dwelling unit, lot frontage, landscaped or usable open space, Floor Area Ratio, or lot coverage.
- The minimum required front yard is 15 feet, except that in the MBMF district where the ground floor façade facing the public way is occupied by nonresidential uses, no front yard is required. Minimum required front yard areas shall be available for uses such as trees, landscaping, benches, tables, chairs, play areas, public art, or similar features. Parking spaces are not permitted in the minimum required front yard.

**We should not be using the MBTA Communities law as an opportunity to provide carte blanche to developers!**

**Thank you:**

We want to end by saying that we are thankful for the efforts of the Working Group, and recognize there is likely frustration that a significant number of questions have been raised relative to the final proposals. We truly believe that we are laying the groundwork for deeply transformative improvements for our community, and that moving forward mindfully and with care, particularly given the theoretical nature of the Working Group's proposal on paper, will allow us to create changes that support the interests of current residents while also welcoming a diverse group of newcomers to our community.

As we tell children in school, the only silly questions are the ones you don't ask, and when you think you 'know for sure', perhaps you should take a few breaths and count to 10. **This is a time for us to pause, breathe and consider our next steps carefully.**