

To: Arlington Redevelopment Board
Copy: Claire Ricker, Director, Planning and Community Development
From: Dr. Christina Smiraglia, Precinct 19
Date: September 11, 2023

Dear Arlington Redevelopment Board members,

First, thank you for your incredible effort and extensive time on behalf of our Town. I am writing to express support for the recent proposed plan for Arlington to comply with the MBTA Communities zoning regulations in Section 3A of M.G.L. Chapter 40A. Overall, I am a strong supporter of not only increasing the quantity of housing in Arlington, but also the diversity of housing options. Three years ago, my husband and I purchased a starter home in Arlington, which we would not be able to afford now. As we think about buying a family home in the next few years, we may not be able to find a property in Arlington that two working professionals with doctorates can afford.

Beyond expressing support for a compliance plan that goes well beyond the minimal requirements of the law, I want to express my support for specific elements of the proposal from the MBTA Communities Working Group (hereafter referred to as the Working Group):

Supporting a four-story height limit for accessibility

I am in agreement with the Working Group's reasons for allowing 4-story buildings: *"The Building Code requires that buildings that are 4 stories or taller have an elevator and meet other accessibility requirements. This was a major driver behind the Working Group choosing to allow by-right residential to be 4 stories tall in all subdistricts. We have heard from many community members that a lack of housing with elevators and other accessibility features is a barrier to residents with different abilities finding housing, and a barrier for seniors looking to downsize and stay in Arlington"* (page 24 of the Working Group report).

I've heard from friends that they have been unable to find housing in Arlington that accommodates their accessibility needs, and as someone who is looking to move their elderly mother to the area, I have also been frustrated at the lack of housing options for people unable to deal with stairs. Thus, I am in support of allowing 4-story buildings to allow for the development of buildings requiring elevators and other accessibility accommodations.

Supporting bonus height limits to incentivize affordability and environmental sustainability

I also agree with the Working Group's incentives for an extra one story (on Broadway) or two stories (on Mass Ave), with particular appreciation for the incentives around environmental sustainability and affordable housing (pages 28-30). Because we cannot make these required, I think it's important to offer incentives for developers to create affordable housing and to achieve SITES certification. I also appreciate that the added height bonus is not just an incentive for affordable housing developers; it also takes into account a financial feasibility analysis, which increases the likelihood of affordable units (pages 28-29) that the Town desperately needs. I am thus in support of these modest height bonuses that address the critical issues of the environment and affordable housing.

Support for no parking minimum and general support for greater density on transit corridors

I am generally supportive of more concentrated housing along transit corridors to encourage moving about by foot, bike, and public transit, which is obviously beneficial to the environment. In particular, I am supportive of the Working Group's proposal that there *not* be parking minimums, which is not only supported by data from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's parking study (page 25), but also further incentivizes the use of environmentally friendly modes of transportation and allows for more space to be used for housing.

Greater density also means less natural space in more remote areas of MA and even other states will be razed for housing. As the Clean Energy Future Committee noted much more articulately, this "*addresses regional needs for more infill development rather than greenfield development which threatens natural habitats and farmland*" (page 2 of their memo). I have multiple colleagues who commute in to Cambridge from newly constructed communities in southern NH and ME, which means more pollution, more traffic, and less natural space in the region.

Support for the Working Group's process

Finally, I really appreciate the many months of work from the Working Group. I have responded to multiple surveys that they sent out asking for public feedback, and I have been following the shifts in their draft plans over the months, where it's been clear that they have taken into account public comments in every iteration. They have also worked with experts and Town staff to consider how different options intersect with existing Town & state regulations and incorporated financial analyses to assess feasibility & impacts. I would be much more comfortable if the ARB recommended that the Town implement a plan that was the result of this lengthy process that engaged a variety of stakeholders, without significant changes that would not have benefited from such extended consideration and iterative honing.

Respectfully yours,
Dr. Christina Smiraglia
164 Forest Street