

From: Joanne Cullinane

Sent: Monday, September 11, 2023 2:40 PM

To: Rachel Zsembery; Stephen Revilak; Kin Lau; Eugene Benson; Melisa Tintocalis

Cc: Claire Ricker; ZBA; Diane Mahon; Len Diggins; John Hurd; Stephen DeCoursey; Eric Helmuth; Jim Feeney; MBTA Communities

Subject: MBTA overlay plan is disastrous for Arlington

To: Distinguished Members of the Arlington Redevelopment Board

Cc: Arlington Select Board, Planning Dept Director, Town Manager, Working Group Members

I'm writing to oppose the MBTA overlay working group's plan to create a zone that is much bigger and that would contain more than triple the number of units required by the MBTA overlay law imposed upon Arlington by people outside our town who know nothing of our particular goals or problems.

Arlington is already the second densest town in Massachusetts but the state would like us to add density near Alewife, a thickly populated area. Because this would be difficult, the overlay group decided to add vast amounts of high density zoning throughout town in a way that runs counter to our town's goals of promoting affordability, respecting the environment, and moving towards greater fiscal sustainability.

It is clear that the MBTA overlay plan was formulated without broad public input. No teachers or firemen or budget experts or elderly residents were involved. ARB members were involved, I have heard, although I sincerely hope that is not true as then a new working group should surely be formed.

The one public meeting where the group allowed public comment was remarkable in that a large majority of the speakers were opposed to the group's insistence upon overcompliance with the MBTA law due to the environmental, fiscal, and gentrification it would cause, and the tiny number of debatably "affordable" units that would be created in exchange for such wholesale - and irreversible - destruction of our town.

The environment would be harmed in that trees would be removed and zero setback bonuses would create heat islands that come even as we see record hot summers. Eighty four foot buildings rising from concrete sidewalks are hardly pedestrian friendly and our walkable streets initiatives would be moot. Increased traffic and parking, even at 1 parking spot per unit, would render streets more dangerous for children and pedestrians alike. Furthermore, residents of the proposed 7500 units would demand parking spots for each unit as a matter of

equity as mbta service has been seriously curtailed in Arlington recently and is not reliable.

Affordability would be harmed because the relatively affordable units in Arlington would be destroyed to make way for larger buildings which would be offered at above-market rates (i.e. on the very highest end of what's available now in Arlington as is all new construction). Since the older units in Arlington that would remain have always only had to compete with the new luxury condos and apartments that spring up, their rents would go up accordingly. The state is clear that it never intended for this new housing to be affordable housing but Arlington is trying to pretend that it can make it so. It cannot. Market forces would prevail. Gentrification would accelerate.

Fiscally, the town already is in poor health, overly dependent upon the residential tax base to fund ballooning town services. Since new apartments and condos would constitute a drain on services vis a vis the taxes they would pay, residential real estate tax payers would be further burdened with every increasing tax hikes (and assessment hikes). This means that those who are living in small homes and house-poor would be driven out by even higher tax bills in favor of richer home buyers who could pay for the gap between taxes collected and services used. Hence the town would attract ever richer residents to buy new units and older houses alike. economic diversity would decline rapidly.

Please put forward a plan that adds only the 2046 units (already too high and very problematic for our fiscal health) demanded by the state. Please eliminate fifth and sixth floor bonuses, and especially radical zero set-back bonuses (offered to developers not adding new commercial businesses, but for simply adding it back to buildings where they once stood before). Please put the 2,046 units we must add (if we must) in sensible areas spread out enough that they do not reduce tree cover, impinge upon side streets, and are not all clustered in one or two school districts. Please rework the plan accordingly for 2024 Town Meeting as the working group has not prepared such a well-formulated compliant plan despite repeated public pleas that they do so.

Thank you,
Joanne Cullinane
69 Newland road