

From: Jo Babiarz

Sent: Thursday, September 14, 2023 2:06 PM

To: Steve Revilak; om; k.kelleher76@comcast.net; Rebecca Gruber; Sanjay Newton; Eugene Benson; Eric Helmuth; Eugene Benson; Kin Lau; Rachel Zsembery; Stephen Revilak; Claire Ricker

Subject: Affordable and Equitable housing thoughts

To: Fellow TM members, Arlington Redevelopment Board members, Select Board members et al
RE: Affordable/Equitable housing and the MBTA Working Group plan

I want equitable and affordable housing. I want residents in the new housing to benefit from a school system that is at least the same quality that our daughter enjoyed, or better. I want my new neighbors to have the same town services I now enjoy. I want this in my lifetime, not 50 years from now.

The MBTA working group has focused on potential, not feasibility or even likelihood. Meetings emphasize that no one can predict when these new units will be available but given the fact that there is so little land ready for development, we should expect delays. I part company when promises are not paired with a viable implementation plan.

I have discussed the relationship between a commercial/industrial property tax base and affordable housing, using Cambridge as a prime example. Without repeating that information, let us assume that somehow, somewhere, Arlington will muster sufficient subsidies to support affordable development. Let us further assume that one or two of the contemplated mixed use/multi-story projects will break ground in 2024. If built per the proposed zoning, what will the new residents' daily life be like?

The first question is how many units, and residents, will there be? The state does not require a "highest and best use" study to establish parameters on the size or number of units. Imagine five stories with three units on each floor – a studio, a one-bedroom, and one two-bedroom. The proposed plan would allow for three parking spaces, maximum, per floor, one per unit. This parking space works for the studio. If a couple moves into the one-bedroom, maybe it would work. One person has to work remotely, or in an area served by the MBTA, or be willing to bike in snowy weather.

The MBTA is currently dysfunctional. Students can't depend on the #77 to get them to the high school, never mind folks who use the red line for work. Two independent studies have given the T failing grades; there is no established timeline for corrective action. The "affordable and equitable housing" parking limitation bars those who commute outside of T service and bike lanes as potential residents. An electrician, plumber, or carpenter with a tool truck needs two spaces. For a couple with 2 children in a 2-bedroom, lack of transportation can be a deal-killer. (If the solution is side-street parking, note that the Select Board is still grappling with overnight parking in general and accessibility of fire trucks and ambulances in particular.) Yes, some folks will be able to work within the transportation restrictions; that is a subset of folks wanting "affordable and equitable" housing.

There is another design for these units – a combination of studio and one-bedrooms, so that there are 5 units on each floor, times 5 floors = 25 units = 25 cars. Are we effectively restricting these units to single people? Is that "equitable"?

Are we saying that you can only have housing on our terms, not housing with amenities that other residents enjoy?

Why are we making rules about housing for people 50 years from now? Those in IT know well the pace of technological advancement has exceeded all expectations. What tools/opportunities for healthy, environmentally sustainable living will be commonplace in 10 years? Will these new technologies be excluded by our plans? Maybe in 10 years the top floor of buildings will routinely be greenhouses. New York City is reviewing zoning that requires green roofs. Maybe the core of each building should be an atrium, with a passive cooling tower like the kind used in parts of the Middle East. Maybe the bottom floors will need to be “shelter areas” where people are protected against tornadoes and hurricanes. Maybe the stretch code and LEED will be obsolete in 10 years replaced by more effective technology. Does the proposed plan require revision in 10 years to accommodate these improvements?

In short, I advocate that Arlington do the minimum required by the state and add a sunset provision in 10 years that requires the Board to evaluate the success of the plan and allows for new technologies/improvements. If we approve more than the state requires now, we lose bargaining power to gain state subsidies, are behind foreseeable innovation and updated code requirements, and are limiting the availability of affordable and equitable housing to a subset of worthy residents.

Thank you for your time.

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