

MBTA Communities Working Group / Arlington Planning Director / Arlington Redevelopment Board
Town of Arlington
730 Massachusetts Ave
Arlington, MA 02476
via email: sanjaynewton@gmail.com / cricker@town.arlington.ma.us / rzsebery@town.arlington.ma.us

September 15, 2023

Dear Claire, Sanjay and Rachel,

After the public meeting on Monday September 11, I wanted to make a suggestion about the process with Town Meeting in October. I'm submitting this letter as a resident and Town Meeting member, not in any official capacity (though I am an Open Space Committee Co-Chair and ARB liaison.)

I work in affordable housing. I support the MBTA working group's goal of creating more housing – but would like to see more affordability in Arlington not just more units. I see a tremendous need for housing in the “missing middle” category – in type, size and cost.

I'm especially concerned about the “naturally occurring,” affordable and middle income housing that will be the first houses to be removed for new higher end construction. These older homes, that might be affordable for a first time home owner or less expensive as rental units, will be lost. But this is an aside from the primary point of this letter!

My suggestion going into Town Meeting would be for the Working Group to have a well thought out “Pilot Program” to offer when the full recommendation is voted down. The advantages of a well located “pilot” that meets the State mandate would allow there to be less antagonism between the different sides of the debate. I think it would pass quickly.

A pilot would also allow guidelines to be developed before the full program goes into effect. The rezoning could take place over a period of time and would allow people to see what kind of changes the multifamily housing types look and feel like in town. A first phase would give the town an opportunity to adjust the future zones in response to what we learn from the pilot.

Town Meeting members have spoken up about wanting to have an option, not an all or nothing proposal. I think a proposed “Pilot Program” with future phasing would allow TM members to vote for change in a positive way.

I do appreciate all the time and effort that the MBTA Working group has put into community outreach on the proposed zoning changes. I'm hoping to see more consensus, as it moves through Town Meeting.

Respectfully,

Wendy Richter
TM, Precinct 17