

From: Elizabeth Pyle

Sent: Saturday, September 30, 2023 4:31 PM

To: Eugene Benson; Rachel Zsebery; Stephen Revilak; Kin Lau

Subject: Comments on MBTA Communities proposal

Dear Members of the Redevelopment Board,

I attended the September 11, 2023 public meeting on the MBTA Communities proposal, and I would like to provide the following comments for your consideration:

1. As a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 8, I support my fellow Town Meeting Member Allan Tosti's proposal to put multiple options for compliance with the MBTA Communities Act before Town Meeting, at different numbers of units, so the Meeting can choose between different options in its capacity as the deliberative legislative body of the Town. I strongly disagree with the current approach to have just one proposal before Town Meeting, in an all-or-nothing approach, where the issue is framed to make it appear that there is only one option for compliance with the state MBTA Communities legislation. Such an approach usurps the function of Town Meeting to exercise its legislative authority to choose the best option for the Town, as the Town's elected representatives. I therefore request that the Redevelopment Board include an option for full compliance with the state's requirement for 2,046 units as a separate article, and also an option for a greater number of units, so that Town Meeting can choose between them. I have heard that other municipalities are following this approach.

2. My neighborhood in Precinct 8 is dismayed with the Working Group's proposal to have 4-story buildings in the Neighborhood Districts. We request that building height in the Neighborhood Districts be limited to 3 stories or 35 feet in height. I previously submitted a petition from residents of my neighborhood to you on this matter. Although the justification for 4 stories is supposedly so that all units are ADA compliant, this seems excessive, particularly where thousands of units in the Mass Ave and Broadway districts would be located in 4 to 6 story buildings with elevators and would therefore be ADA compliant. The ground floor of all units in the Neighborhood Districts could easily be ADA compliant if the buildings are 3 stories. Balanced against the negative impacts of excess height, massing and shadow impacts for our existing neighborhood side streets, the current proposal for 4 stories in the Neighborhood Districts is not warranted. Please limit building height to 3 stories in the Neighborhood Districts, as a reasonable compromise on this issue.

3. From 2016-2019, I was a member of the Town's Residential Zoning Study Group (the "RSG"), which was created by Town Meeting to analyze the impact of new zoning changes in the residential districts in Arlington. The RSG quickly came to the consensus that it is not advisable to have a one-size-fits-all approach to zoning changes in Arlington, because of the widely varying topography in Town. For example, the hills in the Heights make for very different zoning outcomes than on the relatively flat areas in East Arlington, especially when considering building height, number of stories, and what qualifies as a "story" under our zoning bylaws due to changes in grade. I am troubled that the Working Group did not consider the topography of the Neighborhood Districts by reviewing actual ground conditions in all areas of proposed change, when it drew the districts.

Instead, it appears that lines were just drawn on a map without consideration of topography. This is a serious flaw in the design of the proposed MBTA Communities Districts, because it does not take account of impacts associated with locating a 4-6 building on an already elevated hill, or on a steep grade. For example, in my Precinct 8 neighborhood, there is a steep change in grade from Mass Ave extending up into the proposed Neighborhood District on Wildwood Ave. The impacts of locating 4-6 story buildings on this slope -- including extra height over existing grade, excess massing as compared to existing structures, extra shading, and loss of privacy -- have not been considered. On behalf of my neighborhood in Precinct 8, I request that the Mass Ave/Broadway district not be extended to Wildwood Avenue, and that the area from Wildwood Ave to Mass Ave not be included in the district at all, due to the failure to consider the topography of this area in the analysis. Other areas in the Heights likely have the same concerns, and should also be excluded from the districts until the topography can be analyzed. The failure to consider topography further supports limiting the size of the MBTA Communities' proposal to a smaller district designed to support the minimum of 2,046 units, at this time.

4. Finally, I encourage the Redevelopment Board to recommend only the minimum requirement of 2,046 units to comply with the MBTA Communities Act for this Special Town Meeting, so that the impacts of the proposed changes on school overcrowding, traffic congestion, and Town services and finances can be fully studied and assessed. If the Legislature requires municipalities to create more units of housing in the future, a 2,046-unit plan now will give us room to enact additional zoning changes down the line. If the 2,046-unit plan is ultimately successful, it can always be expanded, as well.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely yours,

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