Arlington Redevelopment Board
Monday, October 10, 2023, at 7:30 PM
Community Center, Main Hall
27 Maple Street, Arlington, MA 02476
Meeting Minutes

This meeting was recorded by ACMi.

PRESENT: Rachel Zsembery (Chair), Eugene Benson, Kin Lau, Stephen Revilak

STAFF: Claire Ricker, Director, Planning and Community Development

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The Chair called the meeting of the Board to order.

The Chair opened with **Agenda Item 1 – Redevelopment Board Report to Fall 2023 Special Town Meeting.**

Mr. Benson asked if the Board wants to include with each article in the Report whether the required vote for Town Meeting to pass it is majority or two-thirds. The Chair replied that the Board has not included that information in the past. She is trying to confirm that information with Town Counsel, but it may not be available in time for this report. She thinks that's a good idea for the future.

Mr. Revilak proposed adding a paragraph to the Zoning Articles Overview giving a broad overview of the articles, with some background information about their purposes and some of the motivations behind including them. He wrote such a paragraph and shared it with the Board.

Mr. Revilak also suggested re-ordering the Table of Contents and the report as a whole in numerical order.

The Chair said that the discussion in Article 10 includes a statement about why this group of zoning articles is included this year. She would like to include that statement either in the discussion of each article to which it is relevant or in the Zoning Articles Overview. Mr. Revilak said he thought it should be included with each of the articles regarding dimensional lot requirements. Mr. Benson and Mr. Lau agreed.

Article 5: Open Space in Business Districts

Mr. Revilak said that the discussion focuses on usable open space, but he thinks it applies to landscaped open space as well, and he has suggested some edits to that effect. The other Board members agreed with his suggestions.

Mr. Revilak received an email from the Chair of the Zoning Board of Appeals suggesting that the name of a chart referred to in Section 5.3.22.C be put in quotation marks. Mr. Benson replied that that would not be consistent with how charts are usually referred to.

Mr. Benson suggested two sentences to add to the discussion of Article 5 to highlight the increase to landscaped open space. The other Board members agreed.

He also suggested altering the description of open space so that it is described as private but not public.

The Chair requested that the wording about the vote for each article be changed to include the words "Favorable Action" or "No Action" as appropriate.

Article 6: Rear Yard Setbacks in Business Districts

The Board members had no modifications.

Article 7: Step Back Requirements in Business Districts

Mr. Benson suggested adding a parenthetical statement explaining the reason for the one no vote.

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The Chair said that when this article was originally proposed, the discussion included information about a review of step-back requirements in Arlington's neighboring communities. She proposed a paragraph to be included in the discussion summarizing those regulations in order to add context.

The Chair also proposed adding a sentence to explain the discussion about whether step-backs should start at the 4th or 5th stories, and to clarify that the step-backs start at the property line.

Article 4: Reduced Height Buffer Area

The Board members had no modifications.

Article 9: Corner Lot Requirements

Mr. Revilak suggested adding a paragraph to the discussion noting that the zoning bylaw gives the Board the authority to adjust setbacks during Environmental Design Review, and this article is a codification of how the Board has been applying the bylaw, with the hope that it will lead to more predictability and clarity.

The Chair noted that the Board has heard from Town Meeting members who find this article difficult to understand. In a previous discussion, Mr. Benson provided an example about lots at the corners of major corridors and side streets, and she felt that the example helped clarify the purpose of the article. She would like that example to be included in the discussion to make the purpose and effect of the article clearer to Town Meeting members. Mr. Revilak noted that the current requirements for corner lots make sense when the corner lot and both properties abutting it are in the same zoning district, but that is often not the case, and this article helps solve that problem. The Chair offered to come up with specific wording for this clarification. Mr. Lau suggested including a diagram for the presentation to Town Meeting.

Article 8: Height and Story Minimums in Business Districts

Mr. Benson said that the second paragraph in the discussion doesn't relate to this article, and he proposed deleting it. He suggested editing the last paragraph to clarify the purpose of the article and the fact that the Redevelopment Board can waive or modify the requirements when appropriate.

Mr. Revilak suggested changing the wording in the first paragraph from "intensifying development opportunities" to "encouraging the development of higher value buildings."

The Chair agreed with both those suggestions.

Article 3: Administrative Correction

The Board members had no modifications to the report.

The Chair requested that the slides for the presentation to Town Meeting include when the underlying zoning change was made that caused the current error which this article corrects.

Article 11: Residential Uses in Business Districts

Mr. Benson suggested adding two sentences at the end of the discussion clarifying that currently existing one- and two-family dwellings can continue to be used. The other Board members agreed.

Article 10: Street Trees

Mr. Benson suggested deleting the phrase "along Arlington's main corridors" because this article would apply throughout the town. He also suggested adding a sentence to clarify that passing this article is necessary to require street trees in the MBTA Communities Overlay District.

The Chair requested that the slide presentation highlight the fact that this article only applies to new constructions, redevelopment, and major reconstruction over 50% of the existing footprint, not minor changes.

Article 12: MBTA Communities Overlay District

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Mr. Lau wanted to make sure the discussion includes the fact that although the final vote was unanimous, he was in favor of keeping the three highlighted Working Group recommendations which the Board changed.

Mr. Benson suggested deleting the phrase "allowing for the development of multi-family housing in the R0 and R1 zones," because this article does not allow such development.

He also suggested adding a new paragraph to the discussion explaining what the MBTA Communities Law requires, and why the Board made the decision to distribute the overlay district throughout the town and focus it on the major business corridors. The other Board members agreed.

Mr. Revilak suggested adding a paragraph to the discussion that highlights the primary differences between the Working Group's recommendations and the Board's decisions. The Chair agreed and suggested adding language about why the Board made the changes it did – scale, density, and aesthetic in the existing neighborhoods; parking study conclusions; the desire to rezone the East Arlington Business District in a holistic manner; and feedback from and conversation with members of the public, DPCD staff, the consultant Utile, and the Working Group.

Mr. Revilak also suggested adding a paragraph that provides specific numbers about the overlay district – acres, capacity, existing dwellings, difference between existing dwellings and model capacity, and a projection about development over the next 10 years. Ms. Ricker said that the capacity of the district with the Board's changes is 3,216 units on 115.6 acres. Mr. Revilak offered to work out the projection numbers. He noted that people have asked questions about these numbers, and providing clear data would be helpful. The Chair said that she was concerned about trying to put a number on future projections. Mr. Revilak clarified that it would be a wide range. The other Board members agreed with this addition.

The Chair noted that this report will be amended after the hearing on Article 13, which takes place on October 16, 2023.

The Chair asked for a motion to approve and deliver the Redevelopment Board's Report to 2023 Special Town Meeting as amended. Mr. Benson so moved, Mr. Lau seconded, and the Board voted unanimously.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 2 – New Business.**

Ms. Ricker said that the Board voted to establish the MBTA Communities Working Group on November 7, 2022, and the recommendation is that the Board vote to disband the Working Group as of the beginning of the 2023 Special Town Meeting on October 17, 2023. The Working Group would like to be able to attend precinct meetings as Working Group members leading up to Town Meeting. The Chair suggested that the dissolution take place at the end of Town Meeting, since the overlay district will not be the first article discussed, and there may be further need for the Working Group during Town Meeting.

The Chair asked for a motion to disband the MBTA Communities Working Group at the conclusion of the Fall 2023 Special Town Meeting. Mr. Lau so moved, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted unanimously.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 3 – Public Forum.**

- Jordan Weinstein, 23 Lennon Road – This meeting is close to the conclusion of the long process about MBTA Communities. He is pleased that the Board was able to see what he felt was an excessive plan. He is glad that they voted to reduce building heights and include parking. What has disappointed him about the whole process has been presenting it as a social justice issue to correct the injustices of past zoning decisions. He agrees with those characterizations of how suburban American has used zoning to exclude minorities and poor people. But the mandate that the state has handed to cities and towns has nothing to do with affordability. If the state rejects Arlington's request to maintain affordability at 15%, the overlay district will be even less inclusive than the rest of the town. The way the whole process has been presented has been disingenuous.

- Susan Stamps, 39 Grafton Street – She thinks the Board has done a great job. The only thing that Green Streets Arlington is disappointed about is the removal of the recommendation of SITES for the environmental bonus versus the LEED Gold standard. Her research hasn't shown her how the LEED Gold standard requires any of the outdoor environmental benefits they were looking for – sustainable landscaping, climate resilience, rain gardens, trees and bushes. Green Streets Arlington is very concerned. They are discussing the possibility of doing

a friendly amendment at Town Meeting. If the LEED Gold standard does include the environmental benefits they are looking for, they would appreciate the opportunity to learn more about it.

- Kristin Anderson, 12 Upham Road West, Town Meeting member – She has spent a lot of time watching this process. She is happy with how the Board has chosen to protect existing businesses and create a pathway for future planning for more commercial growth. That's what she was most concerned about from the start.

- Grant Cook, Wollaston Ave – He was gratified to see a "Support MBTA Communities" sign at the Calvary Church. It was refreshing to see a church take the lead in social justice. A house is on the market right now in Arlington, just across the border from Winchester. The previous house was sold for about $1,000,000, torn down and rebuilt, and listed for $2,700,000. Multiple condos could have been built for that amount on that property, but the game is rigged, so that the only thing that exists is the house only available to the wealthy. He is glad to see the start of rolling back the protection of wealth in the system we've built. He hopes to see much more of it.

The Chair said that she would be happy to talk more with Ms. Stamps about the LEED Gold standard and also some of the alternative compliance paths which are included in the MBTA Communities overlay district article.

The Chair asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Lau so moved, and Mr. Benson seconded. The Board voted and approved unanimously.

Meeting **Adjourned** at 8:35 pm.

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