

Arlington Redevelopment Board
Monday, June 2, 2025, at 7:30 PM
Community Center, Main Hall
27 Maple Street, Arlington, MA 02476
Meeting Minutes

This meeting was recorded by ACMI.

PRESENT: Rachel Zsebery (Chair), Eugene Benson, Shaina Korman-Houston, Kin Lau, Stephen Revilak

STAFF: Claire Ricker, Director of Planning and Community Development; Sarah Suarez, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development

The Chair called the meeting of the Board to order.

The Chair opened with **Agenda Item 1 – Review Meeting Minutes.**

May 19, 2025 – The Board members made no changes to the minutes. The Chair requested a motion to approve the May 19 minutes as submitted. Mr. Lau so moved, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted unanimously in favor.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 2 – Public Hearing: Docket #3849, 259 Broadway.**

Ms. Ricker explained that this application is for a project subject to the Mass Ave/Broadway Multi-Family Housing Overlay District. The proposal is for work on an existing non-conforming multi-family building in the R2 Residential District and Mass Ave/Broadway Multi-Family Housing Overlay District. The applicant proposes to renovate the interior, construct an exterior staircase as a second egress, add one additional unit for a total of five units, build a new stockade fence, install two EV chargers, and install new landscaping, including street trees. The attached garage would be demolished. The applicant has requested a reduction from the required number of parking spaces under Section 6.1.5 from five to four, including one compact space.

The applicant was represented by architect Zeke Brown and owner Steve Boubolis. Mr. Brown explained that the building currently has four units, with an odd internal configuration in which one unit is three times the size of the others. The applicant wants to reconfigure the internal space to result in five units of roughly equal size. The current building has only one means of egress, which is illegal and dangerous. The only way to create five units and create a second form of egress is to build the second staircase outside. They also propose to install sprinkler systems and proper fire separation. The external stair will be covered and will replace a porch entryway in the back. The whole side area is a parking area, which officially has three spots but is currently used for five cars, two of which are parked in the front yard setback. They propose to demolish the garage and create four parking spaces along the side and not in the front yard setback, which is why they are asking for a reduction from five to four required parking spaces. The owner has agreed to charge separately for parking, provide a transit subsidy for renters who do not own a car, and install a cargo bike rack in the alcove behind the external stairs as part of a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan. They intend to replace windows but otherwise change very little about the exterior of the building. They intend to add a trash/recycling enclosure. The building will be all electric, with high efficiency heat pumps, insulation, and new Energy Star appliances. There are two street trees already on site, and the applicant proposes adding three more, as well as filling in the landscaping in the front. Air handling units will be on the side of the building. The basement access will remain, and the applicant proposes to put long-term bicycle storage in the basement, with a ramp for the bicycles to be rolled into and out of the basement.

Mr. Revilak asked exactly where the bicycle parking would be. Mr. Brown replied that it would be somewhere along the side of the house, but the specific location has not yet been determined. Mr. Revilak also asked if the applicant has determined what species of street trees they will plant. Mr. Brown said that they have not. Mr. Revilak encouraged him to consult with the Tree Warden.

Mr. Benson asked where the electric water heaters would be located. Mr. Brown replied that they will be in the basement. Specific locations have not been determined, but there is plenty of space in the basement.

Mr. Benson asked which setbacks are nonconforming. Mr. Brown replied that the setback along Broadway is conforming. If Palmer Street is the front, then the rear setback would be nonconforming. Mr. Benson asked if the external stairs would make that side nonconforming. Mr. Brown replied that if Palmer Street is the front, the side setback on the side with the external stairs would be conforming, because only a 5-foot setback is required. The old porch was about 15 feet from the property line, and the new stairs would be about 12 feet from the property line.

Mr. Benson asked what the monthly fee for parking would be. Mr. Brown said that the fee has not been determined. He would guess that it would be \$50 to \$100 per month. Mr. Benson also asked if the driveway would be repaved. Mr. Brown replied that it would likely need to be repaved, especially after potential damage caused by construction. Mr. Benson suggested that lines be placed on the driveway to indicate where each of the four parking spaces will be, and Mr. Brown agreed. Mr. Benson also said that the cargo bicycle parking should be covered. Mr. Brown said that it could be put underneath the external stairs. Mr. Benson asked if charging would be available for an electric bicycle, and Mr. Brown said that it would. Mr. Benson said that he thinks the proposed outdoor short-term bicycle parking is a good idea but should not be considered as part of a TDM plan because it would only be useful for visitors, not for residents of the building.

Ms. Korman-Houston asked if it would be possible to enclose the exterior stairs. Mr. Brown said that they have not considered that, but it would be possible. There are windows behind where the stairs will be built, so it would be preferable for the stairs to be open so as to allow those windows in living spaces to open onto an exterior space rather than an enclosed stairwell. He noted that the stairs are covered. She suggested that he speak further with Inspectional Services Director Mike Ciampa about it.

Ms. Korman-Houston said that she thinks that some of the residential units have an awkward flow. Mr. Brown said that the challenge is that the building currently only has one internal staircase, which does not meet safety standards. He wanted to have the internal staircase located centrally so that it could serve all the units. He tried to be as efficient as possible in terms of construction.

Ms. Korman-Houston appreciated the addition of a lawn in the rear, but she could not tell if that created a space with no paved connection between the door and the driveway. Mr. Brown replied that there are pavers all the way around.

The Chair asked if the third-floor unit has a living room or not. Mr. Brown replied that it has one large kitchen/dining room which provides living space. The ceilings are also high, so it will create a sense of a larger space.

The Chair also asked how the determination was made as to which yard was the side and which was the rear. The address is 259 Broadway, which would imply that the front of the building faces Broadway, but the applicant is treating the side facing Palmer as the front. Mr. Brown replied that his understanding is that on a corner lot, the owner can decide which of the two non-street-facing sides is the rear and which is the side. He noted that the building is also known as 40 Palmer St.

The Chair said that she has a problem with trying to fit more extra units into a building by building an exterior staircase that really should be inside. Architecturally, it presents a problem within the neighborhood. If the required second egress cannot be included inside the building, that means that the building is not large enough to support this number of units. She would like to see an enclosed second egress stair. Because the property is listed on *The Inventory of Historic Structures*, the applicant will need to work with the Historical Commission to have any changes to the exterior approved. Ms. Ricker said that she sent information about this application to the Chair of the Historical Commission and let her know that they would also be hearing from this applicant.

Mr. Lau said that he believes that a three-story building that is fully equipped with sprinklers does not require a second means of egress. He is also concerned about the addition of an external staircase. If a second staircase is not required, then the external stair is not necessary, and the problems it causes would be eliminated. Mr. Brown replied that he and his firm are not willing to do a renovation without a second staircase because they feel that it is important for safety. He said that the type of sprinkler system required in order to eliminate the requirement for a second stair is much more robust, including sprinklers in every closet and cavity, and it often does not make financial sense to install that type of a system.

Mr. Lau asked for clarification about the units with rooms marked “Existing to Remain.” Mr. Brown said that they are trying not to change much on that side of the building, which is why they labeled the rooms that way, but some of those rooms are living rooms, some are bedrooms, and some are offices. Mr. Lau also asked for clarification about the two units that indicate a connected kitchen and living room, but no dining room. Mr. Brown replied that a table could be placed in the kitchen or in one end of the living room, to create a dining area. Mr. Lau said that he thinks some of the internal spaces are awkward.

Mr. Lau said that he likes the idea of bicycle parking under the stairs if there is enough headroom. He noted that electric bicycles should be in a covered space so that they can be safely charged.

The Chair asked if Mr. Brown has confirmed whether any accessible units are required, given that this is a renovation of an existing building rather than new construction. Mr. Brown said that he has spoken with Mr. Ciampa, who confirmed with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board that a renovation of an existing building with less than 12 units does not have to include an accessible unit.

Mr. Benson asked for confirmation that the entrance to the basement would include a ramp that could be used to walk bicycles down. Mr. Benson said that the zoning bylaw requires that bicycle parking have a dedicated area used for no other purpose, so they would need to partition off a section of the basement with enough space for eight bicycles, with some means of locking the bicycles. He said that he would like to see that area shown on the drawings, which Mr. Brown said he could do.

Mr. Benson said that he does not have a problem with the exterior stairs, and he would support whatever the Historical Commission approves. But if the Historical Commission requires significant changes to the exterior from the proposed design, the applicant will need to return to the Redevelopment Board.

Mr. Revilak said that he also does not have a problem with the exterior stairs. He noted that many other buildings of a similar age have exterior decks and staircases, but he would also defer to the Historical Commission.

The Chair opened the floor to public comment.

- Susan Stamps, 39 Grafton Street – She said that Section 6.3 does not apply to this project, but she appreciates that the applicant is planning to plant additional street trees. She said that she would like the applicant to consult with the Tree Warden about the species and height of any trees planted. She would also like there to be a three-year maintenance plan for any new trees.

Seeing no one else who wished to speak, the Chair closed public comment.

Mr. Lau said that he is uncomfortable with the exterior staircase, and he does not want to set the precedent of adding exterior stairs to buildings as a way to fit in more units. Ms. Korman-Houston agreed.

Mr. Benson said that he believes that the project is subject to the bylaw regarding street trees.

Mr. Revilak noted that this is a by-right project, subject to Site Plan Review, but not requiring a Special Permit. As such, he thinks that if the external staircase meets building codes and can receive approval from Inspectional Services, the Board should be willing to approve it, pending approval of the Historical Commission.

The Chair said that Site Plan Review includes the criteria of Environmental Design Review (EDR), and she believes that the external staircase does not meet EDR Criterion 2, the relation of the building to the environment. She does not want to see more exterior stairs proposed and built in this neighborhood because this one has been approved. She asked Mr. Brown if he would be willing to consider an architecturally appropriate addition that would include an enclosed staircase. Mr. Brown said that he would consider it, but the intention was to do the renovations with the smallest footprint possible. Additions with enclosed staircases can look tacked on to buildings.

The Chair said that she would like the Board to work more closely with the Historical Commission in the future, so that before such a project comes before the Board, they have at least an informal sense of what the Historical Commission is likely to think of it. Mr. Brown noted that the property is included in the MBTA Communities overlay, meaning that it can be torn down entirely and replaced with a four- or five-story building. Given that, he wonders why it would be subject to historical review at all. He has proposed renovations that would have as little external impact as possible in order to respect the character of the building and the neighborhood. The Chair said that the Historical Commission’s inventory is

set independently of any zoning, including the Multi-Family Housing overlay districts. The Redevelopment Board cannot remove a historic designation by including a property in one of the Multi-Family Housing overlay districts or rezoning it in other ways. Regardless of the zoning designation, renovations of any property included on the historical inventory would require working with the Historical Commission. Although the goal of the Multi-Family Housing overlay districts is to increase the overall number of housing units, the purpose of the Site Plan Review process is to ensure that such new units fit contextually into their surroundings. If building appendages that are not congruent with adjacent architecture are allowed, the neighborhood begins to erode.

Mr. Lau said that he would like the applicant to return with either more fenestration of the existing stair, an interior version of the stair, or elimination of the stair. The Chair and Ms. Korman-Houston agreed. Mr. Brown agreed to consider it. He said that in order to make it contextual, it would be more of an addition than just a staircase.

The Chair asked for a motion to continue the public hearing for Docket 3849, 259 Broadway, to July 7, 2025, pending the Historical Commission process. Mr. Lau so moved, Ms. Korman-Houston seconded, and the Board voted 4-1 in favor, with Mr. Benson opposed.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 3 – Board Calendar Discussion.**

Ms. Ricker explained that when the Board voted on its 2025 schedule in November 2024, they agreed to revisit the summer meetings in light of summer schedules. The Board currently has upcoming meetings scheduled on June 16, July 7, July 21, and a tentative meeting scheduled for August 4, with a return to their regular schedule of meeting on the first and third Mondays in September. DPCD has received quite a few inquiries about Site Plan Review applications, and she suggested making the August meeting definite rather than tentative, in order to accommodate the number of applications expected.

The Chair noted that she and one other Board member have a conflict with July 7, and she asked if July 14 would work for other Board members. All members said that they were available on July 14, so the Board agreed to move the July 7 meeting to July 14.

Ms. Korman-Houston said that she could attend July 21 remotely, but not in person. The Board agreed to hold a hybrid meeting on July 21. Ms. Ricker said that she would locate an appropriate space for a hybrid meeting.

The Chair proposed moving the August 4 meeting to August 11, so as to reduce the gap between the August meeting and the first September meeting. The other Board members agreed.

The Chair suggested discussing the date of their fall retreat at the next meeting.

Mr. Lau said that he would like to plan a joint meeting with the Select Board in the late summer or early fall, particularly to discuss the Arlington Heights rezoning process. The Chair said that it does not necessarily have to be a full joint meeting, but one or two ARB members could attend a Select Board meeting.

The Chair asked for a motion to amend the Board's 2025 meeting schedule to change the July 7 meeting to July 14, and the August 4 meeting to August 11. Mr. Benson so moved, Mr. Lau seconded, and the Board voted unanimously in favor.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 4 – Open Forum.**

The Chair opened the floor to open forum. Seeing no one who wished to speak, she closed open forum.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 5 – New Business.**

Ms. Ricker explained that at Town Meeting, a Motion to Commit for Article 41 was passed to create an Affordable Housing Overlay Committee, including herself as DPCD Director or her designee, and a Redevelopment Board member or their designee. The Board will need to discuss how to handle representation on this committee. The Chair said that the Board has been asked to provide a representative or designee to other committees as well, and she would like to discuss how to handle all of them at the next meeting, noting that Board members already serve on multiple committees. The other Board members agreed. She also said that she would like the Board to discuss checking in more regularly with their designees on various committees.

Mr. Revilak said that at Bedford's 2023 Town Meeting, they approved two-family by-right construction in zoning districts that had previously only allowed single-family housing. It passed 137-48, so it seems to have been uncontroversial.

Mr. Revilak also said that a bill is currently before the North Carolina senate to encourage missing middle housing, which they define as townhomes or two-plexes through six-plexes. If enacted, the bill would require municipalities to allow all missing middle configurations in all residential districts, provided that water and sewer infrastructure is sufficient.

Mr. Benson said that both Andrew Greenspon and James Fleming, who had submitted a citizen petition warrant article and substitute motion to Town Meeting to allow more home occupations, neither of which passed, asked Mr. Benson if they could work with him to craft a warrant article for next year's Town Meeting. He told them that he was willing to work with them if the Board was okay with his involvement, although he specified that the article would be submitted by Mr. Greenspon and Mr. Fleming, not by the Board, and he would simply help them write it. The Chair said that she would like Mr. Benson to check with Town Counsel before agreeing. Mr. Lau said that he would like to see it discussed earlier than the Town Meeting hearing schedule, so as to allow for more public input. Mr. Revilak said that he would like to see a clearer process by which the Board could help residents who want to submit warrant articles to Town Meeting.

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 8:45 pm.**

Documents used:

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| Agenda Item 1 | DRAFT ARB minutes – May 19, 2025 |
| Agenda Item 2 | 259 Broadway – Site Plan Review Application
259 Broadway – Dimensional & Parking Info
259 Broadway – Impact Statement
259 Broadway – Existing photos
259 Broadway – Plans & Drawings
259 Broadway – LEED Scorecard
259 Broadway – Transportation Demand Management Plan
259 Broadway – Roof Analysis
259 Broadway – Locus Map
SPR memo Docket 259 Broadway - updated 05-30-2025 |
| Agenda Item 3 | ARB Meeting Schedule 2025 |