

Arlington Redevelopment Board
Monday, June 16, 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 Zsembery (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 – Public Hearing: Docket #3854, 125 Broadway.**

Ms. Ricker explained that this application falls within the jurisdiction of the Redevelopment Board both because it is a gas station and because it is on Broadway. However, there are two existing variances on the property that directly impact the application – one related to setbacks and one to sign locations. DPCD staff has asked the Legal Department to determine whether the Redevelopment Board or the Zoning Board of Appeals is the more appropriate venue for hearing this application. The applicant has agreed to the continuation of the hearing until the determination is made.

The Chair asked for a motion to continue the public hearing for Docket 3854 to July 21, 2025. Mr. Lau so motioned, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted unanimously in favor.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 2 – Discussion of Board and Committee Appointments and Memberships.**

Ms. Ricker explained that DPCD is responsible for making two appointments to the Envision Arlington Standing Committee, one of which is currently open. In the past, DPCD staff has made the appointment in consultation with the Board. The Chair said that she received feedback from the current Standing Committee member who is stepping down, indicating that it would be good to have a new appointee who can bring more focus to the group, particularly in areas that are of concern to the Board and DPCD. Mr. Lau suggested trying to find a Town resident who is an urban planner. Ms. Korman-Houston said that she has two people in mind; one is a real-estate attorney with a background in policy who has worked with the state; and the other currently works for the state in relation to housing. Mr. Benson suggested posting the opportunity on the Town website or perhaps having a DPCD staff member as the designee. The Chair said that she would like the Board to engage with Envision Arlington for some of the outreach planned ahead of 2026 Town Meeting, which could affect the consideration of who should be appointed.

Mr. Benson noted that the warrant article establishing the Envision Arlington Standing Committee also established an Advisory Board, including the Director of DPCD and the Chair of the Redevelopment Board. He asked about the status of the Advisory Board. Ms. Ricker said that the Advisory Board last met under previous Town Manager Sanford Pooler. The Chair said that she attended the meeting called by Manager Pooler, but the Advisory Board does not have a clear purpose and is unlikely to meet again in the near future.

Ms. Ricker explained that 2025 Town Meeting passed Article 41, which was a Motion to Commit to establish an Affordable Housing Overlay Committee. The prescribed membership includes the Director of DPCD or designee and a member of the Redevelopment Board or designee. In addition, the membership consists of a member of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, a member of the Arlington Housing Authority, the Executive Director of the Housing Corporation of Arlington, a Town resident appointed by the Select Board, and a Town Meeting member appointed by the Town Moderator. Ms. Ricker expressed concern about the ability of the committee to do the work necessary to bring an overlay proposal by the time the 2026 Town Meeting Warrant opens in December 2025. The Town Manager and the

Select Board want the committee to meet by the end of the summer. The Chair noted that if the committee begins to meet at the end of the summer, they will only have about three months to create an overlay proposal to submit to the 2026 Warrant. She also noted that the Board expressed this concern at Town Meeting.

Mr. Benson said the Motion to Commit states the Committee “shall insert one or more articles” in the 2026 Town Meeting warrant. However, according to Massachusetts state law, the Committee has no authority to insert warrant articles. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A, Section 5 specifically indicates that warrant articles that affect the Zoning Bylaw can be inserted by ten registered voters, a planning board, a regional planning agency, an individual owning land to be affected by the change, a Select Board, or a Board of Appeals, but it does not allow a committee such as the one formed by the Motion to Commit to do so. During Town Meeting, the Town Moderator asked Town Counsel Michael Cunningham about this issue, and he replied that according to MGL Chapter 40A, Section 5, only certain entities can submit a warrant article, but Mr. Benson thinks that Mr. Cunningham’s response was not understood. Mr. Benson noted that the Committee could make a recommendation, which the Board could adopt and submit as a warrant article, but the Board would not be obligated to do so. The Committee could also ask ten residents to sponsor it, but warrant articles proposing a change to the Zoning Map and submitted by citizen petitioners are subject to the requirement to notify owners and immediate abutters of all affected properties by certified mail, which is expensive and could be difficult for the committee to fund. He is concerned about this committee moving forward under the impression that it can file a warrant article.

The Chair noted that the Town has not had a Motion to Commit in recent memory, and the process is unclear. She would like to follow up with Town Counsel, the Town Moderator, and the Town Clerk to find out if a Motion to Commit must be approved by the Attorney General like other warrant articles, and what the process for that approval would be. She would also like confirmation from Town Counsel that the committee as constituted by the Article 41 Motion to Commit would not have the authority to submit an article to the Town Meeting Warrant. Mr. Benson said that he would follow up with Mr. Cunningham about these issues. If the Motion to Commit will not be sent to the Attorney General, Mr. Benson would also like to find out if the Board can request an opinion from the Attorney General on the issue.

The Chair said that the Board should move forward with determining a candidate to be the Board’s designee while waiting to determine the legal issues raised by Mr. Benson. She asked if any Board members would be interested in serving on the committee themselves. Ms. Korman-Houston said that if another appropriate designee is not found, she would consider it. The Chair suggested asking the citizen working group that worked on a proposal for an Affordable Housing Overlay District to the Board in 2024 and early 2025 if any of them would be interested in being the Board’s designee. She specifically mentioned Sanjay Newton, who did a great deal of work with that citizen group, has extensive knowledge about the topic, and has worked with the Board before. Mr. Benson said that Mr. Newton would be a good choice, but he would prefer to ask the group as a whole who they would like to be the Board’s designee. Mr. Benson also expressed some hesitancy, given that the proposal created by the citizen working group was not acceptable to the Board without significant changes, and he said that he would not want the committee to start out with an idea that the Board could not accept. Mr. Lau and Ms. Korman-Houston both agreed that Mr. Newton would be a good choice. Mr. Revilak volunteered to follow up with Mr. Newton and the rest of the citizen working group. He also said that he would be interested in being the Board designee to the Committee as a back-up to Ms. Korman-Houston.

Mr. Revilak noted that proposed zoning bylaw changes often come from a committee that dedicates a significant amount of time to studying the issue and crafting a proposal to be sent to the Board, which may or may not accept the proposal or may make significant changes, which can be a frustrating process for those who put in so much time and work. He would advocate for a process that is more fully integrated with the Board. A committee like the Affordable Housing Overlay Committee would ideally meet regularly with the Board for working sessions, so that it is possible to make small changes throughout the process, rather than the Board being given a proposal at the end of the process that they feel the need to change significantly. The other Board members agreed that regular joint meetings could make it more likely that the final proposal is one that the Board is willing to support and take to Town Meeting.

The Chair said that at a future meeting, she would like to review the full list of committees in which the Board has a role or that report to the Board.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 3 – Discussion of Board Retreat Scheduling.**

Ms. Ricker suggested that the Board consider using the retreat as an opportunity for residents with ideas about warrant articles to have an informal conversation with the Board.

The Chair suggested including a working session about rezoning the Arlington Heights and East Arlington business districts as part of the retreat.

Mr. Benson noted that the retreat has always been an important opportunity for the Board to discuss what warrant articles they want to bring to the upcoming Town Meeting.

Mr. Lau said that he would like to discuss possible topics for a joint meeting with the Select Board.

The Chair proposed September 27, October 18, and October 19, as possible Board retreat dates. She asked that the Board members come to the next meeting prepared to choose a date.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 4 – Discussion of 882 Massachusetts Avenue.**

Ms. Ricker noted that the Board has had several ongoing concerns with this project, including the exterior vents, the color of the first-floor storefront metal, signage and window coverage, the color of the trim painting, the exterior lighting, provision of usable open space, and bicycle parking. DPCD staff has been in close contact with the project's representative, and it has been challenging to convey the importance of meeting the requirements and conditions in the originally issued permits. They have been slowly responding to communication from the staff.

Mr. Benson noted that the approved plans show two areas of short-term bicycle parking, but only one has been installed. The developer also agreed to install a six-foot-wide white thermoplastic crosswalk across the driveway, which has also not been installed. He also noted that the current commercial tenant has two large signs in the window which have not been approved. He also noted that the lighting plan they submitted was insufficient; it showed four lights but did not indicate what type of lights or whether they are dark-sky compliant. He also noted that the applicant originally submitted a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan (approved on May 19, 2022) committing to three actions to reduce demand for parking: charge tenants a fee of \$50 per month for parking in the lot (except for tenants of deed-restricted affordable units), provide a BlueBikes membership to all tenants, and provide covered bicycle parking and storage. It is not clear if they have done any of those things.

Mr. Revilak noted that on the west side of the building, the existing retaining wall was to remain, with the chain link fence removed within the concrete wall. However, when he recently visited the building, the chain link fence remained, and he saw no concrete wall.

Mr. Lau expressed frustration that the developer has been saying that they will address many of these issues for a long time without anything happening. He would like the developer to come before the Board to address these issues. The Chair said that staff has communicated with the developer about many of these issues, but the Board has not sent an official letter with every issue listed. Mr. Revilak supported the idea of putting all the expectations in writing. Ms. Korman-Houston said that any written communication should include repercussions, including possible withdrawing the Special Permit. The Chair said that she would work with DPCD staff to write such a letter, including a requirement that they attend an upcoming Board meeting with an action plan including dates by which each of the issues will be addressed, and she would share a draft with the rest of the Board and with Director Mike Ciampa of the Inspectional Services Department (ISD).

Ms. Ricker noted that this development team has another project under construction in Town, and a third due to begin construction, and it would be good to pay attention to how those projects develop and whether they diverge from approved plans. The Chair said that she would like to meet with Ms. Ricker and Mr. Ciampa to review the plans and permits and identify potential deviations from approved plans before sending the letter regarding 882 Mass Ave. She requested that the last set of approved plans and decision letter for the project currently under constructions be circulated to the Board.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 5 – Open Forum.**

The Chair opened the floor to the public.

- Chris Strauper, 898 Mass Ave – He asked who is responsible for snow clearance at the bus stop in front of 882 Mass Ave. Ms. Ricker said that snow removal is usually the responsibility of the property owner, but she would have to confirm that with Mr. Ciampa. Mr. Strauper said that snow removal at that location has been uneven for many years.

Seeing no one else who wished to speak, the Chair closed Open Forum.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 6 – New Business.**

The Chair said that after the recent hearing on 259 Broadway, she followed up with JoAnn Robinson, the Chair of the Historical Commission. They discussed having the Historical Commission review the proposal for 259 Broadway, specifically for the proposed exterior second means of egress, before the project comes back before the Redevelopment Board. The next Historical Commission meeting will be either June 30 or July 7. Ms. Ricker confirmed that the applicant is in touch with Ms. Robinson and is aware that they will need to attend the next Historical Commission meeting.

Ms. Ricker said that Stantec, the Comprehensive Plan consultant, will attend the next meeting of the AmpUp Advisory Committee, on Thursday, June 26, and will provide a report about the results of the survey that has been available on the website.

Mr. Revilak said that he attended a conference put on by a group called Strong Towns, which focuses on allowing communities to evolve while being fiscally sustainable. They did financial analysis looking what it would take to do long-term infrastructure replacement and comparing it to tax revenue to see what is feasible. Some municipalities have looked at adding small business districts in areas that generate less tax revenue in order to raise more funds and enable better infrastructure.

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.**

Documents used:

Agenda Item 2	Art 41 Revised Dennis Motion to Commit Envision Arlington MGL c 40A sec 5
Agenda Item 4	882-892 Mass Ave Decision and Signature Page 2020 882 Mass Ave Exterior Photos 882 Mass Ave Lighting Plan 882 Mass Ave Layout & Materials Plan C-102
Correspondence	D. Seltzer – 1500 Mass Ave – 6/4/2025 D. Seltzer – 80 Broadway – 6/9/2025 J. Gersh – 882 Mass Ave – 6/15/2025 W. Evans – 882 Mass Ave – 6/15/2025