

Arlington Redevelopment Board
Monday, July 21, 2025, at 7:30 PM
Town Hall Annex, Second Floor Conference Room
730 Massachusetts Ave, 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 (continued from June 16, 2025).**

Ms. Ricker explained that this application is for the renovation of a gas station at 125 Broadway, a project which would ordinarily be within the Board's jurisdiction. However, the property has four existing variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), and the work they propose to do would require an amendment to at least one of the existing variances and likely an additional variance as well. As a result, DPCD staff has determined that this project would more appropriately be heard by the ZBA, as the Redevelopment Board cannot modify existing variances or issue new ones. DPCD staff recommends that Docket 3854 be closed, that fees paid by the applicant be refunded, and that the applicant be instructed to submit an application to the ZBA.

Mr. Benson noted that the applicant might need a sign permit, which would need to be reviewed by DPCD or heard by the Redevelopment Board, not the ZBA. Ms. Ricker said that the signage is not yet determined, but when it is, the applicant will submit an application for a sign permit.

The Chair asked for a motion to close the hearing for Docket 3854, 125 Broadway. Mr. Lau so moved, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted unanimously in favor.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 2 – Public Hearing: Docket #3862, 126 Broadway.**

Ms. Ricker explained that the applicant has requested to continue the hearing to a future meeting.

Mr. Benson asked if the applicant held a pre-application meeting with DPCD staff, as required by the Board's Rules and Regulations. Ms. Ricker replied that they did hold such a meeting, but it was not clear at that meeting how many units the applicant intended to propose, and they have asked for additional time to make changes to their proposal.

Mr. Lau asked Ms. Ricker to notify the applicant that the Board will expect to see a SketchUp model and renderings that show the proposed building in context with surrounding buildings.

The Chair asked for a motion to continue the hearing for Docket 3862, 126 Broadway, to August 11, 2025. Mr. Lau so moved, Mr. Benson seconded, and the Board voted unanimously in favor.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 3 – Discussion of 1207-1211 Massachusetts Avenue.**

James Doherty, developer of the project at 1207-1211 Mass Ave, explained that he is continuing to explore possible changes to the original proposal. The last time he met with the Board, he shared a few different options, and the Board gave him feedback about them, and he has no further information to share at this time.

Mr. Lau asked the status of the current Special Permit. Mr. Doherty responded that he believes that the permit is good through sometime in 2027. His expectation is that they will have a clear idea of what the project will be before the permit expires.

Mr. Revilak said that one of the options under consideration discussed at the last meeting was a hotel with a larger building envelope toward the Mass Ave side, and another option was changing to residential. He asked if Mr. Doherty is still considering the option of a hotel. Mr. Doherty said that he would still like to make a hotel work, but he is trying to figure out how much can be changed without triggering a new Special Permit hearing. The Chair said that even if the project remains a hotel, any modifications to the size would require a new Special Permit.

Ms. Korman-Houston asked what activities have taken place over the last six months to determine the feasibility of the different options. Mr. Doherty replied that he has worked with the architect, and they are also working with the Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which has increased in recent plans. They are considering expanding toward Mass Ave and adding additional height.

The Chair asked what the timeline is. Mr. Doherty said that they hope to have a decision as to whether they will propose a hotel or a residential building by December 2025. He said that he plans to contact Ms. Ricker for a meeting to discuss plans in the fall. The Chair said that the Board would like to meet with him again in December 2025 or early in 2026.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 4 – Artist Live/Work Discussion.**

Ms. Ricker said that Katie Luczai, Economic Development Coordinator, has been working with the Arlington Commission for Arts and Culture (ACAC) to develop a draft agreement related to Artist Live/Work.

Ms. Luczai said that Artist Live/Work was passed at 2021 Annual Town Meeting. It allows the construction of residential units in areas zoned Industrial for artistic creative production with a Special Permit. The bylaw includes three elements: a certification process, a set of standards and guidelines, and an agreement. She has been working with ACAC to create those three elements. Because ACAC does not have an enforcement mechanism, they propose that the standards and guidelines be included in any Special Permits issued by the Board. ACAC has created a draft agreement, shared with the Board in advance of this meeting.

Ms. Korman-Houston said that one of the implementation challenges with Artist Live/Work programs in Boston has been mandatory programming, in which Artist Live/Work buildings would have to offer public programming. She noted that the draft agreement does not include such a requirement and said that if it were included, the Board would be unable to enforce it. Ms. Luczai said that given the fact that Arlington already has cultural and artistic spaces, and its limited availability of housing stock, including a programming requirement did not seem appropriate for Arlington.

Ms. Korman-Houston noted that the Board members are not experts in the arts or the type of spaces needed for artistic production. She asked who would be providing guidance to the Board on those matters. Ms. Luczai said that ACAC will consult with the Board to the best of their ability, particularly on the question of who qualifies as an artist. Specific proposals might require the Board to seek other expert advice.

Mr. Lau assumed that Artist Live/Work spaces would include some sort of public space to display the art, but he does not see that in the draft agreement. Ms. Korman-Houston said that Boston does not necessarily require public space for programming, but it does require programming facilitated by the artists in the Artist Live/Work community.

Mr. Lau noted that the draft agreement requires that a participant have been a practicing artist for at least three years and be recertified every six years. He suggested reducing the first requirement to two years, so that newer artists would be eligible. He also suggested reducing the recertification requirement to every four to five years, so that people who have stopped producing art are not taking up limited space as part of the program. Ms. Luczai said that she would take those suggestions back to the ACAC. She also noted that the agreement could be changed even after the program is started.

Mr. Benson asked how ACAC chose three years as the required length of time that participants must have been practicing artists. Ms. Luczai responded that it is based on the certification processes created by other municipalities.

Mr. Benson noted that the agreement is unclear about whether an artist who has been practicing for less than three years but who has received a grant or fellowship would qualify.

Mr. Benson asked about the process. Will a developer apply for a special permit using the Artist Live/Work guidelines and the Board be required to determine if they met all the standards? Or would an artist approach ACAC, which would

certify them as appropriate to be included in the program, and then a developer separately apply for a special permit for a project including that artist? Ms. Ricker said that the process is not yet clear. Such a project would likely have to undergo some sort of internal review before going before the Board, perhaps including DPCD staff and an ACAC representative.

Mr. Benson noted that the language in the agreement refers to “recommended guidelines” and “general guidelines,” which are not enforceable, and he expressed concern about the Board’s ability to enforce appropriate standards. The Chair said that her understanding from Town Counsel is that the Board can enforce guidelines, but not recommendations. Mr. Benson suggested removing the word “recommended” and changing “general guidelines” to “general requirements.”

Mr. Benson noted that Boston has faced situations in which an artist purchases multiple live/work spaces and combines them into one, reducing the number of overall spaces available. He suggested giving some consideration to how Arlington should deal with that situation.

Mr. Benson said that once a special permit is issued, enforcement generally becomes the responsibility of the Inspectional Services Department (ISD). The permit should reference the fact that the artist(s) would need to enter into an agreement with the Town. The Chair said that she has been speaking with Mike Ciampa, Director of ISD, about creating a position for a shared enforcement officer between DPCD and ISD, and enforcement of the Artist Live/Work agreements could be part of that job description.

The Chair noted that under Design Standards, number 13 looks unfinished, and she suggested that Ms. Luczai take another look at it.

The Chair suggested that the performance standards be more defined and prescriptive. For example, the agreement requires high quality ventilation, but it does not specify exactly what that means, so the Board would have to determine how to interpret it during the review process. She would prefer that the performance standards be clarified.

Mr. Lau asked that information about traffic and parking be added to the standards. Mr. Benson noted that the Industrial zone already has parking standards. Mr. Lau said that artistic programming or deliveries of materials might lead to increased traffic not anticipated in the zoning bylaws. The Chair noted that the design standards already include requirements about entry and exit doors and loading zones. She also noted that each property is different, so she does not think that it is a good idea to be too specific.

Mr. Benson noted that the fourth performance standard addresses how the project will be designed and operated. Design refers to the building plans and development, which can be reviewed and assessed by the Board and ISD. But the space will ultimately be operated by the artist, and the Board is not in a position to assess how that happens. He suggested that anything relating to operation be moved to a separate agreement with the artist.

The Chair suggested a wording change to the section regarding application materials.

Mr. Revilak suggested a grammatical change to the section regarding notification of change of use.

Mr. Revilak noted that the requirements of different art forms are extremely different. The space needs to be flexible enough to be adapted to a variety of uses, which is often the case with industrial space. The standards should be broad enough to be adaptable.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 5 – Discussion of 455 Massachusetts Avenue.**

Ms. Ricker explained that this project has been under construction for about two and a half years. Work was stalled, but it is picking up again, and the developer is eager to complete it. There are some outstanding issues, including façade materials and façade design.

Mr. Lau said that the Board should follow up with a letter clarifying what exactly was approved. He would like to get clarity about the installation of windows; he believes that the number and location of windows installed does not match the Special Permit. He would also like the Board to discuss whether they are okay with the brick veneer that has been installed, as it is not what they approved. The Chair noted that after the Board issued the Special Permit, the applicant

went to the Historical Commission, which changed the proposed façade to a brick veneer. Mr. Benson noted that in the Special Permit, special condition 9 said “The Owner shall provide a final plan with the required building materials as approved by the Arlington Historical Commission to DPCD for approval.” Mr. Benson noted that the second-floor façade and the second-floor doors and windows also do not match what the Board originally approved. Other Board members noted multiple significant differences in what has been constructed versus what the Board approved.

The Chair suggested that the Board ask the applicant to come to a future meeting to discuss the plans and elevations, comparing what was approved with the Special Permit with what has been constructed to date. The Board will need to identify what they will accept and what the applicant will be required to remediate. Mr. Lau said that he would like the architect to come as well as the developer, because the architectural design is so different from what was approved. Ms. Ricker said that the Town Manager Jim Feeney and Town Counsel Mike Cunningham have been in contact with the applicant’s counsel.

Ms. Korman-Houston said that the Board is having difficulty with non-compliance from developers who then return with other projects. She asked if the Board has the authority to withhold a special permit based on a developer’s non-compliance with a special permit on a previous project. Ms. Ricker said that that is a question for Town Counsel. She noted that DPCD review has been added to ISD’s process prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy. Mr. Lau noted that many properties are owned by their own LLC, so the ownership is technically different, even if the architect or developer is the same as on other projects. Ms. Korman-Houston said that the developer is generally legally attached to the LLC. The Chair said that she and Ms. Ricker would discuss these issues with Town Counsel.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 6 – Discussion of 882 Massachusetts Avenue.**

Ms. Ricker explained that DPCD received a letter from the first-floor commercial tenant of 882 Mass Ave, which described that the transparency had been put in the window due to the nature of her business as a physical therapist. Ms. Ricker said that the tenant has also applied for a sign permit, which meets zoning requirements. The Chair said that the tenant should submit a sign permit application that includes both the proposed sign and the window coverings, and that the window coverings need to include patterning or color that will be appealing from the street.

Mr. Benson said that he would like to reopen the Special Permit for 882 Mass Ave. He would also like more information about how the first-floor space is being used. If some of it is a waiting room, that part might not require privacy. He also said that he thinks that the sign permit and the window transparency should be dealt with separately, because they are separate parts of the bylaw. He is fine with DPCD staff approving the sign permit if it is within zoning requirements, but he thinks that the Board should approve any window coverings that reduce transparency. The Chair said that the signs and the window transparency are generally dealt with by the tenant, whereas the overall special permit is the responsibility of the owner and developer. She thinks it makes more sense for the tenant to come before the Board with a sign application that includes window coverings. Signs and window coverings can complement each other, so she would like to evaluate them together.

Mr. Lau asked when the special permit and building permit for 190-192 Mass Ave are due to expire. Nothing seems to have happened with that property for a long time, and he would like to know what the current status is.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 7 – Affordable Housing Overlay Committee designee.**

Ms. Ricker said that two people have indicated interest in serving on the AHOC as the Board’s designee. One has experience with planning and housing development, and the other is an affordable housing attorney. Ms. Ricker asked what information the Board would like to see from people who are interested. Ms. Korman-Houston said that she would like to see resumes from those two people. The Chair said that she would also like to see letters of interest from both candidates. The other Board members agreed. Mr. Revilak explained that both candidates were part of the group that put together an AHO proposal prior to 2025 Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Benson said that he spoke with Town Counsel Mike Cunningham, and they agreed that the AHOC does not have the legal authority to file a warrant article, although the Motion to Commit allows them to do so. The Board’s designee will need to convey that information to the Committee, so that they understand what they are legally allowed to do. The Committee can gather the signatures of 10 residents to submit a warrant article, but in that case, they would be subject

to the bylaw requirement to notify owners and immediate abutters of all properties to be rezoned by certified mail, which could be prohibitively expensive. They can also bring a proposed warrant article to the Board, and if the Board decides to take it up themselves, they would not be subject to the same notification requirements. But the Board would not be obligated to take up the proposal and submit it as a warrant article to Town Meeting.

The Chair said that the Committee should also be informed that DPCD and the Board do not have resources available to support their work. Town resources to support the Board's work are already limited, and no funds or other resources were identified for this effort at the time of the filing of the Motion to Commit.

Mr. Benson said that he would like the Board's designee to meet with the Board on a regular basis. Mr. Revilak said that he would like the entire AHOC to meet with the Board regularly, to avoid a situation in which the Committee's ultimate proposal is not something the Board can support.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 8 – Board Retreat.**

The Chair said that the Board had previously identified three possible dates for the Board Retreat: September 27, October 18, and October 19. The Board agreed to schedule the Retreat for Sunday, October 19, 2025.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 9 – Open Forum.**

The Board opened the floor to the public. Seeing no one who wished to speak, she closed the floor.

The Chair moved to **Agenda Item 10 – New Business.**

Mr. Lau asked about the status of the tree across the street from 882 Mass Ave. Ms. Ricker replied that Ms. Suarez is working with the owner to replace the tree.

Mr. Revilak said that the property at 1341-1347 Mass Ave, which used to be a post office, sold recently. He asked if anyone had approached DPCD about developing the property, and Ms. Ricker replied that she has not heard anything.

Ms. Korman-Houston said that the Massachusetts Zoning Atlas has been launched. It is an online tool that maps the zoning regulations for every jurisdiction and every zoning district in the state.

The Chair asked Ms. Ricker if she knows what is happening with 1306-1308 Mass Ave, for which the Board approved a permit for Farina Roofing. It has been boarded up for quite some time. Ms. Ricker said that she would look into it.

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 9:05 pm.**

Documents used:

Agenda Item 1	Memo to ARB re 125 Broadway – 07-15-2025
Agenda Item 4	Artist Live Work ARB Memo with materials
Agenda Item 6	Letter from Activate to Redevelopment Board – 07-08-2025
Correspondence	1500 Mass Ave, Seltzer, D – 07182025 1207-1211 Mass Ave - Ruderman, M – 07182025 126 Broadway, Cullinane – 07212025