



Joint Meeting:
Arlington Select Board (SB) and Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB)
Monday, September 16, 2024, at 7:15 PM
School Committee Room
Arlington Public Schools District Office, 14 Mill Brook Drive, 2nd Floor, Arlington, MA 02476
Meeting Minutes

This meeting was recorded by ACMi.

REDEVELOPMENT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Rachel Zsembery (Chair), Eugene Benson, Shaina Korman-Houston, Kin Lau, Stephen Revilak

SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Stephen DeCoursey (Chair), Diane Mahon (Vice Chair), Lenard Diggins (remote), John Hurd

STAFF: Jim Feeney, Town Manager; Michael Cunningham, Town Counsel; Ashley Maher, Select Board Administrator; Claire Ricker, Director of Planning and Community Development

Mr. DeCoursey and Ms. Zsembery called the meeting to order.

Mr. DeCoursey stated that tonight's meeting is hybrid, with the remote portion conducted via Zoom, and that it is being recorded by ACMi.

The Board members and Staff representatives introduced themselves.

Agenda Item 1 – Arlington Heights Business District.

Ms. Zsembery explained that the ARB is currently working on a warrant article for 2025 Annual Town Meeting to rezone the Arlington Heights Business District. In 2019, the ARB and DPCD hired a consultant and worked with the Arlington Heights community to create the Arlington Heights Neighborhood Action plan. The neighborhood is currently a mix of different residential and business zones, and the plan proposes creating a more cohesive business district to allow for more effective redevelopment. During the process of working on MBTA Communities, it became clear that it would be helpful to define the boundaries of all three of Arlington's major business districts: Arlington Heights, Capitol Square/East Arlington, and Arlington Center.

Ms. Ricker said that the Arlington Heights Neighborhood Advisory Committee, which worked on the Neighborhood Action Plan, has been reconvened. They've met twice and had a table at the Spring Fling Festival in the Heights, and they will also have a booth at Town Day on September 21. They are planning a community meeting in the Heights for October or early November, with the idea that the zoning proposal would go to the ARB in November or early December for consideration.

Ms. Zsembery said that the Economic Development Coordinator shared with the ARB that the major challenges facing businesses who would like to rent space in Arlington are commercial spaces that are too small and sometimes not in good enough condition. The hope is that the rezoning plan will enable some smaller parcels to be combined, which is currently difficult if two adjoining parcels are zoned differently. The ARB also wants to comprehensively look at parking.

Mr. Hurd said that reconsidering the Heights Business District makes sense and that parking is one of the biggest challenges there. If the hope is to bring in more businesses, adequate parking must be considered. He would like to see a parking study for the Heights, to see if metering makes sense.

Ms. Mahon said that she has heard from several people who live over the storefronts in the Heights, which includes a lot of affordable housing. They are concerned about whether the housing will continue to be affordable. They have asked her if the Town can put a safeguard into place to deal with what happens if the buildings are redeveloped and the apartment rents are higher, but the apartments don't get filled. Ms. Zsembery replied that the bylaw does include inclusionary zoning requiring a certain amount of affordable housing in larger developments. She also said that the ARB can consider offering bonuses to developers in exchange for additional affordable housing or other things that the community wants. DPCD and the Arlington Heights Neighborhood Advisory Committee are collecting information about community goals for redevelopment, so ideas for incentivizing developers to meet those goals can be developed. Mr. Lau said that he would like to see tax incentives offered for developments with more affordable housing than required, as well as those with larger and/or renovated retail spaces and other community goals. Tax incentives could be offered to businesses as well, to help with their up-front costs in opening a storefront.

Mr. Benson said that Ms. Mahon's question doesn't really have a good answer. The ARB can put incentives in the zoning bylaw, but the owners may not take them. If a property owner redevelops a property, the current tenants will probably have to leave, even if the development ultimately does include affordable housing. The Town could look into creating a relocation fund for low-income tenants forced to move by redevelopment.

Ms. Korman-Houston said that the state has regulations for units with expiring use covenants. Some members of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board have expertise in this area.

Mr. DeCoursey said tax incentives would involve multiple departments and can be quite complicated, but he hopes they would all be open to examining the possibility.

Mr. Diggins noted that the Select Board is largely responsible for transportation. If redevelopment does happen, and the numbers of both businesses and residential units increases, the SB needs to think about how to get people in and out of the area. Options for making Park Avenue safer are already under consideration, which will probably mean making it narrower and slower. He would like to see more transit in the area, whether that is increased public transit or some sort of shuttle service. They could also consider shared vehicles, perhaps on the MBTA bus turnaround site, which would decrease the need for people to own cars, as well as the need to park on Mass Ave. He would like to work with the MBTA to improve travel on Mass Ave for buses.

Mr. Benson said that any redevelopment plans for the Heights need to consider the bus turnaround. He asked if the SB has had any conversations with the MBTA about freeing up the site. Mr. DeCoursey said that they have not, but they are very aware of how underutilized that site is. Ms. Zsembery noted that the SB sent a letter to the MBTA on behalf of the Town regarding the redevelopment of the Alewife MBTA stop, and she hopes that can be the beginning of a conversation that could also include the MBTA turnaround.

Mr. Hurd suggested reducing or eliminating the minimum parking requirements for residential units within the Heights Business District. Parking minimums restrict what can be built, and he thinks that if a developer is willing to take the risk of building a development without parking, they should be able to do so. The SB has heard from residents that they don't want to promote policies that bring more cars into the Town.

Ms. Zsembery said that parking has been a significant topic of discussion for the ARB. Not having overnight street parking makes many projects challenging, if not infeasible.

Agenda Item 2 – Overnight Parking.

Mr. DeCoursey gave an update on the overnight parking pilot program, which started in 2023. The SB started the program because they had so many hearings in which residents asked for parking waivers. The pilot program has been expanded for another year, through June 2025, and they have increased the number of permits to 150, on a first-come first-served basis. 78 permits have been issued thus far. To get a waiver, a resident previously had to show hardship, but with the pilot program, they only have to show proof of residence and pay a fee of \$1 per night. The Board is

unanimously in support of the pilot program and will revisit extending it next year. Mr. Hurd noted that the current iteration of the pilot program was developed over the course of many meetings. It has been very successful, and it has proven to be popular without overwhelming the Town with many additional cars parking overnight.

Mr. Revilak noted that the Capitol Theater has five or six parking spaces. According to the zoning requirements for minimum parking, the theater and the residential uses would require over 300 parking spaces. The largest parking reduction the ARB could grant would be to 75 spaces. The building has been around for 100 years, and the business works successfully without the parking. Requiring parking minimums leads to a lot of parking spaces, many of which are unused much of the time. He thinks that there is opportunity to reduce or eliminate parking minimums, especially in commercial areas. Changing the requirements will take a long time, but the Town can do more by eliminating or reducing parking minimums and allowing for more curbside parking.

Mr. DeCoursey noted that there are two issues being discussed – reducing parking minimum requirements and dealing with the overnight street parking ban. Mr. Benson said that the zoning bylaw currently requires one parking space for each residential unit, regardless of size. The first 3,000 square feet in a mixed-use building doesn't require any parking at all. The ARB can waive the parking requirements completely for businesses. If a developer gives them a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan, the ARB can reduce the required parking for residential by up to 75%. A question that has frequently come up is changing the zoning bylaw to require no parking at all. Mr. Benson could only support that change if those who need a car have the option of parking it on the street overnight. Right now, eliminating parking minimums would lead to people either illegally parking on the street overnight or choosing not to live in Arlington at all. He knows people who have moved into Arlington without a car, thinking they would rely on the T, but then have gotten jobs that aren't accessible by public transportation, so they need a car and a place to park it overnight. The pilot program is great, but as long as it's a pilot, it's not a guarantee.

Mr. Hurd noted that the pilot program doesn't allow for daytime parking. Someone living in an area with parking meters or two- or four-hour parking who got an overnight parking permit would still have to deal with where they could park during the day.

Mr. Diggins agreed with Mr. Benson about the importance of getting certainty on the future of the pilot program. He noted that some people may not want to apply for a permit until they know that they will continue to be able to do so in future years. He also noted that it might make sense to reduce the price. He would also like to see a program with shared vehicles.

Mr. Lau noted that some municipalities have residential parking that goes from something like 6:00 pm to 7:00 am, but during the day, those spaces are two- or four-hour parking. That is essentially a shared parking program, enabling the same spaces to be used by residents at night and by business customers during the day.

Agenda Item 3 – Potential Expansion of Parking Benefits Districts.

Mr. DeCoursey said that the Town has one Parking Benefits District (PBD), in the Center. Mr. Feeney would like to evaluate the potential for expansion to one or both of the other two main business areas. The parking meters in Arlington Center have generated revenue that has been put into streetscape enhancements that would otherwise not be feasible. Business owners in the Center appreciate the program because of the improvements it has enabled. Those sorts of improvements can't be done in other parts of Town. Before implementing parking meters in other areas of Town, we would need to study the potential neighborhood impacts. Arlington Center has two relatively large parking lots, so overflow from street parking does not impact the residential neighborhoods, which could be an issue in Arlington Heights and East Arlington.

Mr. Benson said that the parking meters themselves in the Center are confusing, and he recommended considering the type of parking kiosks in use in Belmont Center. Mr. Feeney also noted that having a meter at every parking space, rather than kiosks which can be used for multiple spaces, requires maintenance of all the meters, including digging them out when there has been a significant amount of snow.

Mr. Revilak agreed with Mr. Feeney that the decision to expand metered parking into the Heights and East Arlington should be based on study. He also noted that people want parking to be convenient, available, and free. But in high-traffic areas, it is only possible to meet two of those goals. PBDs, if priced correctly to incentivize turnover, generally

enable parking to be convenient and available, while those who want to park for longer, such as employees, can choose to park on side streets which are available and free, but less convenient. A study would help determine whether it would be possible to implement a PBD in the Heights and/or East Arlington in a way that would maximize use.

Mr. Diggins said that he was in favor of expanding the PBD, especially in East Arlington. He said that it is also important to consider bicycle traffic. A study should consider how to better configure parking to enable safer travel for cyclists. He also thinks that it would be possible to implement a permit system allowing employees to park on side streets.

Agenda Item 4 – Affordable Housing Overlay District.

Ms. Zsembery explained that a working group came to the ARB in early 2024 with a proposal for an as of right affordable housing overlay. The ARB recommended that the group engage in a much more public process to understand the full range of implications for the Town. They agreed and did not bring their proposal to 2024 Annual Town Meeting, and they are currently working on proposal that will mostly likely be brought to 2025 Annual Town Meeting. She noted that this proposal will be challenging without an overnight parking program. It will also challenge some of the decisions the Town has already made with regard to the Multi-Family Housing Overlay Districts being implemented as a result of the MBTA Communities Law, as well as what the Town hopes to accomplish by rezoning the business districts. However, there are still ways to make the proposal work. She explained that the working group hopes to provide as of right development through Site Plan Review rather than Environmental Design Review for any project that is primarily affordable housing. They are not planning to restrict residential development in the business districts, which is a concern of the ARB given the overwhelming support in Town for maintaining and further developing the business districts. The working group has also asked that all parking requirements be eliminated, which some members of the ARB also have concerns with without more information about the future of overnight parking.

Ms. Ricker said that the working group is working through questions about levels of affordability. She noted that one of the sites mentioned repeatedly is the Walgreens site. She noted that a future East Arlington Business District boundary could perhaps mirror the borders of a PBD boundary, which she hopes the two Boards could come to agreement about.

Mr. Lau said that he does not want to create one section of Town where all the affordable housing is, so he thinks that the Affordable Housing Overlay District should not have particular boundaries – affordable housing should be built so that it is distributed throughout the Town.

Mr. DeCoursey noted that Cambridge has a similar overlay district, and he asked if other communities do as well. Mr. Revilak replied that Cambridge is definitely not the only one, and he believes Somerville and Boston do as well.

Mr. Diggins said that he supports the idea of an Affordable Housing Overlay District. He does want to protect business districts, but he thinks that can happen with mixed-use requirements, so that affordable housing can be developed above businesses. He also noted that increased housing in business districts would provide an opportunity for shared vehicle programs, which could include a program allowing shared vehicles to be parked on the street at all times.

Agenda Item 5 – Liquor License Control.

Mr. DeCoursey said that the SB has heard of situations in which potential businesses have chosen not to locate in Arlington because of difficulties with liquor licenses. He noted that current regulations require that no more than two alcoholic beverages per person may be served without food. He asked Ms. Ricker if DPCD staff is finding that the current requirements for liquor licenses are proving to be barriers to new businesses, and if so, what the specific issues are.

Ms. Ricker replied that a wine and cheese shop recently wanted to open a location in Arlington Center but was unable to because no package store licenses were available. DPCD has also had extensive conversations with a brewery that would like to open in Arlington but has struggled with the requirement that if a business serves alcohol, it must also serve food. One of the biggest problems is that all-alcohol restaurants must have a 50-seat minimum. Most of the Town's available restaurant storefronts are too small for that size restaurant.

Mr. Hurd said that he has always been somewhat uncomfortable with the two-drink maximum without food. He noted that some business owners like it, because it encourages people to order food, but it is very hard to enforce. He thinks that bartenders and restaurant owners have the duty to make sure that they do not serve intoxicated people regardless

of the two-drink rule, and he is not sure that the rule makes sense, especially if it is an impediment to a business like a brewery.

Ms. Mahon agreed with Mr. Hurd. She noted that at the time that the Select Board began to allow restaurants to serve alcohol, the two-drink rule was introduced as a way to enable one particular Board member to agree to allow any alcohol. She would be willing to revisit it. She is also open to reassessing the 50-seat minimum for an all-alcohol restaurant. She asked the ARB and Ms. Ricker what opportunities Arlington has lost out on because of the two-drink rule and/or the 50-seat minimum. She also noted that in asking other municipalities how to get a thriving industrial zone, she has heard that it is important to tie in with flag companies and to use CDBG funds to incentivize companies that represent a gap in the types of business that are currently present.

Mr. Diggins said that is also in favor of revisiting all the alcohol requirements and restrictions. When they were put in place, people had significant safety concerns and wanted to enact policies that would not lead to impaired driving. Times and standards have changed, and the changes being considered carry less of that risk now. He would like to make simple changes that make life easier for business owners.

Mr. DeCoursey noted that the Town currently has 13 all-alcohol restaurants, with a remaining 7 licenses available for a total of 20. He does not want to create a situation in which there is significantly more demand for those licenses, such that they have all been issued and are being sold for exorbitant amounts, as has happened in Boston. Ms. Maher noted that the town has an unlimited amount of beer and wine licenses, and those have a 19-seat minimum. Mr. DeCoursey noted that the Town has no package store licenses available to issue, but there are two licenses in use for stores that are not currently open.

Mr. Feeney noted that if the seat minimum for all-alcohol licenses were reduced, it is likely that currently existing beer and wine restaurants would apply for the remaining licenses, more so than new businesses looking to open.

Mr. DeCoursey noted that elsewhere, many breweries do not serve food themselves but either bring in food trucks or encourage delivery from nearby restaurants. Eliminating the two-drink minimum would not necessarily lead to more people drinking alcohol without eating, but it would enable a business like a brewery to thrive without serving food while partnering with a business that does serve food.

Ms. Zsemberly noted that the ARB would like to be able to be more flexible in supporting creative ideas that come before the Board, whether it's tasting rooms, breweries, or other businesses.

Mr. Cunningham said that as the local licensing authority, the SB has significant discretion to deal with these issues.

Agenda Item 6 – Signage Enforcement.

Ms. Zsemberly said that the ARB would like to identify ways that the two Boards might better ensure that businesses follow the bylaw requirement regarding the submission and approval of signage. An increasing number of nonconforming signs have been installed without the approval of DPCD or the ARB, and in some cases without the approval of the Inspectional Services Department (ISD). When new businesses go before the SB, conditions placed on the approval include appropriate review of the signage. The ARB believes that to improve the business districts, it is important to ensure that signage meets quality and quantity standards and that it is permanent rather than temporary.

Mr. Hurd said that the SB is pretty clear with new businesses about what is and isn't allowed, but the enforcement process is not clear. The Director of ISD has said in the past that ISD does not have the resources to focus on signage enforcement. He would like to come up with an enforcement mechanism. Businesses that in are in conformance are at a disadvantage compared to those who put up whatever signage they want.

Mr. DeCoursey said that the problem generally happens after the SB approves a business license. The SB and ISD make clear to the applicant that all signage needs to meet bylaw requirements and go through the process of receiving a sign permit. ISD is then responsible for enforcement, but they do not have the staff or resources to focus on signs when they are responsible for so many other inspectional and permitting issues.

Ms. Ricker said that DPCD regularly receives signage applications, but businesses often put signage up without applying for a sign permit at all. One of the challenges is that the signage requirements in the bylaw are somewhat prescriptive,

so businesses often assume that their signage is in compliance when it is not. She said that ISD cannot prioritize signage enforcement with the resources they have available. She wondered if it would be appropriate to add some sort of punitive response should a new business not apply for a sign permit. The problem is with businesses that put up signs without looking at the sign code or submitting an application for a sign permit. The businesses who are in communication with DPCD are generally responsive.

Ms. Zsembery said that she, Ms. Ricker, and Mike Ciampa, Director of ISD, have discussed creating a part-time position specifically for signage enforcement, and possibly also vacant storefronts, potentially partially funded by fines for violations. Before budget season, she would like to have further discussions about creating such a position. Mr. DeCoursey noted that because signage comes under the Zoning Bylaw rather than the Town Bylaws, options for financial sanctions are limited. Mr. Feeney said that because the Town now uses the online platform OpenGov, we are better positioned than in the past to make clear to businesses what the requirements are, and businesses that go through the proper process are generally in compliance. We need to identify a way to respond when businesses circumvent the process. It is well known that if a business starts construction without a building permit, their building permit fee will be tripled, which is an effective deterrent. No such deterrent exists for installing signage without a sign permit. He noted that a sign permit is not required for a Certificate of Occupancy, so a new business can apply for all required permits, get all their inspections, get a Certificate of Occupancy, and then put up whatever sort of sign they want, at which point the Town has little recourse.

Mr. Diggins said that it is important that all types of businesses are treated equally. He would like to get more information about how much money fines for noncompliance could actually bring in, and whether that could really fund a position. He also said that he would like to know more about the impact of noncompliance and how it affects the larger business community. Ms. Zsembery said that research has been done about the effect lack of attention to signage and storefront management has on the number of vacant storefronts and on the type of establishments that seek to locate in the vicinity.

Ms. Mahon said that a significant portion of the problem is a communication issue. Many applicants, particularly small businesses, are not represented by attorneys, and she thinks that many do not understand the requirements, either because of a language barrier or because the requirements are complicated. She thinks that relevant documents and forms need to be translated into multiple languages, and translators need to be available for hearings. Mr. Feeney replied that the Town is beginning the process of having important documents translated into the most commonly spoken languages in Arlington; a number of documents have already been translated, and more are in the pipeline.

Ms. Zsembery replied that even for native English speakers, the zoning bylaw is not always easy to understand. She appreciates that ISD and DPCD consistently work with business owners and others to help them understand the requirements. She thinks that the ARB and the SB should encourage applicants coming before them to reach out to DPCD and ISD staff for clarity about what is required of them.

Mr. Lau noted that when businesses apply for a license, there is a checklist of things they need to comply with. He asked if business license renewals have a similar checklist, which would note if they are out of compliance with signage requirements, and if delaying the license renewal could be used as a way to bring them into compliance. Mr. DeCoursey replied that those questions are not asked. Mr. Feeney said that signage enforcement should be tethered to license renewal. The Town sends out renewal materials, and they could include materials explaining the signage requirements. A group could also be established to go out and look at businesses in advance of the renewal and provide comments that could be included in renewal materials.

Mr. Hurd noted applicants for new licenses are put on the SB's agenda individually, but that license renewals take place en masse at the end of the year, and the Board votes for the entire list at once. Evaluating each license renewal individually would bog down the SB's meetings. It would work better to include a checklist of issues to consider with the renewal information sent to all the businesses, and to require the businesses to certify that they are in compliance. Mr. Revilak noted that the materials sent out could include a question such as, "Have you changed signs in the last year?"

Agenda Item 7 – Cannabis Licensing.

Mr. DeCoursey explained that the Town has three licenses to issue cannabis dispensaries. A business first goes to the SB, which enters into a host community agreement, then gets approval from the Cannabis Commission, and then has to get a Special Permit from the ARB. Two licenses are currently in use. The third host community agreement has been issued to Calyx Peak. The host community agreement says that the applicant must obtain all necessary approvals, or the agreement will become null and void, but does not include a date by which the agreement will expire if they are unable to obtain the required approvals. There has been discussion about whether to expand the number of host agreements available. Calyx Peak has been stalled, and they have been unable to proceed with their licensing process. Mr. Feeney said that there are two or three other potential applicants who would be interested in making use of the third host agreement if it were available.

Ms. Ricker said that Calyx Peak applied to the ARB for a Special Permit, but they have since been unable to come to terms with the landlord. She and Mr. Feeney have had discussions that it is unclear which Town entity is responsible for communicating with them and requiring an update. Mr. DeCoursey said that applicants for host agreements are required to show site control, and the absence of that should disqualify them at some point.

Mr. Hurd said that the SB has discussed whether the distance restrictions initially put in place still make sense, because they have found that not many suitable locations are in compliance with those restrictions in terms of distance from schools and playgrounds as well as other dispensaries. The site chosen by Calyx Peak generated significant community opposition, but it was chosen in part because it was the only site available that met all the requirements. It might make sense to amend the original restrictions to allow for more possible locations.

Mr. Diggins said that Calyx Peak should come back before the SB. The SB also needs to add some sort of deadline to the host agreements. He thinks that the required distance from schools and playgrounds should be maintained, but it would make sense to reduce the required distance between marijuana establishments.

Mr. Benson noted that either changing the number of establishments or reducing the required distance between them would require a zoning warrant article approved by Town Meeting. If the SB wants to make such changes, they need to communicate that to the ARB, so that the ARB has time to create such a warrant article and hold a public hearing on it in the leadup to 2025 Annual Town Meeting. Mr. DeCoursey replied that he would like the question of Calyx Peak's host agreement settled first, so that it's clear whether the Town has a third host agreement to give out, before making other potential changes, so it might not happen for 2025 Town Meeting.

Mr. Hurd said that the number of host agreements was originally decided upon based on the number of liquor stores, which has increased. He asked Mr. Cunningham if they are required to increase the number of host agreements as well. Mr. Cunningham replied that the Town has the option to increase the number but is not required to do so.

Agenda Item 8 – Master Plan Update Advisory (AMPUp!) Committee Select Board seat

Ms. Zsembery explained that the SB has the option to appoint a liaison to the AMPUp! Advisory Committee. Ms. Ricker said that she gave a presentation to the SB at their July meeting explaining the Master Plan update process and what an SB liaison might do. She noted that the 2015 Master Plan Committee did include a representative from the SB, and that SB representation to such a committee is common for municipalities. The first task of the AMPUp! Advisory Committee is to evaluate the Request for Proposals due on September 23. She understands that members of the SB may not have the time to serve as a full member on the committee, but someone could potentially serve as a liaison, which would involve attending some meetings, keeping apprised of the minutes, and answering questions as they arose.

Ms. Zsembery noted that the Master Plan is an extremely important document for the Town, and it has guided a great deal of the ARB's work. The ARB has two representatives to the AMPUp! Advisory Committee who provide regular updates, and it would be helpful to have the SB involved in some capacity.

Mr. Diggins said that he would like to have a discussion about this at an SB meeting with full attendance. He thinks that the SB should have a representative who is a full member of the Advisory Committee. The SB considers all aspects of the Town and has accountability to the Town as a whole, so it should be fully a part of the Master Plan update process.

Mr. DeCoursey said that because of their limited time, the SB has discussed having a designee on the Advisory Committee, rather than an SB member. Potentially, they could have an SB member serve as a liaison in addition. Statutorily, the Master Plan is the ARB's responsibility, so it is ultimately up to them if they would allow an SB designee.

Mr. Benson said that he and Mr. Revilak are the two ARB members on the Advisory Committee. He said that Ms. Ricker explained to the Committee the option of either having an SB liaison or an SB designee, and the Committee was in favor of an SB liaison. They didn't feel that they needed another full member, but they did want to have ongoing communication with the SB.

Ms. Mahon said that she would prefer to have the SB provide a designee. Even if no member of the SB can make the time commitment necessary, she wants the SB to be fully represented, and not just have an occasional liaison. She noted that before she served on the SB, she was the SB's designee to several of the subcommittees in the 2015 Master Plan process.

Mr. Hurd suggested that the SB have two liaisons, in order to divide up the work involved. Mr. Benson said that he thinks the Advisory Committee would be open to that. Ms. Zsembery asked that the Advisory Committee discuss it at their next meeting and share their thoughts with the SB.

Agenda Item 9 – Vacant Storefronts

Mr. DeCoursey noted that the SB frequently gets questions about vacant storefronts, especially about prominent locations. He said that they would like to gain clarity on the process for keeping in touch with landlords. He referred to the ARB's authority under Chapter 121B of Mass General Law to intervene in situations in which storefronts are vacant for an extensive period of time, noting that such intervention would be an extreme option. Ms. Ricker said that the Economic Development Coordinator regularly does inspections to determine which storefronts are vacant, and she notifies property owners that they will be subject to a fine. The fine was increased by 2024 Annual Town Meeting. DPCD has discussed the possibility of placing a lien on the property if the fines accrue significantly. Exercising Chapter 121B powers would require creating an urban renewal plan for Arlington Center (or another relevant area of Arlington), and identifying problem properties as targets for acquisition and redevelopment. An urban renewal plan is a lengthy and potentially expensive endeavor but may be worth it.

Mr. DeCoursey asked if the property owners have paid the fines. Ms. Ricker replied that some have and some have not. Mr. DeCoursey suggested that perhaps a lien could be added to a tax bill for unpaid fines.

Ms. Zsembery said that the ARB has discussed the possibility of creating an urban renewal plan regarding particular problem properties in the past, and those discussions have had positive results. They regularly discuss which properties are the most problematic and what measures might be appropriate, and they appreciate having the SB's support in looking at the possibility of taking more extreme action.

Mr. Lau said that it is important in some situations to provide incentives to development rather than focus on fines and other punitive measures, although he also recognized that some landlords have proven difficult for tenants to work with and may not respond to incentives.

Mr. Diggins likes the idea of an urban renewal plan. He noted that the problem is not unique to Arlington; other nearby municipalities have a significant number of vacant storefronts as well. An urban renewal plan might identify some properties as too difficult to lease, and it might result in increased open space or other amenities, helping us to think beyond trying to fill every empty space with more retail. He asked Ms. Ricker how much creating an urban renewal plan would cost. She replied that the Master Plan Update process has a budget of \$250,000, and she thinks an urban renewal plan for Arlington Center might be around \$100,000.

Ms. Zsembery and Mr. DeCoursey thanked all the Board members and Town staff for their participation in this joint meeting.

Ms. Zsembery asked for a motion to adjourn the ARB meeting. Mr. Lau so moved, and Mr. Benson seconded. The Board voted and approved unanimously.

Mr. DeCoursey asked for a motion to adjourn the SB meeting. Ms. Mahon so moved, and Mr. Hurd seconded. The Board voted and approved unanimously.

Meeting **Adjourned at 9:30 pm.**