

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ARLINGTON REDEVELOPMENT BOARD

The Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) is the planning board for the Town and fulfills those functions envisioned by the State for local governments to assist in and regulate the development of the Town. The ARB is charged with planning for the orderly development of residences and businesses and the streets and infrastructure needed to serve them. This function takes on different appearances in different towns. In Arlington, the Redevelopment Board's planning responsibilities take the form of conducting planning studies, recommending zoning regulations (to Town Meeting) and issuing special permits.

Arlington's planning board differs from most in that it is also a redevelopment authority. Arlington was the first town in Massachusetts to create a combined planning board and redevelopment authority. As a redevelopment authority, the ARB is authorized to own property and to create urban renewal projects such as the Symmes Hospital site. The Board also owns and manages a number of Town buildings, which it leases.

The planning board's role in the town is to provide for the orderly development of property and anticipate needs and problems that development or population change or change in economic conditions may bring. The ARB carries out this responsibility by reviewing all significant development projects, commissioning studies, and marshalling grant funds for the development of public facilities to compliment other public development funded by the Town budget. It is the planning studies and the Zoning Bylaw that provide the guidance for how Arlington develops. The documents constitute a policy plan for the Town and instruct the ARB in its issuance of special permits. The Zoning Bylaw lists the uses for property that are allowed in Town and specifies where each use is allowed. Certain uses are allowed only by special permit and special permit uses that are of a certain size and location qualify for environmental design review before the Redevelopment Board.

The Department of Planning and Community Development serves as staff to the Redevelopment Board, operates the Town's community development program, oversees the home rehab and weatherization programs and manages the eight buildings under the jurisdiction of the Redevelopment Board.

Personnel Changes

Lynne Lowenstein moved out of Town in 2006 and therefore had to resign from the Board. A realtor, Lynne brought her knowledge of the real estate market on issues and projects before the Board. She frequently held the pulse of the community and helped the Board understand that perspective. She served on the Board since

2002 when she was appointed by the Mass. Department of Housing and Community Development.

In January, the State appointed Chris Loreti to take Lynne Lowenstein's place on the Board. Chris is an environmental scientist who has been active in Town affairs. The Board had only four members for several months until Bruce Fitzsimmons was appointed in June. Bruce has lived in Arlington for sixteen years with his wife and two children. He is an attorney in private practice in Arlington.

The Symmes Story

At the beginning of the year, we were finally able to arrange a meeting between the developer of the Symmes project and the neighbors who appealed the special permit issued by the Redevelopment Board. The Town did not participate in this or subsequent meetings concerning the appeal. The developer eventually offered to reduce the height of the buildings and the number of housing units that would be built and the appellants withdrew their appeal. The tallest buildings were reduced in height by thirty-three feet and the size of the project which had been 258 units was capped at 200 units. At the beginning of April, the Director of Planning and the Town Manager participated in the final meeting between the two parties where the settlement agreement was crafted.

The project could be made smaller only if the sales agreement was changed. The Town was asked to accept less money for the property. The delay, due to the appeal, had already cost the Town about \$250,000 and now it was asked to sell the land for \$1.3 million less and accept a project that would be reduced in size by twenty percent which would reduce the tax revenue the Town would receive by about \$300,000 each year. The Town negotiated an agreement by which it would receive a surcharge upon each sale of a condominium in years to come to compensate for the loss.

Following the settlement, the developer reduced the size of the project and submitted plans to the Board for approval. The plans were then at the 50% stage of development. The Board found that the reduction in the development was within the scope of the permit and approved the 50% plans. The plans will also be reviewed at the 100% stage. The Board reviews the plans at this stage to see if there are any changes necessitated by design of the final details. The Board does not expect to see any significant changes.

The new agreement required the developer to submit final plans for the project for ARB approval within six months. The agreement said that after the plans were approved by the ARB, the developer would have ninety days to either close on the sale of the property or begin paying the carrying costs of the Town (the expenses the town incurs for property maintenance, insurance, etc., and for interest on debt). When the time came to sub-

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mit the 100% plans, the developer was not ready. The agreement was again amended to allow the developer more time, but that the time at which the developer would begin to pay the carrying costs would be fixed and was no longer dependent upon the submittal of the plans.

The developer was not ready to submit the 100% plans because it was discovered that the settlement agreement with the appellants contained an error in listing the maximum size of one of the buildings. The building in question was not one that was changed by the settlement agreement, but the agreement listed a size that was less than that shown on the plans. The appellants refused to acknowledge the error in writing, and the developer was eventually forced to redesign the building to reduce its size so that the plans would conform to the settlement agreement. This decision was not made until late in the year and as the year closed final plans were not yet submitted to the ARB. The obligation of the developer to begin paying carrying costs would come due on January, 2007.

Staffing

The Department was finally restored to full strength this year with the hiring of the Assistant Director of Planning. This has allowed the Department to pick up on tasks that have had to be postponed for the last three years. It also enabled the Department to begin its first major dialog with the residents of Arlington about planning effort in years.

Planning Dialog

The Redevelopment Board along with the Selectmen and the Town Manager asked that the Department look at issues regarding the future development of the Town. Some Community Development Block Grant funds were made available to help and the Department obtained a Smart Growth Technical Assistance grant from the State as well. Working with its consultants from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, the Department created a survey questionnaire to engage residents in a dialog about issues such as open space, affordable housing, traffic, parking, recreation space, and commercial development.

While it is not the only way that the Town can influence its development, the regulation of land use through the Zoning Bylaw is a major tool in this regard. The Zoning Bylaw had its last major revision in 1975 which was just after the Town reached its maximum population. Compared to 1970, Arlington has only 80% of the population it had then. It has only 45% of the students in school that it had in 1970. Yet we now have about 1,500 more housing units than we had in 1970 and have almost as many cars registered in Arlington as we have people (39,000 cars and 42,000 people). Who knows what the next 35 years will bring. Perhaps we should try to determine what we want it to bring.

Near the end of the year, the survey was used with several existing groups active in Town affairs to inspire a discussion with Department or Board personnel. The survey asks the respondents to confront the implications and costs associated with their preferences. The survey was to be made available to all residents on the Town web site in the beginning of 2007. The dialog is directed toward making recommendations for future policy pointed towards the 2008 Annual Town Meeting for any recommendations that may require Town Meeting action. An interim report will be made to the 2007 Town Meeting.

Massachusetts Avenue Corridor

The Department has been working for quite some time with the Department of Public Works and the Transportation Advisory Committee to solve various problems at various locations along Mass. Ave. Collectively it was decided that the corridor from Cambridge to the High School should be looked at in a comprehensive manner rather than treating each problem piecemeal. We therefore began the lengthy process of getting the project on the State Transportation Improvement Program and sought funding from State and Federal sources. Congressman Markey championed our cause and we were able to obtain \$1.6 million in federal funds to begin the project. In our interactions with Mass Highway, it was suggested that our unified project be split into three phases as different sections of the Avenue lent themselves to different State funding priorities. Accordingly it was determined that the first phase should be from Pond Lane near the Central Fire Station to the Cambridge line.

The design for the first phase of the project was included in the State Transportation Improvement Program, a necessary step for any state and federal financed project, in the summer and we issued a request for proposals from design engineers in October. In December we received three proposals and a choice of designer will be made in early 2007. The project will involve public meetings to discuss alternative traffic regulation and will reconstruct the roadway to conform to a plan that evolves from the public process. The Lake Street business district will get a thorough redesign similar to that which was done in the Heights several years ago. The project has been a long time coming and additional funds must be secured to complete it, but it is now officially a project and design is underway.