



Your Town, Your Future



Summary for Town Meeting Consideration

Arlington Master Plan

Arlington Redevelopment Board

Master Plan Advisory Committee

Department of Planning & Community Development

To see the complete Arlington Master Plan visit: <http://www.arlingtonma.gov/planning>

What is a master plan and why does Arlington need one?

A master plan is a town's policy statement on physical development. It is a living document that conveys what is planned for the future and helps make change more predictable and desirable, which is attractive to new business and investment. A master plan identifies which areas are appropriate for specific types of residences, commerce, or industry, and which areas are for preservation and conservation, or how a mixture of uses might occur on the same property.

A master plan is not a zoning bylaw, a subdivision regulation, a budget, a capital improvement program, or other regulatory document. It simply provides the framework for the development of these plan implementation tools.

Arlington is a thriving, attractive, desirable, healthy place to live and do business, but it faces challenges, such as the high cost of housing, a small commercial tax base, and the need to rebuild the high school to keep state accreditation. The Town's fixed costs have been rising faster every year than its revenue, leading to calls for property tax overrides. In response, the Town has developed a Five Year Fiscal Plan that has improved town finances and the budget process. Arlington housing is in high demand so high-cost units are built in unexpected locations, smaller, affordable houses are being enlarged, and two-family houses are converted into expensive condos.

The amount of land available for commercial uses, and thus the commercial tax base, has been declining since 1990, putting nearly all the tax burden on

residential taxpayers. Arlington residents often have to leave town to afford a home, start a business, get to their jobs, and shop. In recent times, the town did not anticipate or plan in advance for the possible closing of Symmes Hospital and the Brigham's headquarters. Arlington had to react to private real estate decisions that will now exist for decades, precluding opportunities to consider other land uses on those sites.

What was the master plan process?

To start to address these and other challenges, Arlington began this master plan process in the autumn of 2012 with a community conversation at Town Hall. A Master Plan Advisory Committee of local residents, including Town Meeting members and professionals in relevant fields, was formed. Since then, hundreds of residents have participated in over 75 public workshops, presentations, meetings, interviews, and surveys. They have provided valuable community input for the plan's vision statement, findings, and recommendations.

By state law, a planning board formally adopts a master plan. In Arlington, the Redevelopment Board (ARB) has planning board authority. The ARB adopted the Arlington Master Plan as Town policy on February 4, 2015, following a public hearing on January 12. Any changes to zoning or new infrastructure projects, and many other specific recommendations in the Arlington Master Plan would have to be presented to and passed by Town Meeting at some time in the future. For this reason, the ARB and the Master Plan Advisory Committee request Town Meeting's consideration to accept, receive, or resolve to endorse this Master Plan.



VISION STATEMENT

Arlington's Master Plan envisions civic connections that encourage social interaction and foster a sense of community. The plan considers a range of critical topics by focusing on how they contribute to these connections:

- *Open spaces and corridors that link neighborhoods*
- *Thriving business districts*
- *Living and working opportunities for all*
- *Stewardship and promotion of our historic heritage*
- *Cultural and recreational resources that provide shared experiences*
- *Natural systems in ecological balance*
- *A walkable public realm where residents meet their neighbors*
- *A shared interest in community-wide fiscal health*

What is addressed in the Arlington Master Plan?

The following sections summarize the key topics and selected recommendations addressed in the Arlington Master Plan.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Since 2000 the town has slowly gained 450 new residents, and projections show this trend will continue until 2030, when Arlington will have nearly 47,000 residents. This population growth has been accompanied by dramatic age shifts, with increases

in school-aged children and older adults, but losses in the 20-34 age group. As more young families have moved into town and non-family households have moved out, household size has grown slightly after decades of decline. Incomes of town residents have also increased in recent decades. These demographic changes have important fiscal implications, since school-aged children and senior citizens with fixed incomes generally present greater costs to Arlington than working-aged adults, even though income growth may provide more resources to pay property taxes that fund town operations.

LAND USE

Arlington is a predominantly residential suburb of Boston. Three major business districts along Massachusetts Avenue are surrounded by walkable neighborhoods. Commercial, industrial, civic, and cultural activity is focused in the middle of town, along Massachusetts Avenue and Broadway. It's difficult to tell from Arlington's zoning map what the community wants today since our zoning is a snapshot of the uses and buildings that were in place in 1974, when the zoning bylaw was adopted. For example: (1) in the short distance between Prentiss Road and Brattle Street, properties are governed by four different zoning districts, with different allowed uses and different dimensional rules; (2) several blocks on Forest Street between Massachusetts Avenue and the Minuteman Bikeway are governed by five zoning districts; (3) Massachusetts Avenue has several single parcels surrounded by different zoning districts on either side. This patchwork of zoning districts is confusing for



property owners, neighboring residents, and tenants, making it hard to predict what uses are allowed and what might be possible or desirable in the future for building size, design, or uses. Further, the Town's special permit requirement for most uses may inhibit businesses from growing or locating here. Property in business districts can now be converted to residential uses by special permit, thereby reducing commercial uses and worsening our tax base imbalance.

To increase economic development, resident input calls for encouraging new office space, where appropriate, and for mixed-use buildings in nonresidential areas. Mixed-use development generally combines commercial space on lower-floors with housing on upper floors to foster eclectic and walkable business districts in areas served by public transit. Arlington's existing zoning encourages mixed-use development in Arlington Heights, Arlington Center, and Capitol Square in East Arlington, but no design guidelines are

given. Ironically, our zoning requirements have the unintended effect of inhibiting mixed-use development, although this is the historic form of many valued Arlington commercial buildings.

Selected recommendations:

1. Recodify and update the Zoning Bylaw (ZBL).
2. Adopt design guidelines for new and redeveloped commercial and industrial sites.
3. Reorganize and consolidate the business zoning districts on Massachusetts Avenue.
4. Encourage new mixed-use development in designated districts.
5. Reduce the number of uses that require a special permit.
6. Establish areas for preservation and areas for redevelopment.

TRANSPORTATION

Arlington's relatively complete network of streets, sidewalks, pathways, and trails has barely changed in decades, while increased automobile traffic from inside and outside of town has worsened congestion. This traffic combined with bus routes, growing bicycle usage, and pedestrian activity requires coordination of transportation improvements for economic development, health, and quality of life for residents. Walking, access to bus and transit options, as well as vehicle mobility, are important to Arlington residents and businesses.

Selected Recommendations:

1. Develop a Complete Streets policy (space for walkers, motorists, transit, cyclists) governing design and implementation of street construction
2. Create safer pedestrian conditions to increase walking, reduce auto traffic, and improve public health.
3. Improve conditions, access, and safety along the Minuteman Bikeway.



4. Work with the MBTA to improve bus service and connections, to help increase transit ridership.
5. Improve parking availability, especially in the commercial centers, through better parking management.
6. Review existing residential parking policies.



HOUSING

Arlington has distinct neighborhoods offering a variety of housing, from single-family homes to mid-rise apartment buildings. Increased demand for housing in the Boston area has pushed up home prices and rents in once-affordable communities like Arlington, triggering the conversion of nonresidential space to housing, and the redevelopment of small-scale buildings or underutilized properties into larger, more expensive homes or high-end, multi-family units. Population trends indicate a need for more small housing units for both the aging population and young people beginning their careers. Public concern regarding “teardowns” and new houses on double lots in established residential neighborhoods was also heard often during the master plan process.

Selected recommendations:

1. Create an Affordable Housing Plan for state approval under MGL Chapter 40B.
2. Allocate Town resources to meet local needs and the state’s requirement for affordable housing under MGL Chapter 40B.
3. Address the quality and condition of aging housing stock.
4. Modify parking requirements to encourage multi-family housing and mixed-use development in commercial areas.
5. Study and plan for increasing the supply of both smaller market-rate housing and affordable/subsidized housing to meet changing demographic needs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Arlington is primarily a bedroom community with a decreasing business tax base, so the tax burden rests on residents. Yet Arlington’s location and large number of trained professionals make it attractive to commercial development and new businesses. Many residents and civic leaders believe that more businesses are needed to expand the tax base and provide more economic opportunity for entrepreneurs. However, Arlington has very little vacant, developable commercial land available, so the redevelopment or renewal of key sites must be considered for improving commercial growth.

Selected recommendations:

1. Amend the Zoning Bylaw to enhance flexibility in business districts.
2. Update industrial district zoning to adapt to current market trends.
3. Allow and promote locations for new office buildings and/or an innovation park.
4. Allow new collaborative work spaces to attract small business ventures, innovative companies, entrepreneurs, and currently home-based businesses.
5. Invest in policies that support and promote Arlington’s magnet businesses.
6. Implement the most appropriate recommendations from the 2009 Commercial Center Revitalization report, in coordination with other Master Plan initiatives.



HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCE AREAS

Communities need to preserve significant historic buildings, structures, and landscapes for future generations. Arlington's notable spaces include the heritage landscape of the Mill Brook, which represents generations of industrial development, and the iconic Civic Block that includes the Winfield Robbins Memorial Garden, Robbins Library and Town Hall, along with several of Cyrus Dallin's bronze sculptures. Places for public art and performing arts are important to the community and help attract business, commerce, and tourism. These irreplaceable resources contribute to Arlington's quality of life and sense of place.

Selected recommendations:

1. Develop a historic and archaeological resources survey to identify and prioritize outstanding inventory needs.
2. Research the possibility of Certified Local Government (CLG) status for the Arlington Historical Commission.
3. Expand community-wide preservation advocacy and education.
4. Review and strengthen the Demolition Delay Bylaw.
5. Preserve the character of the Historic Districts.
6. Preserve Town-owned historic resources.
7. Adopt procedures to plan for public art and performance opportunities for economic development.



NATURAL RESOURCES AND OPEN SPACE

Lakes, ponds, brooks, wetlands, meadows and woods provide crucial public health and ecological benefits, as well as recreational opportunities. In addition, man-made outdoor structures such as paths, gardens, and playing fields also factor into the components of open space. Arlington residents have strongly expressed how much they value the Town's natural resources, water bodies, and other open spaces, and they support their preservation, protection, and maintenance.

Selected recommendations:

1. Create a comprehensive plan for the Mill Brook study area.
2. Address maintenance needs for all of the Town's open spaces and natural resources, including highly valued street trees.
3. Pursue strategies to protect large parcels of undeveloped land in order to preserve open space and manage floodplains.
4. Use more native and natural choices for landscaping on Town-owned properties and consider a bylaw to require more native landscaping for new developments.
5. Use environmentally sustainable planning and engineering approaches for natural resources management.



PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

This element of the master plan addresses Town-owned buildings, infrastructure, facilities, and staff that Arlington will need in order to meet future demands for services. These include roadways, parking lots, utilities such as water or sewer service, parks, playing fields, public schools, playgrounds, and cemeteries. Arlington is widely considered to be a well-run, fiscally responsible town, but it still faces challenges to keep up with changing needs.

Selected recommendations:

1. Perform a space needs analysis for all Town-owned buildings.
2. Plan future space needs for schools and other town services; determine what is needed and available for future redevelopment.
3. Establish a regular process for evaluating the need to retain and/or dispose of Town-owned properties that no longer serve public purposes.
4. Establish a Planned Preventive Maintenance (PPM) program to improve maintenance of Town facilities and structures.
5. Assess the condition of private ways and work with residents to improve their maintenance where required.
6. Study and develop a practical plan for addressing Arlington's long-term public works needs, including cemetery and snow storage space.
7. Prepare a sidewalk pavement inventory and criteria for using different materials on public rights of way.
8. Prepare a feasibility study for building an updated community/senior center.





NEXT STEPS

The Arlington Master Plan was adopted by the Arlington Redevelopment Board on February 4, 2015. It will now serve as Town policy and as a focused agenda and framework for future formal action by Town staff, boards, committees, and Town Meeting. It is a living document subject to regular review as conditions warrant. It also makes the town eligible for more state grant programs. The phased implementation steps will be guided by an implementation committee comprised of residents, business owners, Town officials, and Town Meeting members.

The complete version of the Arlington Master Plan is available at arlingtonma.gov/planning and hard copies are available for viewing at Town Hall, Robbins Library, and Fox Branch Library.

