

Master Plan Implementation Committee

Report to Annual Town Meeting

April 22, 2019

The Arlington Master Plan, “Your Town Your Future,” was adopted by approximately 75% of Town Meeting members in 2015. The Town then appointed a Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) which meets quarterly to oversee and ensure plan implementation. MPIC reports are organized to follow the topic areas of the Master Plan: Land Use, Traffic and Circulation, Housing and Residential Development, Economic Development, Historic and Cultural Resource Areas, Natural Resources and Open Space, and Public Facilities and Services. The following report provides highlights of accomplishments since Annual Town Meeting and the ongoing and upcoming projects.

Land Use

- **Recodify and update the Zoning Bylaw.**

The recodified Zoning Bylaw was passed by Special Town Meeting in February 2018 and approved by the Massachusetts Attorney General on June 12, 2018. Recodifying the Town’s Zoning Bylaw was one of the first recommended steps in implementing the Master Plan by laying the foundation for future zoning changes aligned with its goals. In September 2018, the new Zoning Bylaw Working Group was convened by the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) to review and propose amendments to the Zoning Bylaw as identified in the Master Plan and through the recodification process. The first major initiative is to create new sign regulations in the Zoning Bylaw that are well-organized, straightforward to understand and administer, consistent with state and federal law, and representative of best practices. These regulations will be considered under **Article 17** at this Annual Town Meeting.

- **Reorganize and consolidate the business zoning districts.** A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in June 2018 for a consultant to assist with the reorganization and consolidation of the Business Zoning Districts. However, no responses were received to the RFP due to the limited funding to address all of the tasks described in the scope of work. DPCD plans to undertake reorganization and consolidation of the Business Zoning Districts in coordination with the completion of the *Arlington Heights Action Plan* (described below), which could inform the broader reorganization and consolidation process. Consolidation of zoning districts would require a zoning map change, and consultant assistance may be necessary.

- **Promote development of higher value mixed-use building by providing redevelopment incentives in business districts. Support vibrant commercial areas by encouraging new mixed-use redevelopment.** Town Meeting in 2016 added Mixed-Use to the list of allowed uses in all of the Business districts, with parking reductions by special permit with Transportation Demand Management Plans, which identify strategies to reduce the use of single occupant vehicles in developments. While applicants to the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) for Special Permits showed a strong interest in using mixed-use zoning, the yield has been relatively low at 14 new residential units, including one deed-restricted affordable unit, and approximately 4,250 square feet of commercial and office space. The proposed zoning amendments related to multi-family uses and mixed-uses (**Articles 6 through 13 and 16** at this Annual Town Meeting) will build upon the zoning amendments adopted in 2016 by creating further flexibility to encourage economically-feasible infill development within the R4, R5, R6, and R7 zoning districts and all of the Business districts if more than the minimum number of affordable housing units are provided.

- **Reduce the number of uses that require a special permit.** The Town secured a Planning Assistance Grant from the State’s Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to advance the Housing Production Plan (HPP), which was adopted by the Select Board and ARB and approved by the state in 2016. The HPP identified the development of multi-family housing in select locations, including by-right, as one strategy to increase housing diversity and affordability in town. Allowing multi-family uses to be developed by-right was considered by the ARB in December 2018 and January 2019, but the ARB decided to retain their special permit

granting authority for multi-family uses and mixed-uses and determined that this issue could be revisited in the future.

Traffic and Circulation

- **Work with MassDOT, DCR, and City of Cambridge to improve the efficiency of Massachusetts Avenue/Route 16 signal in Cambridge and work with the MBTA to reduce bus bunching and improve the efficiency of bus service.** The Town received a \$100,000 grant through the Barr Foundation to pilot a bus rapid transit (BRT) project. Arlington was one of four municipalities in Greater Boston to receive the funding. Working in cooperation with the City of Cambridge, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the MBTA, a month-long eastbound BRT pilot was conducted between October 9 and November 9, 2018 during the morning commute (6 AM to 9 AM) on Mass Ave in East Arlington. The pilot included a bus stop relocation with transit signal priority and a queue jump at Lake Street, a dedicated bus lane between Varnum Street and Alewife Brook Parkway, and modifications to the lane assignments and signal changes at Alewife Brook Parkway. Following the completion of the pilot, an analysis of the MBTA data showed that buses ran faster through the pilot area than before the pilot, and with increased reliability. The dedicated bus lane saved, on average, five minutes in commute time for all bus routes during the hours it was piloted. Due to this success, the Select Board approved a permanent installation of the BRT lane beginning late Spring 2019.
- **Review the extension of the regional bike share program into Arlington.** In collaboration with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and 14 neighboring municipalities, Arlington brought a regional dockless bike share system operated by Lime to the community. The system was launched in Arlington on June 28, 2018, with 150 manual bikes and the fleet was supplemented with 30-40 pedal assist electric bicycles (e-bikes) in September. From the beginning of the program through the end of December 2018, more than 19,500 trips have been made on Lime bicycles in Arlington, with approximately 15,400 on manual bicycles and 4,100 on e-bikes. This Spring Lime will be transitioning its fleet to all e-bikes in the regional dockless bike share system in support of a rapidly evolving industry. MAPC and the participating municipalities will work to enhance participation in the Lime Access program, which provides discounted membership options to underserved populations, and will continue to reevaluate the benefits and alternatives to enhancing local mobility options.
- **Manage parking in commercial areas.** In 2017, Town Meeting voted to establish a Parking Benefits District (the first of its kind in the state) to earmark parking revenue for expenditures in Arlington Center in association with the installation of new parking meters. In addition to managing and maintaining the meters, the revenue can fund a wide range of purposes including increased street sweeping or snow removal, beautification, or larger street and infrastructure projects such as lighting, streetscape, or roadway improvements. In 2018, Parking Implementation Governance Committee (PIGC) members worked with DPCD to identify expenditures for improvements to Broadway Plaza and sidewalks in Arlington Center, which are under consideration for endorsement by this Annual Town Meeting (**Article 53**), as well as identify a new vendor for existing parking equipment in municipal lots and meters on the street.

Housing and Residential Development

- **Study and consider techniques that could address concern for neighborhood impacts of new large homes constructed in existing residential neighborhoods.** The Residential Study Group (RSG) was formed to address concerns regarding new single-family home and two-family home construction in existing neighborhoods, as requested in a resolution at the 2016 Annual Town Meeting. At the 2017 Annual Town Meeting, Zoning Bylaw and Town Bylaw amendments proposed by the RSG were adopted, including setting maximum driveway slopes and incentivizing surface parking, as well as creating a new Residential Construction Control Agreement to codify Town Bylaw rules and regulations and to add new rules that addressed a range of concerns expressed by residents abutting new construction activities. The RSG followed up this year by adjusting the provisions in the 2017 amendments to further address maximum driveway slopes (**Article 25**), to include adding tree removal to the Residential Construction Control Agreement (**Article 32**), and to adjust the definition of a half story to minimize the appearance of a full third story in typical single-family structures

(Article 24). DPCD staff also worked with the RSG on a study of the impact of the demolition of structures and the compatibility of the new structures in established neighborhoods.

Economic Development

- **Amend Business District Zoning to enhance flexibility and promote development of higher-value mixed-use properties.** The 2016 Town Meeting adopted mixed-use and flexible parking requirements in the Business districts. The Master Plan recommends increased height and lot coverage limits, to promote development of higher value properties. A suite of zoning amendments (**Articles 6 through 13 and 16**) proposed this year are focused on multi-family uses in the higher density residential districts (R4 through R7) and mixed-uses in all of the Business districts in order to further encourage placing new housing, jobs, stores, and other destinations in close proximity where residents can support the economic vitality of a local business district.
- **Amend the Zoning Bylaw to provide redevelopment incentives in all or selected portions of the business districts on Massachusetts Avenue, Broadway, and Medford Street (incentives may include more than zoning).** The Town received \$40,000 in technical assistance from MAPC to complete several Master Plan implementation actions relevant to Arlington Heights, such as exploring options for spurring revitalization efforts along Massachusetts Avenue to attain the area's potential for mixed-use development. Since the 2018 Annual Town Meeting, two forums were held in Arlington Heights to gather feedback from the community. DPCD and MAPC learned that the community is supportive of mixed-use projects, including a substantial amount of housing, artists' spaces, retail, connectivity, and lively spaces that can be programmed and that engage the residents. MAPC's final product, *Arlington Heights Action Plan*, includes zoning and non-zoning recommendations to implement the feedback received during the process. A core zoning recommendation is to consolidate the four different business districts into a single, consistent business district for Arlington Heights. A core non-zoning recommendation is to focus on creative place-making projects to bring vitality to the Heights and foster a more active street life. The recommendations will be acted on over the next year for consideration by a future Town Meeting.

Historic and Cultural Resource Areas

- **Develop a historic, architectural, and archaeological resources survey plan to identify and prioritize outstanding inventory needs.** DPCD, working with representatives from the Historic Districts Commission, Historical Commission, Historical Society, and MPIC, began work on a Community Preservation Act (CPA)-funded project approved by the 2017 Annual Town Meeting. The current phase of the overall project is the completion a Community-Wide Historic Preservation Survey Master Plan with the assistance of consultants Wendy Frontiero and Kathy Broomer. This Plan was completed in April 2019. The purpose of the Plan is to guide the Town's historic preservation efforts by identifying and prioritizing outstanding needs regarding the inventory and documentation of Arlington's local historic resources, including historic buildings and places, cultural and archaeological elements, and other significant objects and structures. The first recommendation is to update, correct, and expand Arlington's cultural resource inventory, to meet current survey standards of the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) and support local priorities for preservation. The Plan prioritizes additional recommendations by neighborhood and by resource type (areas and individual properties). However, the Plan also notes that before the Town proceeds with new survey work, the highest priority task is to make corrections to Arlington inventory forms on file with the MHC (i.e., corrections to street addresses, notations of buildings demolished or moved) and concomitant coordination with Arlington Historical Commission records.
- **Adopt procedures to plan for public art and performance opportunities.** In 2016, DPCD launched a town-wide arts and cultural planning process with MAPC, the Arlington Commission on Arts and Culture (ACAC), and others. The Arts and Culture Action Plan was completed in 2017 and aims to strengthen and grow arts and cultural opportunities in Arlington. The plan also bolsters the Arlington Cultural District which spans from Arlington Center to East Arlington and was designated by the Massachusetts Cultural Council in the fall of 2017. During 2018, the Arlington Center for the Arts (ACA) moved from its former space in the Gibbs School and re-opened in the Central School at 27 Maple Street following a renovation supported financially by the

Town of Arlington and ACA's major fundraising campaign. The Arts Center includes performance space, classrooms, studios, and gallery space.

Natural Resources and Open Space

- **Create a Comprehensive Plan for the Mill Brook Study Area.** The Mill Brook Corridor Study Group was formed in late 2015 to increase awareness and guide changes in the Mill Brook Corridor. The group includes membership from the Mystic River Watershed Association, the Conservation Commission, the Redevelopment Board, and the Open Space Committee. The Working Group is updating the Mill Brook Corridor Action Plan for release in spring 2019, including recommendations to conserve and protect this natural resource while leveraging recreational, economic development, and historic preservation opportunities.
- **Update Arlington's sustainability action plan and address Arlington's concerns about flooding and climate change adaptation.** In 2018, the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Core Group coordinated a community resilience planning process to address the local impacts of climate change. The top priority identified is flooding in the Mill Brook Corridor, which has recently caused significant damage to homes, businesses, and other properties in the brook's vicinity. The Town was awarded an MVP Action Grant of almost \$400,000 to increase flood storage capacity of the brook in Wellington Park, which is located on Grove Street. This project builds on a current initiative, undertaken by the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) and funded by the CPA, to improve public access and recreational opportunities in the Mill Brook Corridor at Wellington Park. In addition to advancing aims of the Master Plan, this process will fulfill key objectives of Arlington's Open Space and Recreation Plan (2015-2022). The project was bid this winter, with construction wrapping up this summer.

Public Facilities and Services

- **Prepare a feasibility study for an updated Community Center/Senior Center.** A Feasibility Study for a Multi-Purpose Senior Center at the Central School is complete. Capital funds were used to hire an Owner's Project Manager (OPM) and designer for the renovation project. The OPM is in the process of completing construction documents for the estimated \$8.1 million project. Review of the exterior modifications was approved by the Historic Districts Commission in winter 2019. Funding is in the Capital Plan for construction in FY 2020.

Respectfully submitted by the Master Plan Implementation Committee:

Andrew Bunnell, ARB representative
Michael Byrne, Inspectional Services, ex officio
Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager, ex officio
Joe Barr (Co-Chair), ARB appointee
Peter Howard, Finance Committee appointee

Charles Kalaskas (Co-Chair), Select Board appointee
Ann LeRoy, Town Meeting Moderator appointee
Wendy Richter, ARB appointee
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with staff support from Jennifer Raitt, Director of Planning and Community Development, and Erin Zwirko, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development