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**Town of Belmont, Massachusetts  
MBTA COMMUNITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES**

**February 1, 2024**

Present: Thayer Donham, Roy Epstein, Rachel Heller, Paul Joy, Drew Nealon,

Absent: Patrick Murphy, Julie Wu

Town Staff: Christopher Ryan

MAPC: Josh Fiala

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 pm. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom.

**1) Feedback on Community Forum**

Rachel Heller read the following comments from Julie Wu who was unable to attend the meeting:

Josh did a terrific job that reflected a ton of work, and I thank him for that. There was a good crowd, too.

I think that for future presentations, we should make sure to describe at the outset, in plain language, what the application of 3A would look like to a property owner--starting with something like what I said at the forum--that it would give the property owner the right to build a multifamily unit without having to get a special permit. It would also be good to point out that

1. That same property owner could possibly build a multifamily unit today, without 3A. It would just be more difficult, as it would require getting a special permit. 3A would basically make the process easier for the property owner.

2. The law does not compel the property owner to do anything.

3. The law does not take anything away from the property owner. In fact, it gives the property owner more rights.

4. The law does not give developers any more right to buy properties from current owners than they currently have.

5. Since there are already many housing units built within most of the districts we are discussing, proposing a unit capacity of 1632, for example, does not mean that we would be bringing 1632 additional households to Belmont. The number would be smaller, and the change would be over time as properties change hands at the rate of the real estate market.

Paul Joy commented that there seemed to be a better understanding of the MBTA Communities for the participants based on the presentation.

Roy Epstein commented that we will need to continue to help folks understand it

Rachel Heller responded that we need to level set at each public meeting so people new to the process get an overview.

Chris Ryan gave a shout out to the Beech Street Center staff and Belmont Media Center for their great assistance.

Paul Joy acknowledged Senator Brownsberger's attendance and clear guidance.

## **2) Agenda for the February 15<sup>th</sup> Public Forum**

Chris Ryan presented the draft agenda for the February 15<sup>th</sup> public forum:

1. Overview of 3A
2. Review each scenario with pause for clarifying questions
3. Open House to look at storyboards with each scenario. Comments through dots: green dots = yes, red dots= no and other sticky notes would be available to provide comments on each scenario.

Rachel Heller asked what needed to be done to make the meeting an interactive hybrid meeting? Josh Fiala responded that he had requested assistance from MAPC. He did not think he would be able to get the assistance to manage an interactive conversation with a large group on-line but was thinking about providing an on-line survey to allow feedback. He will get back to Chris once he hears back from the Community Engagement team at MAPC.

## **3) Discussion of Chapter 3A Compliance Model**

Rachel Heller suggested that the committee could reduce the number of Scenarios if we thought we were ready to do that.

Roy Epstein asked if he could get clarification before jumping into that discussion. He had some questions for MAPC about the following parcels: 115 Leonard St, 386 Concord Ave, 39 Hittinger Street, 10 Claflin Street. Josh Fiala will get back to the committee to verify the reasons the parcels were omitted from the maps.

Rachel Heller suggested working on the geographic areas first and then the committee can zoom in on specific parcels.

Josh Fiala reminded the committee that all the scenarios are compliant so it is not a problem to make tweaks. Josh recommended that the final scenario have a higher number of units than the minimum required because the state reviewed the final maps for both Salem and Lexington and reduced the compliant areas and number of units. Salem had a 10% reduction in the number of compliant units and Lexington had a 30% reduction in the number of compliant units. The MAPC team is trying to understand why this occurred. Once they figure it out, Josh Fiala will report on their findings.

Chris Ryan asked whether there would be an opportunity to revise the maps after the review by the EOHLC in the case where EOHLC reduced the number of compliant units. Rachel Heller suggested that Belmont could request a pre-compliance check with the state.

Josh Fiala reviewed the draft options to remind the committee and the public as to what we had developed to date.

Rachel Heller read Julie's Wu's note regarding the options. She favored Options 1B, 3 and possibly 2. She thought it was important to include as much of the Belmont Housing Authority property as possible. She suggested changing the Waverley option to remove the Star Market and Belmont Car Wash parcels but to add other parcels to compensate for the loss of area.

Roy asked if we would still be compliant without those parcels and Josh Fiala responded no. Josh Fiala indicated that because of the tiny parcels at Belmont Village it does not produce many units and does not help move toward compliance. Roy Epstein noted that the concept of contiguity does not help us with trying to include the Belmont Village development.

Paul Joy asked if they could modify the map to connect to Waverley Oaks housing development. The committee had looked at this option previously.

Roy Epstein remarked that the unit counts are high because of the typologies and by modifying the typologies to a lower density the number of units can be reduced. Josh Fiala responded that MAPC was trying to provide opportunities for the "missing middle" housing by allowing typologies geared toward alternative housing types.

Paul Joy made a motion to eliminate scenarios #1A and #4 from further consideration. Drew Nealon seconded the motion and the committee voted unanimously to approve the motion.

#### **4) Meeting Minutes**

Meeting minutes for 1/25/24 were approved as amended.

Meeting minutes for 1/29/24 were approved.

#### **5) Public Comments**

Linda Nickens noted that she lives on Pleasant Street in the historic district and that she was opposed to 5-story buildings along Leonard Street. The Sub-district 5 typology should not be next to single-family homes because it is too large.

Roy Epstein asked Josh Fiala what building heights are modeled in the compliance model. Josh Fiala responded that 3-stories are modeled and the sub-district could be modified to only allow 4-stories as a mixed-use incentive rather than 5-stories as allowed in the draft development standards.

Rachel Heller emphasized that it is important to keep the mixed-use incentive in the commercial centers.

Juldie Feins indicated that the maps are hard to read and it is impossible to see the parcels. Better resolution on the maps would be very helpful. John Fiala responded that he would send the maps to Chris Ryan at a higher resolution and Chris Ryan agreed to post the maps on the town website.

Doug Koplow asked whether anyone had pushed back on the contiguity issue since it seems to work against a good solution for Belmont. He has noticed that there is a difference between the statute and the guidelines. He also noted that if the goal of the February 15<sup>th</sup> meeting is to selection an option then the public needs to see what the options look like.

Roy Epstein asked if MAPC could provide any renderings. Josh Fiala indicated that they have the capability but maybe not the time or budget to provide renderings.

Judith Feinlieb agreed with Doug Koplow and Judie Feins with respect to legibility of the maps. Her preference is for fewer units distributed around Belmont.

Roy Epstein noted that it is hard to keep the units count down and meet the contiguity requirement.

Chris Ryan indicated that he would add contiguity and the term “Lexington Exception” to the FAQ and Glossary webpage.

Gloria Leipzig asked that Sherman Gardens and Belmont Village be included in all options as the Belmont Housing Authority views those sites as redevelopment opportunities.

**6) Next Meetings:**

- **Friday, February 9th at 8:30 am** in a remote Zoom format only.
- **Thursday, February 15<sup>th</sup> from 7-9 pm Public Forum in a Hybrid Format.**
- **Thursday, February 29<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm** in a remote Zoom format only.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm

Minutes recorded by Thayer Donham.