

Town of Belmont, Massachusetts  
MBTA COMMUNITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**MEETING MINUTES**

**January 3, 2024**

**RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK  
BELMONT, MA**

DATE: January 31, 2024  
TIME: 8:18 AM

Present: Thayer Donham, Roy Epstein, Rachel Heller, Paul Joy, Patrick Murphy, Drew Nealon, Julie Wu

Town Staff: Christopher Ryan

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom and in-person in the Art Gallery in the Town Hall Annex.

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

Roy Epstein reported that there was a meeting early that day with MAPC and EOHLC who had identified that the map the committee had proposed it is not compliant due to lack of contiguity of some of the zoning area. The 3A guidelines require a single district with 50% of the total acreage in it. An option is to exclude all the smaller districts. This would provide fewer units and less area thus making the areas that remain appear to be more dense. That is how Lexington did their 3A zoning.

MAPC said they would work on some options and come back to the committee in a week or so.

The options they will develop are:

- 1) Adjusting the current proposal
- 2) Belmont Center focused with satellite zones
- 3) Station area concentration only
- 4) Getting the SHI to 10% option
- 5) Combined 3A and 40R option

Patrick Murphy said that since the committee needs to lower the number of units anyway and this wrinkle might be ok. Roy Epstein responded that we cannot just shrink each district, we will need to concentrate the units. Rachel Heller added that community input will be important in reviewing the options.

**2) Chapter 40R and 40S**

Rachel Heller said that in her view there are two approaches: one that is compliance focused only and the other that will be more outcome focused and more distributed. The benefit to town of 4R and 40S into the 3A zoning is that it allows a higher number of affordable units, provides potential dollars for actual development proposals and schools and it reduces the probability for 40B proposals by taking action toward creating more affordable housing units. Many town of Belmont reports by various committees identify 40R as a potential

benefit to the town. The additional 40R overlay could be used in targeted areas of the new zoning and can have special design guidelines. The state considers a 40R overlay compliant with 3A zoning effort and MassHousing can provide technical assistance to the town for putting it in place. A few other communities are considering it.

Chris Ryan indicated that a consultant would be needed given current planning staffing in the town. He supports looking at form-based code and getting grants to integrate that into the final zoning proposal.

Roy Epstein indicated that he does not think it should be pursued given the tight time constraint and the added complexity. His concern is that the Oakley 40R zoning took a year to get into place and we do not have that amount of time.

Rachel Heller asked if the committee could vote on pursuing the 40R/ 40S zoning next week. Julie Wu observed that the Planning Board would have to get smart on 40R in a short time period. Roy Epstein reported that 40R requires an economic feasibility study. The economic feasibility studies tend to be biased toward larger lots that can accommodate larger developments and therefore produces more affordable units. 40R might work well on the peripheral districts we are showing on the map and could be re-zoned later for 40R/ 40S.

Pal Joy commented that these are good principles to try to address but if the planning board is only interested in the minimum number of units then the 40R is too much to fold into the proposed map and zoning.

Rachel Heller confirmed that the town meeting vote for a 40R district would only require a simple majority, no economic feasibility analysis is required, and that zoning for 40R after zoning is already changed for 3A won't yield the same monetary benefits from the state. She also agreed that there is a time issue and if MAPC can produce a 40R/ 40S option that would be great.

### **3) Set Target Number of Units**

Patrick Murphy asked that the committee discuss a goal or target number of units to which the committee can reduce the number of units. He suggested that 1800 is a good target since it is the minimum plus a buffer. He requested the removal of the Star Market parcel as it is zoned commercial and provides the only grocery store in town. Paul Joy agreed that 1800 units is good target.

Roy Epstein reminded the committee that the numbers are constrained by the eligible area. Districts have to have a certain number units and the current density assumptions need to be reduced. He agreed that 1800 units is a good target.

Rachel Heller asked that the committee not focus on a specific number of units but the committee should look more broadly at the potential opportunities. For example, it is possible that 2400 units could get the town of Belmont to 10% of SHI which would alleviate the pressure of a 40B development in a location over which the town has no control. We will need to do more analysis and work with MAPC to get to the most accurate number.

Chris Ryan indicated that he should have the options from MAPC by next week but the Committee would not get to thoroughly vet them until after the public forum meeting on 1/29/24. He recommends still having the public meeting on 1/29/24 to get public feedback before the meeting on 2/15/24 where the specific proposed options can be reviewed by the public.

Rachel Heller asked if the five scenarios could be put on the town website for comment. Chris was not sure how to implement that option but would discuss with MAPC.

Paul Joy asked when the Committee will discuss parking options? Chris Ryan responded that all the variables should be presented in the public forums. Paul Joy asked what if the town required no minimum number of parking spaces per unit? Julie asked Chris Ryan if he had been discussing the parking options with MAPC? Roy Epstein indicated that he needs more information on the effect of less than one parking space per unit.

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

Meeting minutes for the December 18, 2023 meeting were approved as amended.

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

Mary Kennedy, Precinct 3, said she was surprised by the number of units required and asked whether the units were apartments. Roy Epstein responded that the definition of Multi-family in this instance is 3 or more housing units. She asked why the committee was not sticking to the mandated number and Roy Epstein explained that there needs to be a buffer in case some lots are deemed non-compliant. Mary Kennedy also said that the Star Market was critical to the town and should not be rezoned.

Lisa Pargoli asked that the committee focus all the new density in Belmont Center and not in Waverley Square.

Angus Abercrombie, Precinct 8, said he understood that there are pain points for various folks and that the number of proposed units does need to be reduced. However, Belmont needs more housing of all types and all Belmontonians are not represented at these meetings. He expressed concern about arbitrarily lopping off many units. In his opinion, 40R is complicated and may add too much complexity for most Town Meeting members.

Judith Ananian Sarno, Precinct 3, suggested that the committee removed Star Market from the map since it is commercially zoned and commercial zoning is really important to maintain.

Joe Bernard, Precinct 3, indicated that he is not scared of 5000 new units if it goes through a rigorous process. 40R might be ok but time appears to be an issue

Aaron Pikcilingis echoed Joe Bernard's comments. He is in favor of leveraging 3A to accomplish other town goals.

Helen Bakeman, Lexington Street. Great density is fine. She reported that she lives in a 30 unit building and the parking lot is not well utilized so reducing the number of parking spaces per unit seems reasonable. She appreciated the scenario discussions.

Judith Feinleib, Oakley Road, agrees that the Star Market should not be part of the 3A zoning and recommended that the committee put forward the lowest possible number of new units necessary to comply with the law.

Doug Koplow, Precinct 6, asked why MAPC is just catching the issue of contiguity. Roy Epstein responded that he did not know and we have been relying on MAPC for guidance.

Ade Baptista, was in favor of the proposed density and observed that we are not talking about density like NYC, Chelsea or Brighton. The proposal is for a few targeted sites to have additional housing units that would help affordability and relieve pressure on the area's housing demand.

Paul Joy said that people are leaving California and other expensive places to live. This effort needs to address housing opportunities and affordability.

**6) Next Meeting:**

**Wednesday January 10<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm** in a remote Zoom format only.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm

Minutes recorded by Thayer Donham.