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

Town of Belmont, Massachusetts
MBTA COMMUNITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

January 10, 2024

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom.

1) Discussion of 40R and 40S Zoning

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. 40R is considered in compliance with the 3A zoning but comes with financial incentives.

Roy Epstein indicated that he does not think it should be pursued given the tight time constraint and the added burden to the town staff's workload. Chris Ryan is over loaded with work since there is no Town Planner to assist him yet.

Rachel Heller responded that there is technical assistance available from the state. Also, MAPC could determine how many units are needed to get to the 10% SHI.

Roy reported that Jeffrey Birnbaum sent an email to the committee chairs and requested that the MBTA Advisory Committee pass the relevant zoning map and language to the Planning Board by 4/2/24 so they can start working on it. He also stated that affordability should not be part of the zoning.

Thayer Donham responded that the Planning Board never discussed affordability so it seemed to her that he was expressing his personal opinion not that of the Board.

Julie Wu indicated that she did not want 40R to get in the way of Town Meeting passing a good 3A proposal and thought it would be possible to recommend zoning some 40R districts at a later time.

Drew Nealon agreed that he was hearing from the town that we should focus on getting the 3A completed now and recommend some areas for 40R later.

Roy Epstein reported that SHI only counts when a building permit for that unit has been issued. Rachel Heller reported that the state is interested in towns showing action toward increasing the number of affordable units which can prevent the construction of 40B projects. By planning for new affordable units Belmont would show that it is trying to increase affordability.

Roy Epstein and Rachel Heller will have a discussion with Mass Housing on this matter.

The committee voted in favor of not including the 40R zoning recommendation in what gets forwarded to the Planning Board by a vote of 5 to 1.

2) Public Comments:

Joe Bernard said that 40B alone is a cumbersome and expensive process that most developers are not interested in pursuing. He thought Belmont should pursue 40R and 40S zoning since it comes with financial incentives. He noted that the committee did not include timing in the approved motion. He also noted that the email from the Planning Board chair is now public since it was discussed in the public meeting.

Joe Wright agreed with previous speaker. The political moment will not come back to make affordability a priority.

Judith Ananian Sarno requested again that the Star Market and Belmont Car Wash properties be removed from the map so that the town does not risk losing the commercial anchor of Waverley Square.

3) Next Meeting:

Friday January 19, 2024 at 8:30 am in a remote Zoom format only.

Meeting adjourned at 8 pm

Minutes recorded by Thayer Donham.