

Town of Belmont, Massachusetts
MBTA COMMUNITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

February 14, 2024

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DATE: March 4, 2024
TIME: 9:01 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 5:31 pm. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom and in person in Belmont Town Hall.

1) Discussion of Chapter 3A Options

Roy Epstein and Chris Ryan reviewed the new options that MAPC had developed since the last version of 1/29/24.

Option 1 – most inclusive map

Option 2 – Pared down

Option 3 - Like Option 1 but without Belmont Village.

Option 4 – Roy’s Option.

Includes Waverley, Belmont Center and Belmont Village. MAPC needs to run the compliance model but there about 1800 units and about 55 % contiguity so it should be a viable option.

Thayer Donham asked if the any of the options reflected Belmont Village as one site rather than multiple small parcels. Roy Epstein responded that the number of units will grow but it has not been updated.

Julie Wu asked what is the difference between Option 1 and 3 and requested that it be clearly communicated.

Roy Epstein reported that he, Chris Ryan and Rachel Heller had a meeting with the abutters to Leonard Street and the neighbors were concerned about subdistrict 4 and 5 in Belmont Center. He said since the zoning is conceived as a residential initiative, the mixed use application is not as well developed and does not contemplate the needs of a commercial center where 2 levels of commercial uses exist and should be able to exist in the future.

Rachel Heller suggested that the committee look at incentive zoning and try to develop a typology that would work for commercial and housing in the center rather than eliminate it

completely from consideration. Perhaps putting denser housing at the edge of the commercial area is a good strategy.

Julie Wu and Paul Joy indicated that they want to make sure that there is no reduction in the commercial area in Belmont Center. Chris Ryan noted that the east side of Leonard is of a sufficient scale that redevelopment is not a likely option.

Roy Epstein indicated that there are assumptions in the model that he does not understand. Chris Ryan reported that he is waiting for some answers from EOHLC that should help. The committee agreed that a discussion of the modelling assumptions would be helpful. Rachel Heller requested that the committee review the assumptions at the next meeting or the subsequent one.

2) Forum Logistics

Chris Ryan reported that he has seen the Forum presentation and there are 55 slides which is a lot to get through in less than one hour.

The overall format is:

1. Slides: 45 minutes
2. Comments/ Questions: 15 minutes
3. Walk around the Maps and provide comments and votes: 60 minutes.

Patrick Murphy suggested printing the slides and putting them on a wall so folks could see the slides before and after the formal presentation. Chris Ryan agreed to print and post them.

3) Meeting minutes

The 02/09/24 meeting minutes were approved as amended. Rachel Heller to provide edits.

4) Public Comments

Judie Feins asked that the maps include all the BHA properties since they are ripe for redevelopment. She also reminded the committee that the HPP sets out plans and goals and this zoning is a good opportunity to implement some of them.

John Beaty suggested that the slide deck get posted on the website as soon as possible.

Judith Feinleib reiterated that in order to vote for the 3A zoning she needs it to contain the lowest number of units and the Shaw's/ Star Market parcel needs to be removed from the map. She wants to see a financial analysis because she thinks it might be better to not comply with the law and take the fines from the state.

Sheila Flewelling asked if she could vote for Roy's option at the public forum. She remains concerned about density in Waverley as there are too many units shown in that area.

Chris Ryan responded that Roy's option would be available for discussion at the forum.

Linda Nickens is concerned about zoning parking lots as housing without a plan to replace the parking spaces. Roy Epstein responded that the Planning Board will have to address this issue in the final zoning recommendation.

Jeanne Mooney asked that since the town needs to grow its commercial tax base, how can this zoning dovetail with future commercial zoning changes proposed by the Planning Board?

Chris Ryan indicated that was a good point and Belmont should start working on a masterplan that can help address those issues.

Raleigh Finlayson asked who was at the developer focus group and what was the outcome of the meeting?

Chris Ryan responded that MAPC ran the focus group and Rachel Heller noted that the minutes are posted on the Town of Belmont MBTA Communities webpage.

Doug Koplow suggested that more work needed to be done on the zoning incentives and they would need to be vetted carefully.

Rena Fonseca stated that she has a concern about zoning for more than 1,632 units and that the proposed map seems counter to the principles that the committee created.

Rachel Heller responded that the state required this zoning near the rail stations and not complying is not an option.

Judith Ananian Sarno said she likes Roy's option and is opposed to adding South Pleasant Street back into the map.

Bill Trabilcy, Town Meeting Member, Precinct 7, reported that there has been a significant change in T ridership and that is no longer relevant to this concept.

Matt Taylor, Precinct 1, said that the town needs more housing options especially when looking at economic development it makes sense to bring residents into commercial areas to live. Free market will bring options.

Next Meetings:

- **Thursday, February 15th from 7-9 pm Public Forum in a Hybrid Format at the Beech Street Center.**
- **Thursday, February 29th at 7:00 pm** in a remote Zoom format only. Paul Joy to do minutes.

Meeting adjourned at 6:48 pm.

Minutes recorded by Thayer Donham.