



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

Mr. Arena asked if developments downtown are regularly built at 30 to 35 units per acre and if this is a practical density. Mr. MacNichol said that this is the density that has been seen in past developments and most multifamily developments in town are built to be over 50 units an acre. Ms. Clish stated that there is a density maximum that cannot be exceeded, and Mr. MacNichol stated that the current density cap is 20 units per acre and 35 units per acre is being proposed.

Mr. MacNichol continued to review the proposed bylaw changes. The board asked clarifying questions.

Mr. Weston asked about changing the parking space requirements from per bedroom to per unit and asked if there are requirements in the law that state whether parking can be determined by unit. Mr. MacNichol said that the law does not require parking to be calculated by unit but that it is easier to facilitate development more consistently on a per unit basis. Mr. Arena asked if there is evidence that shows whether additional parking is needed for units with more than two bedrooms. Mr. MacNichol said that he does not have data for this, and Mr. Weston stated that developments usually have a combination of one to two or more bedrooms and parking needs will vary.

Mr. MacNichol reviewed the proposed changes to the tiered density schedule and there was a discussion about moving the tier one requirements to the appropriate sections and allowing the density by right. Mr. Arena asked if the board could waive the minimum requirements and Mr. MacNichol responded yes. The board continued to review and discuss the tiered schedule. Ms. Clish asked if the maximum density is 50 units per acre and if this can be waived to go higher. Mr. MacNichol said that the board cannot waive the max density.

John Sullivan, 23 Weston Road, noted that many commercial properties Downtown have zero-foot setbacks currently and asked how a five-foot setback makes a difference. Mr. MacNichol said that some of the buildings have variable setbacks throughout the building façade and Ms. Clish said that setbacks allow for visual interest and some open space. Mr. MacNichol said that an applicant can waive from these requirements if it makes sense for their building. Mr. Sullivan asked what the utilization rate of parking spaces is for recent developments. Mr. MacNichol stated that the developments provide about 1.3 to 1.4 parking spaces and utilize an average of 1.2 spaces. Mr. Sullivan emphasized that less parking is needed in new developments.

Mr. Arena asked if the compliance model results are the most recent version. Mr. MacNichol responded yes and that parking spaces are being proposed at a rate of 1.5 spaces per unit. Mr. Weston stated that 1.5 spaces are not a major change from what was previously approved at Town Meeting, and he is interested in making the Smart Growth Downtown District more compatible with the MBTA community's law.

Mr. MacNichol said that Downtown looks to achieve the minimum station area unit requirement of 40%, which is being achieved through the proposed concept. He continued to review the compliance model results with the board.

Carlo Bacci, 494 Main Street, spoke as a downtown resident and town meeting member, and stated that it feels like a struggle to see economic development downtown. He asked if the 6,000-sf minimum lot size requirement was from town meeting several years ago and Mr. MacNichol confirmed yes. Mr. Bacci stated that Green Street has experienced a lot of development, and he would like to see this in other areas of Downtown. He asked that the minimum lot size requirement be changed so that more density can occur, and he stated



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that there will be missed opportunities for real development and believes that a smaller minimum lot size will allow for more opportunity downtown.

Mr. MacNichol stated that about 40% of the downtown area does not meet the minimum square foot requirements and would not be able to use the proposed zoning.

Mr. Arena stated that residents in the area expressed that they do not want the area to change and don't support development. He asked if the 6,000-sf minimum lot size could be waived, and Mr. MacNichol stated that it has never been waived and that it would likely need a variance application through the Zoning Board of Appeals. Mr. MacNichol said that adjoining lots is possible to achieve the minimum lot size. Ms. Clish stated that changing the minimum lot size at this time would not be reflective of the feedback from residents thus far. The board continued to discuss the minimum lot size requirements.

Tara Gregory, 111 Pleasant Street, asked if the map could be expanded toward John Street to include more residential properties and existing multifamily. Mr. MacNichol said that they could look to expand multifamily use in this area in the future, but expanding 40R, mixed-use, and commercial is unlikely.

Jim Riley, 87 Hancock Street, asked how the upcoming ADU requirement will affect the MBTA Communities proposal. Mr. MacNichol stated that it is a separate requirement passed by the state. Ms. Clish stated that it does not interact with the 3A proposal and Mr. Weston stated the Town already has an ADU bylaw that will be updated.

Mr. MacNichol displayed the draft bylaw for the proposed BUS-D Main Street zoning proposal and provided an overview of the zoning changes. The board asked clarifying questions and provided comments.

The board discussed un-splitting lots along Main Street and Mr. MacNichol said that un-splitting lots is not required but will require justification if they decide to do so and would need to remove the clause that the zoning extension cannot apply to multifamily.

Sarah Fuller, 24 Pinevale Ave, asked if the residential parcels near Summer Ave could be conjoined under the law. Mr. MacNichol responded that parcels could be conjoined, and the proposed zoning allows multifamily up to three-stories and existing business and mixed use up to four or five stories. Mr. Arena asked if there is a maximum square foot area that a mixed-use building is capped at, and Mr. MacNichol said that the controls allow for a 70% lot coverage and a four-story height.

Ms. Clish asked if mixed use needs to go through the site plan review process. Mr. MacNichol said that the board can make mixed use development by-right. The board further discussed the Main and Pinevale Development in respect to the proposed zoning changes and development impacts. Mr. MacNichol stated that site plan review will still be required in the review process and the board continued to review the draft bylaw for Main Street. Mr. Weston stated his preference for requiring a special permit for mixed use development and stated it will be beneficial because almost every parcel along Main Street abuts residential properties. Mr. MacNichol reviewed the table of dimensional requirements for mixed use in the proposed Business D district.

The board discussed landscape requirements and Mr. MacNichol stated that landscaping requirements previously applied only to multifamily use and will now be applicable to commercial and mixed use. He continued to say that landscape areas include patio spaces and shared use spaces.



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Mr. MacNichol reviewed the inclusionary zoning regulations which apply affordable units to multifamily housing and mixed use at a rate of 12% in developments of 13 units or more. The board briefly discussed the proposed inclusionary zoning rates. Mr. MacNichol stated that a definition for Affordable Dwelling Units was added to the bylaw and Ms. Clish proposed the term be changed to Affordable Unit as to not confuse the term with ADU.

Mr. Weston said that the South Main Street design best practices will not be changing but there will need to be an addendum that includes the North Main Street area as well.

Mr. MacNichol reviewed the proposed setbacks and controls for the Main Street, Business D areas and the required 20 to 25% commercial component in mixed use developments. He suggested adding an opportunity to waive the commercial component in certain circumstances. The board briefly discussed the mixed-use percentage and Ms. Clish stated a preference for lowering the requirement so that it is not prohibitive to development.

Mr. Weston opened for public comment.

John Sullivan provided a minor spelling correction to the bylaw language.

Mr. Arena raised concern for floor amendments to the bylaw at town meeting and Mr. Weston stated that it is important to convey that any amendment that proposed changes to the bylaw controls has potential to impact the entire bylaw and jeopardize compliance. Ms. Clish said that these are minimal compliance options and any changes to the numbers will affect the dwelling units and could result in the plan falling out of compliance and there is no wiggle room for changing dimensions or affordability. Ms. Clish added that it should be conveyed at Town Meeting that the two proposed concepts are a result of listening to the community and hearing three priorities, including minimal compliance, protecting single family homes, and achieving affordability.

Mr. MacNichol mentioned the possibility for transitional area controls that would add additional setbacks to lots that abut residential districts on Main Street, and stated a preference for setting proper setbacks for the entire district since all parcels abut residential uses already. Mr. Weston agreed, and the board discussed setbacks for the Business D district.

Mr. MacNichol reviewed the site plan review trigger applicability and street tree requirements. Mr. Weston suggested removing the set dollar value payment per tree and instead utilizing MADOT index standards which are annually updated.

Jennifer Kileen, 12 Pinevale, requested to review the language on curb cuts and driveways. She mentioned that the language seems to encourage site access via side streets and asked if the language could be less encouraging of this practice. Ms. Clish said that the bylaw should minimize access from side streets and the board revised the bylaw language.

The board had a brief discussion about un-splitting lots along Main Street.

Ms. Kileen asked if the board could further amend the language on curb cuts and Mr. MacNichol said that this language applies specifically to abutting parcels that can improve connectivity to one another within the confines of the lots.

Mr. MacNichol reviewed the A-80 bylaw with the board, with a focus on intensity regulations and the dimensional controls that differ from the Business D bylaw. The board discussed the dimensional controls and provided revisions. Mr. Arena asked if the Downtown Districts proposed are the same and Mr. MacNichol confirmed that they are.



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Mr. MacNichol asked the board to proceed with a recommendation for Town Meeting. Ms. Clish asked Mr. MacNichol to review with the board the guidance provided by the Town Meeting Moderator regarding a potential reconsideration and the Assistant Town Manager Jayne Wellman stated that a reconsideration can only happen at town meeting if there is a procedural defect in the vote and then a motion may be made to reconsider. Ms. Wellman said that the two bylaws are similar enough which may warrant a reconsideration. Mr. Weston stated that the two proposals are independent of one another and would be voted on separately. Mr. Arena stated that this has been done historically at town meeting before. John Sullivan asked who can determine if something is a reconsideration. Ms. Wellman stated that it is up to the Moderator. Mr. Arena said that comments received by constituents reflect interest in both concepts and that the voters should decide, and Mr. Weston agreed.

The board discussed how they would like to proceed with the Town Meeting warrant.

Ms. Clish asked if the A-80 concepts provide additional affordability and Mr. MacNichol said that should the Summit Towers and Gazebo Circle developments be re-built they may provide additional affordability, but Reading Commons would likely not. Mr. Weston said that they could also add units by right and would have to add affordable units.

Laurie Hayes, 59 Forest Street, stated her support for the A-80 Option and stated that the ADU law may take pressure off the MBTA Communities initiative and provide housing opportunities. Ms. Hayes said that there are other initiatives that the town can pursue outside of MBTA Communities. She asked if there is a way to include a clause in the bylaw that allows the Town to revise it should the courts find the law unlawful. Mr. MacNichol said that if there are any changes in 3A then the town would revisit the bylaw.

Chris Calabrese, 17 Debra Drive, asked if there is a proposal that is more likely to be approved by the state. Mr. MacNichol responded that each plan could be accepted. Mr. Calabrese stated that additional education would be required if the board brought two concepts to Town Meeting.

Mr. Sullivan asked the board not to bring the A-80 concept to Town Meeting and reminded the board that the initial public survey indicated support for the MBTA Communities act.

Mr. Armstrong suggested that the board recommend one concept be brought to Town Meeting and that the Town Meeting Moderator should be consulted to determine if two concepts would be acceptable. Mr. Weston stated that two concepts should be voted on for the warrant prior and one could be rescinded if necessary.

Ms. Hayes asked how much of the A-80 areas will still be developable and Mr. Weston said that the density allowance will be increased, and these developments exist at a lower density and could be built out more. He added that Reading Commons is owned by JP Morgan and may fit another 40 units on their site while Summit Towers is a condo association and may be less likely to increase development on site. Ms. Clish said that to comply with the law their maximum lot coverage will be increased so this increases buildable area. Mr. Weston said that A-80 could result in more development that people may be expecting.

Mr. Calabrese asked a clarifying question about the location of the existing A-80 developments.

The board discussed making a motion and how the articles should be presented at town meeting.



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Mr. Arena made a motion to recommend up to two alternatives through up to two warrant articles to comply with the MBTA Communities, as presented. Mr. Weston seconded the motion, and it was approved 5-0-0 (Arena, Armstrong, Clish, Mateev, Weston).

The board determined that they would consult the town meeting moderator to determine the feasibility of bringing forward two warrant articles to town meeting. Mr. Weston said that the board will need to discuss the order of the articles at the next meeting.

Ms. Mateev made a motion to continue the public hearing to October 7, Ms. Clish seconded the motion, and it was approved 5-0-0 (Arena, Armstrong, Clish, Mateev, Weston).

Adjournment

Ms. Mateev made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:59 pm and it was seconded by Ms. Clish. It was approved 5-0-0 (Arena, Armstrong, Clish, Mateev, Weston)

Documents Reviewed at the Meeting:

- Zoning Bylaw Maps, dated September 18, 2024
- Draft Zoning Bylaw Texts, dated September 19, 2024
- Initial Compliance Analysis, dated September 18, 2024