

Minutes of the October 11, 2023, meeting of the Government Affairs Committee

Location Teleconference via Zoom

Present

(*AIA MA board members)

(**GAC Co-chairs)

Alison Nash	Emily Talcott	Julie Rivera
Amy Dain	Eric Reinhard	Lameece Kanan
Andrew Mitchell	Florence Ma	Laurence Spang**
Brian Sandford	G. Drake Jacobs	Sarah Oakes
Chin Lin	Gregory Smith	Thomas Hartman*
Chris Wilson	Jacob Knowles	Wandy Pascoal
Christine Clements	Jennifer Hardy	
Ellen Watts*	John Nunnari	

Legislative, Regulatory Updates:

- See the attached write-up from John Nunnari:
 - o JN: BBRS met yesterday, Oct-10; noted that the Administration is starting to schedule public hearings on regulations. The three public hearings on the 10th Edition will be scheduled when cleared by the Healey Administration.
 - o Note: the Oct-25 meeting of MAAB's subcommittee on regulations.

Multi-Family Zoning:

- LS: introducing Amy Dain, who wrote a 2019 report on ***The State of Multi-Family Housing in Greater Boston***. Note: MA housing shortage, rising prices, impact of zoning. 1. Approval process, 2. Shift to mixed-use for downtowns, 3. more housing in village centers.
- AD: history of exclusionary zoning, state library reference materials back to 1920s: 1972-1974, the entire region started “down-zoning,” eliminating many multi-family zones, powerful political forces responding to housing growth in 1950s-1960s, plus some environmental and anti-highway activism. 1965 federal opening to immigration led to population growth and social change. Many communities published growth policy statements but effectively closed borders through zoning. The current zoning era began in 1975, with tight regulations leading to scarcity and price escalation; the process changed to project-by-project review. Civil rights activism pushed to open zoning back up. The Commonwealth passed Chapter 40B in 1969 and revised Chapter 40A in 1975 to include regional needs, not only local. MBTA Communities Zoning Law passed mandating multi-family housing near transit, with as-of-right zoning without going through a discretionary approval process - requiring districts of “reasonable size” near transit to allow multi-family development. The “Zoning capacity” of an area is calculated on the maximum allowed. Still, existing buildings in an area may have more or less than zoning would allow and don’t address communities without MBTA service.
- AD: what are examples of the impact of MBTA communities' regulations on projects?
 - LS: halfway through the deadline to implement zoning areas? AD: many communities are waiting until next year. Zoning doesn’t guarantee construction. LS: rising construction and financing costs and uncertainty in awaiting zoning changes hold up projects.

- JN: did MA's abolishing the county form of government contribute to the lack of regional consideration of zoning decisions? For example, the Town of Holliston identified a prominent site for multi-use but is encountering local opposition. Has reduction from super-majority to simple for approval helped? AD: yes, the simple majority has some results, like for ADUs. Research hasn't found county government particularly involved historically. It's more regional planning agencies, like MAPC.
- GDJ: in Melrose, Fidelity planned 450 units on a 20-acre abandoned site, well designed (IKON Architects). Attorney neighbor organized to oppose re: increased traffic impact, etc., negotiated 10% reduction in unit count. The NIMBY backlash was to the detriment of future needs, and architects stood up in favor of housing development.
- EW: 1. Average home size has doubled, car ownership quadrupled 2. Wellesley implementing MBTA Communities changes 3. Wellesley needs to provide housing for the next generation to keep residents and redevelop empty office space 4. Decline in transit infrastructure is a crisis; MBTA stations deferred maintenance.
- JN: Braintree recently voted down ~500 units at South Shore Plaza. What happened? AD: that project was separate from the MBTA by-right area, and not sure why it failed, though it is located at a shopping center/highway adjacent to public transportation. Housing goals assume multi-modal transport will be available to support housing construction. "The way to manage traffic can't be not building housing!" Traffic can create political pressure to improve public transportation.
- GDJ: This is not all the fault of MBTA. The legislature needs to take action and invest in the transit system. Could there be a state board of zoning oversight?

Upcoming meeting topics speakers:

- *Tom Hartman has a program/learning unit on carbon education and can publicize/offer to members.*

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine M Clements, AIA
Recording Secretary, Government Affairs Committee

The next meeting of the Government Affairs Committee will be held on November 8, 2023, at 8:30 a.m. via teleconference. You may register in advance using this link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZltd-2sqj8jHtat-IPxA_OHYGgGSSPSes69

An email reminder with directions on RSVP will also be sent to all AIA members in Massachusetts and via the BSA's knowledge committee announcements.

Distribution:

AIA MA Board

Note: Items in italics are carried over from prior minutes.

Attachments: [Legis and Reg update_101123](#)

End of Minutes