

Michael McCusker, *Chair*
Joan Courtney Murray
Joe Previtera
Louis Rizoli
Chris Pfaff, *Planning Board Liaison*
Kathleen Nee, *Planning Board Liaison, Alt.*

TOWN OF WESTWOOD By: **Westwood Town Clerk** **Amanda Wolfe**
Commonwealth of Massachusetts *Ex-officio Member*



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APPROVED
On Meeting Date: 7/15/24

**HOUSING PARTNERSHIP
FAIR HOUSING COMMITTEE**

May 6, 2024
Meeting Minutes

Housing Partnership members Michael McCusker and Joan Courtney Murray, and Town of Westwood Housing and Land Use Planner Amanda Wolfe and Town Planner Elijah Romulus were present for the in-person meeting.

The meeting began at 5 p.m.

Staff Wolfe presented the talking points for the MBTA Communities Law and the Mixed Use Multi-Family Residential Overlay District (MUMFROD) up for vote at the Annual Town Meeting to be held at 6 p.m. on the same evening.

Character of Westwood

The MUMFROD expansion will allow us to expand housing opportunities in a way that aligns with the character of Westwood. The densities of the varying MUMFROD districts have been carefully determined to correspond with the existing makeup of each neighborhood. The Planning Board public hearings, Finance and Warrant Commission hearings, PSAs, and video played tonight demonstrated just some of the many designs multi-family housing can have using existing examples from around Westwood. The Islington Center Redevelopment and Gables at University Station are examples of multi-family housing projects that enhanced the existing character of their neighborhoods.

Housing Capacity, Not Construction & Review Process

The MBTA Communities Law is not a requirement to build, just to allow multi-family by-right. All by-right projects still go through the site plan review process known as an Environmental Impact and Design Review (EIDR). EIDR applications are heard at public hearings held by the Planning Board. During an EIDR review, the Planning Board reviews everything from stormwater management, traffic, landscaping and building design, and many other bylaw requirements and can also impose conditions. These hearings are advertised twice in Hometown Weekly and on the Town website in advance to allow for public comment. Single-family homes, alternatively, do not have to go through the EIDR process.

School Impacts

Use caution when discussing this topic. As a member of the Fair Housing Committee/Housing Partnership, it's especially important to remember that housing decisions cannot legally be made based on school or fiscal impacts. Refer to Housing Messaging memo.

The MAPC, our regional planning agency, conducted a study that reaffirmed there has been no significant association between school enrollment and housing development in MA based on data from 2010 to 2020. In the case of Gables, it produced far fewer students than projected by the Economic Impact study. Chapter 70 aid, which is state funding for public schools, is partially calculated based on enrollment. If enrollment declines, Chapter 70 aid can decline. If enrollment increases, Chapter 70 aid can increase.

Further, WPS administration can determine where students attend school based on capacity – as required by the MA Constitution.

Traffic Impacts

The Planning Board factors traffic mitigation into every decision – whether it's commercial, residential, or mixed use development. 50% of our MUMFROD district was required to be within a ½ mile of public transit in Westwood. However, the Planning Board has gone above and beyond this requirement to reduce the need for personal vehicle use. By situating most of the MUMFROD zone near transit and other everyday amenities (e.g. grocery stores, pharmacies, coffee shops, etc.), residents of any future development will not be as reliant on personal vehicles to run errands, access services, and go to work/school. Moreover, the Planning Board often requires developers of large projects to produce a transportation demand management (TDM) plan to encourage alternative forms of transportation.

The Planning Board is further promoting walking, cycling, and public transit through the soon-to-be-released Climate Action, Resiliency, and Sustainability (CRS) Plan. The CRS Plan calls for better transit access and walking/cycling infrastructure to make it more feasible for people traveling into, out of, and within Westwood.

Property Values

Our Zoning Bylaws and the careful review conducted by the Planning Board for all projects have ensured that every housing development project has added value to the Town's tax base. In many cases, property values have increased as a result due to the added neighborhood amenities and infrastructure. Like most projects from the last ten years, the selected MUMFROD parcels are areas that are underutilized and already contain industrial or commercial development. No residential areas were rezoned. In other words, any potential projects that arise from this zoning will be redevelopments of existing commercial areas. A larger tax base means greater funding for services to residents.

Environment

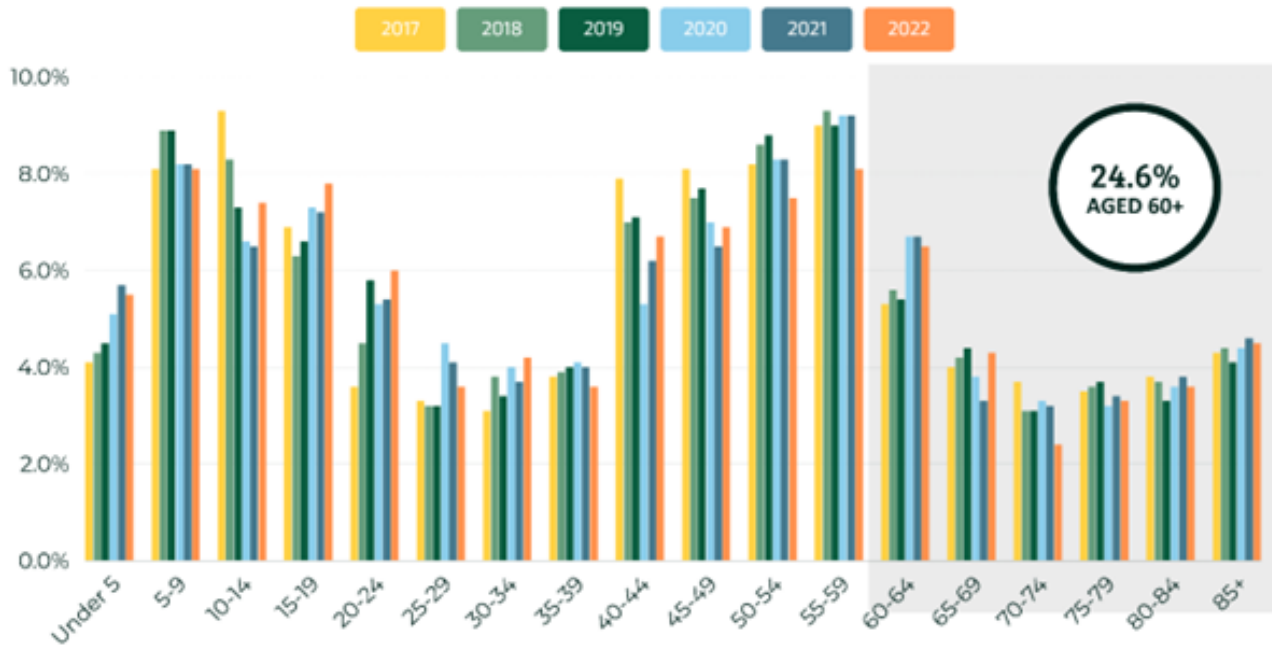
Multi-family housing is better for the environment because it uses less land area per person and often has greater energy efficiency than single-family homes. This is a result of greener construction and building material requirements in newer construction and the efficiency of having fewer exterior walls per unit. If every household lived in a single-family home, there would be no land left for recreation or conservation.

Secondly, Multi-family situated near transit and amenities in walkable/bikeable neighborhoods - also known as transit-oriented development (TOD) - reduces the need for personal vehicle use. Personal vehicles accounted for roughly 32% of greenhouse gas emissions in Westwood in a 2017 emissions inventory conducted by the MAPC.

Multi-family housing allows the Town to address housing need while furthering its efforts as a Green Community with ample open space and recreation land.

Overreach from the Commonwealth

Both the 2019 Housing Production Plan and 2020 Comprehensive Plan in Westwood prioritize the creation of greater housing choice. These plans were developed based on extensive public feedback. The soon-to-be-released Climate Action, Resiliency, and Sustainability (CRS) Plan further exemplifies the importance of multi-family housing. Young adults, families with young children, and seniors are finding it increasingly difficult to afford to live in Westwood – which is contributing reason for why nearly a quarter of residents are ages 60 years or older. This MUMFROD expansion builds upon existing efforts to encourage diverse housing production that the community has already supported through previous Town Meeting votes and aligns with existing review processes for development projects.



The Supreme Judicial Court will eventually decide in the Attorney General’s lawsuit against the Town of Milton whether or not the MBTA Communities Law Guidelines promulgated by the Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities (EOHLC) are an overreach of the MBTA Communities Law, and whether or not the state has the right to take the back zoning powers granted to municipalities pursuant to the Zoning Enabling Act (MGL Chapter 40A). Until such time as the court renders its decision on these questions of law, Town Counsel has strongly advised that Westwood voters approve Article 21 and expand the MUMFROD district as necessary to achieve compliance with the MBTA Community Law Guidelines.

Desire for More Affordable Housing

Westwood has strong inclusionary zoning requirements. In any multi-family development of eight units or more, 15% of those must be affordable at minimum. Mixed-income housing allows people regardless of socioeconomic status to benefit from the production of new housing. The Bylaw does not dictate whether housing built contains ownership or rental housing. To align with the Town’s goal for diverse housing opportunity, it will likely result in a mix of both to serve a variety of socioeconomic needs.

Total Units	Minimum Affordable Units
1-7	0
8-9	1
10-15	2
16-22	3
23-26	4
27+	15% of the total rounded up to the next whole number

Understanding Housing Need

Housing need has far outpaced housing production nationwide, which drives up housing costs. This is especially prevalent in eastern MA. After adjusting for inflation, the average millennial salary is

substantially lower than that of a baby boomer when they were the same age. This cost burden is worsened by the greater amount of debt held by the millennial generation due to increasing costs. Many of these increased costs are associated with steps that would help people achieve greater economic mobility, such as a college education and purchasing a home.

Many households that were able to buy a home even as few as five years ago, would not be able to buy their first home in today's market. People are paying the greatest percentage of their income toward housing in decades because wages have grown significantly slower than housing prices. This has particularly impacted millennials, who are experiencing the lowest ownership rate of any generation (43%). As a result, renters tend to be more cost-burdened than owners – making it even more challenging to save up for a home if that's what they desire. Owning is not superior to renting, but does offer households greater economic stability through tax benefits, asset growth, and stable housing costs.

It is difficult for both public and private employers to find employees to maintain essential services and economically beneficial services when the cost of living outweighs what they can pay employees. As a result, employees have to live further from their place of work. When people have to live further away from their place of work or other common destinations, they end up paying a comparable amount in commuting costs.

The number one way to address housing costs is by increasing supply. The MUMFROD expansion simply enables the possibility of more housing, which would still undergo Environmental Impact and Design Review (EIDR) at public hearings.

Housing Insecurity

The increase in housing costs and climate change increase the likelihood of housing insecurity. Housing insecurity can materialize in the form of cost-burden households, evictions, forced migration due to climate impacts (e.g. flooding), or experiencing homelessness to name some examples. In the most recent American Community Survey data, which is from the U.S. Census Bureau, poverty rose 3% (5% total) and median household income rose nearly \$20,000 to (nearly \$193,000 from the previous year in Westwood, indicating an increasing socioeconomic divide locally.

Racial Equity

Less than a quarter of Westwood identifies as persons of color. While Westwood has aimed to be an inclusive place, policies from many levels of government have both advertently and inadvertently perpetuated housing segregation, such as post-WWII GI Bill housing opportunities limited to white veterans and redlining that made it difficult for people of color to access lending services. This MUMFROD expansion is another opportunity to promote equity in our community.

Failure to Comply

While a couple municipalities are challenging the MBTA Communities Law requirements, over 40 communities have passed. Failure to comply can result in the loss of grant money, ability to enforce the existing Zoning Bylaw, and civil rights suit. A civil rights suit would be in conflict with our community's commitment to inclusivity, while losing the ability to enforce our Zoning Bylaw would allow people to build anything they want. Failure to comply is not an option.

The Town has received funding from the grants that require MBTA Communities Law compliance. However, other popular grant programs have since revised their criteria to include MBTA Communities Law compliance too, meaning more grants are at risk.

- The Town applied for and received a Massworks grant of \$5.5 million in 2015 for the Canton Street/university Avenue/Dedham Street intersection.
- The Town applied for but did not receive a smaller Massworks grant (under \$1 million) for Islington Center Sidewalks grant in 2018.
- The Town looked into grants under the Housing Choice Initiative Program in 2019 and 2021, but found we did not meet the criteria for application in those 2 years.
- The Town has not applied for or received any other grants from those particular programs in the last several years.
- While we have not received grants from these specific programs, the Town has received numerous grants from related programs, including over \$1,056,000 in funding from the Complete Streets programs from 2016 to 2022, and \$240,000 in funding from the Shared Streets grant in 2019.

Inclusive Speech

- Westwood welcomes all people regardless of age, race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, familial status, and disability in accordance with national and state level housing laws and community value in inclusivity.
- The Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee is committed to promoting housing choice for anyone that desires to lives in Westwood regardless of socioeconomic status. The MUMFROD expansion allows us to create a more livable community for current and future residents.

The meeting closed at 5:30 p.m.