



Town of Carlisle

66 Westford Street
Carlisle, MA 01741

To: Planning Board
From: MBTA Communities Subcommittee
CC: Select Board
Date: December 5, 2024
Re: Subcommittee Report/Update to Planning Board

The intent of this memo is to provide an update from the MBTA Communities Subcommittee to the Planning Board for their meeting of December 9, 2024.

Background Information

Subcommittee Mission: the Planning Board established the Town's MBTA Communities Subcommittee in March 2024 to make a good faith effort to explore the feasibility of compliance with the MBTA Communities legislation (MGL Ch. 40A Section 3A) and guidelines, which is a strategy identified within the Housing Production Plan (most recently updated in August 2023).

Subcommittee Exploration: the Subcommittee's exploration was to include but not be limited to the following analyses: potential sites, areas, corridors, and neighborhoods; site constraints (environmental, legal, etc.) and available mapping; various zoning bylaw options; applicability of methodology used in other similar towns; compliance modeling in consultation with assigned Technical Assistance providers designated by various state agencies (EOHLC, CHAPA and MHP, among others); feedback received from residents and stakeholders.

Subcommittee Assistance: the Subcommittee was to assist the Town Planner as needed with the following: scoping for the grant-funded Subsurface Hydrogeology Study; education and outreach to the community; presentations of recommendations to the Planning Board; Assistance with Town Meeting preparation and presentations.

Subcommittee Update

- 1) Materials are posted to the Town of Carlisle's MBTA Communities web page for the results of the "exploration" aspects of the charge: [MBTA Communities | Carlisle, MA](#)
- 2) The below is the primary strategy investigated for compliance with the legislation and guidelines, which reflects the results of the Subcommittee's good faith effort and diligent analysis of feasibility within the constraints of the Town of Carlisle, in connection with the state's compliance modeling, and in response to feedback from residents and stakeholders.
- 3) Other aspects that may impact feasibility, such as ecological impacts, BioMap, etc., have not been fully considered.
- 4) Detailed Subcommittee review of public feedback has not been conducted.

- 5) Detailed Subcommittee review of potential Multi-family Conservation Cluster Subdivision has not been fully conducted.
- 6) With this report the Subcommittee has made progress towards the primary feasibility, exploration, and education / outreach aspects of its charge.
- 7) Further work associated with scoping the Subsurface Hydrogeology Study is beyond the capabilities of the Subcommittee.
- 8) The Subcommittee believes that Town Meeting preparation and presentations should not be in our charge because we are not a decision-making body.

Primary STRATEGY Investigated:

2-Acre Multi-Family Conservation Cluster of 3-4 Housing Units per 2-Acre Lot

What: Zoning overlay for a minimum of 95 units of multi-family capacity based on nitrogen loading limitations of private septic and private well on a 2- acre lot. The 8 bedrooms currently allowed under Title 5 would be grouped into multi-family buildings as defined by the legislation and guidelines of a total of 3 or 4 housing units per 2-acre lot. These units would be located on a small portion of the lot while the rest of the lot would be put into open space preservation.

Where – Considerations for Determining Potential Locations for Zoning Overlay:

- 1) Subsurface geological conditions – avoid areas where ledge and glacial till are present, as these conditions present challenges to the siting of proper septic systems and risk of potential groundwater contamination
- 2) Floodplain – avoid areas known as 100- and 500-year floodplain and areas known to be flood prone
- 3) Existing site conditions – avoid areas where established wildlife habitat such as woods, wetlands, native or preserved meadows, and unmanaged woodland edges predominate, as these areas could be negatively impacted by potential development
- 4) Wildlife corridors – avoid areas that appear on BioMap, etc., as these areas could be negatively impacted by potential development
- 5) Existing structures – prioritize areas with existing structures to enable adaptive reuse and minimize new land disturbance
- 6) Drinking water – avoid areas of known well water deficiencies, recognizing that it may not be possible to know definitively whether an area is at risk for well water deficiencies
- 7) Primary vehicular access – orient toward direct access to major routes through town, avoiding narrow roads with known issues
- 8) MBTA Station access – orient toward multimodal routes out of town toward MBTA Stations
- 9) Historic districts and structures – avoid historic districts and structures in order to preserve Carlisle character

How: The intent would be for this to be an overlay district on top of base zoning. It would not take away any existing property rights or render any existing conforming uses non-conforming. It would be another option that a property owner could utilize to develop or redevelop their land. It would allow for the re-use of existing structures as well as new construction. A property owner could carve up an existing single-family home into 3 or 4 units with a total of 8 bedrooms per 2-acre parcel pursuant to Title 5. A property owner would still have the right to tear down and rebuild a single-family home if desired.

Considerations Discussed for Zoning Overlay Language and Planning Board Regulations:

- 1) Dimensional requirements to scale allowable development to housing types appropriate for “missing middle” and downsizing
- 2) Ensure protections for habitat areas are substantially more robust than underlying single-family residential zoning
- 3) Clustering to ensure more meaningful preserved natural areas
- 4) Water recharge rate and water quality impacts to abutters
- 5) Require Site Plan Review through Planning Board with detailed Conditions of Approval to ensure compliance with Planning Board Regulations (no exemption from any and all other board approvals necessary for any development, which must be finalized in advance of any Site Plan Approval)

Why the Subcommittee focused on this strategy:

- Aligned with Master Plan and Housing Production Plan recommendations (Appendix A)
- Supported by survey results
- Title 5-compliant via conventional septic system
- Ecologically sensitive
- Historically sensitive
- Hydro-geologic conditions considered to the extent possible (i.e., groundwater, geology, soil conditions)
- Minimum allowable multi-family scale
- 2-acre strategy is intuitive and practicable
- Reliant on action by private property owners
- Spreads density impacts throughout Town
- Allows single-family conversion to multi-family (also supported by survey results)

Compliance: This strategy is compliant because the Guidelines allow land needed for the protection of the drinking water supply (i.e., nitrogen loading land on lots that rely on private septic and well) to be excluded from the gross density calculation, which enables Carlisle to meet the gross density requirement with just 3 or 4 units per 2 acres. Final zoning areas will need to be run through the State’s compliance model to determine actual unit yield. Zoning language will require review and approval by HLC and AGO.

OTHER STRATEGIES CONSIDERED BUT NOT PURSUED

The Subcommittee has considered other alternatives, a list of which is below. Summaries of each alternative considered will be provided under separate cover.

- A.** Town-Owned Land (i.e., Banta Davis, Conant)
- B.** Town-Owned Buildings (i.e., Highland, Bog House)
- C.** Town Center / Mixed-Use
- D.** Large Development on Edge of Town
- E.** Churches (i.e., St. Irene's Parish, Congregational Church)
- F.** Vacant Land
- G.** Commercial Areas
- H.** Existing Development Overlay
- I.** Low Value Properties
- J.** Willing Property Owners
- K.** Do Nothing

APPENDIX A

Master Plan Goals & Recommendations that align with the Subcommittee’s process and considerations:

- Goal 1: Protect and maintain open space, recreational assets, conservation lands, and wetlands
 - Rec 1b: Encourage residents to protect portions of their private land using Conservation Restrictions or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions if appropriate;
- Goal 4: Ensure that local policies and land use decisions consider multiple Town goals and community needs
- Goal 14: Foster collaboration between and among staff, volunteer boards, committees, and commissions
- Rec 15e: Incorporate environmental stewardship and sustainability impacts into municipal decision-making
- Goal 19: Protect land (both developed and undeveloped) and native flora, fauna, and funga
 - Rec 19a: Consider adopting an additional or alternative open space residential development or conservation cluster bylaw.
 - Rec 19b: Explore options and possible methods for, and costs and benefits of, extending regulation of tree cutting to individually-owned parcels of land that would build upon the regulations in place.
- Goal 20: Increase the range of housing options to meet diverse community needs.
 - Rec 20b: Explore strategies to promote housing diversity and allow development of “missing middle” housing in specified areas.
 - Rec 20d: Consider other opportunities to produce housing as outlined in the Housing Production Plan in effect at the time.
- Goal 23: Support the health, safety, and wellness of residents

Housing Production Plan Goals & Strategies that align with the Subcommittee’s process and considerations:

- Goal 1: Create community awareness of housing need
- Goal 3: Diversify housing options to provide “lower-case a” affordable housing
- Goal 4: Affirmatively further fair housing
- Strategy 1: Investigate the feasibility of adopting a new cluster/cottage housing zoning bylaw
- Strategy 4: Investigate the feasibility of complying with M.G.L. Chapter 40A Section 3A (a.k.a. “MBTA Communities”)
- Strategy 5: Investigate the feasibility of increasing housing supply and housing choice via zoning amendments that encourage “missing middle” housing typologies