

**Town of Carlisle Planning Board
MBTA Communities Subcommittee**

**Minutes of 5/14/24 2:00PM / Minutes Prepared by: Julie Mercier, Town Planner
Hybrid Meeting Format: Heald Room, 66 Westford Street, Carlisle MA & Zoom**

Voting Members Present:

- Kate Reid, Select Board
- Adelaide Grady, Planning Board
- Christina Christodoulopoulos, Environmental Sustainability Committee
- Tony Mariano, Board of Health

Voting Members Absent:

- Christine Johnson-Battista, Affordable Housing Trust
- Helen Jackson Young, Conservation Commission

Non-Voting Members Present:

- Julie Mercier, Town Planner
- Linda Fantasia, Health Agent

Other Attendees:

None

Chair Grady called the meeting to order at 2:02 PM.

Minutes of 4/16/24

The Subcommittee reviewed the minutes and made minor amendments. Ms. Reid made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Ms. Grady seconded. The minutes were approved by roll call vote:

Reid – aye

Grady – aye

Mariano – aye

Christodoulopoulos – aye

Site Selection Analysis

Ms. Mercier screen shared a document outlining a potential approach that she and Chair Grady have started to think through as they've become more familiar with Title 5 and nitrogen sensitive areas as relates to the MBTA Communities guidelines.

Chair Grady explained that technically the MBTA Communities guidelines exclude nitrogen sensitive areas (needed for the protection of drinking water) from the denominator of the gross density calculation. Mr. Mariano exclaimed "that's the whole Town!" Any site with on-site septic and well is considered a nitrogen sensitive area under Title 5 and is limited to a total flow rate of 440 gpd/acre.

Chair Grady and Ms. Mercier walked the Subcommittee through the thought process, which contemplates a minimum land area (i.e. 4.5 acres), calculates total bedrooms allowed under Title 5 in compliance with nitrogen loading limitations for 4 of the 4.5 acres, and then proposes that the housing units associated with the bedrooms be grouped onto the 0.5-acre piece while the 4 acres are set aside for nitrogen loading, and excluded from the gross density calculation. This would allow for zoning in compliance with MBTA Communities but result in an actual density and unit count per project that is more in line with the Carlisle context.

Ms. Mercier mentioned that it's unclear whether any sites under 5 acres can count towards compliance based on the wording in the guidelines. Chair Grady explained her interpretation of the wording. It was agreed that they would ask Bohler Engineering for a technical opinion. In any case, it may be possible to scale the idea explained above to 5+ acre properties, if needed.

Ms. Reid asked about large properties next to conservation land, and how this could apply to that scenario. She mentioned a property in Concord that used "credit land" across town. Ms. Mercier asked for clarification on whether the extra land in the above analysis would be considered "credit land" or would need a nitrogen loading easement. Ms. Fantasia clarified that it's not "credit land" if it's on the same parcel as the development project. She noted that if you have to site both a septic and a well on the property, "credit land" is required to be adjacent to the development parcel.

Ms. Christodouloupoulos asked if this idea could be applied to existing neighborhoods and not be limited to existing sites that meet the exact acreage needed. Ms. Mercier said that finding a real-world example site is helpful, but that the zoning would not be limited to existing sites if the Subcommittee would prefer it contemplate potential future scenarios on already-developed areas.

Mr. Mariano asked about achieving the 95-unit capacity requirement. Ms. Mercier and Chair Grady noted that under the scenario described, several 4.5-acre sites would be needed to achieve the 95-unit capacity requirement. The total acreage of all these sites would be 54 acres.

Mr. Mariano asked whether the HLC (EOHLC) allows towns to take credit for existing development. Ms. Mercier mentioned her work in the Town of Reading and noted that she believes there is a mechanism if existing density is higher than what can be achieved with a 15 unit/acre minimum. She noted that this would not apply to Carlisle because nothing in Carlisle comes close to 15 units/acre.

Ms. Christodouloupoulos suggested an approach that would consider properties at the edge of town that could tie into neighboring sewer systems. Ms. Reid noted a recent example of a property on Estey Road tying into Billerica sewer b/c an on-site septic was going to be very expensive to construct. Ms. Fantasia mentioned the Chelmsford sewer

system and noted that other neighboring towns are not fully sewered in the areas adjacent to Carlisle.

Chair Grady suggested a hybrid strategy with edge properties and some scattered sites. This could reduce the total acreage needed to meet the 95-unit capacity requirement.

Mr. Mariano opined that it seems more beneficial and much more do-able to developers, and likely to pass Town Meeting, if the development is focused on the edges with potential utility tie-in to neighboring towns. He commented that this isn't just a septic analysis, there are many other considerations that need to be made – like traffic. He suggested that it will be good to see these ideas modeled.

Chair Grady said the current housing market is favoring smaller units at “affordable” price points. Mr. Mariano said he has spent hours trying to understand what “affordable” means and he still has no idea. Chair Grady explained the difference between “Capital A Affordable” which is income-restricted, and “lower-case a affordable” which is essentially relative to the local housing market. Mr. Mariano summed it up by saying that “lower case a affordable” is essentially affordable in an unaffordable town. He questioned who the town is trying to help by putting in more housing. Chair Grady described the housing gap.

Mr. Mariano asked about how well and water capacity fits into the above scenario. Ms. Fantasia noted that the trigger for a public water supply is 25 people for 60 days a year. She and Mr. Mariano expressed concern that the above 4.5-acre, 16-bedroom scenario will yield 32 people (under Title 5 septic counts), and thus trigger a public water supply. Chair Grady suggested there may be a way to thread this needle, perhaps by looking at 3.3-acre sites and 12 bedrooms.

Ms. Christodouloupoulos asked about allowing single-family conversions to 4 units. The Subcommittee talked about if and how this might be possible. Mr. Mariano inquired as to whether developers would want to carve up existing homes, and asked how that works from an ownership standpoint. Chair Grady opined affirmatively and noted that they would be condos, and under Title 5 the condo association would own the septic system.

Ms. Mercier asked the Subcommittee if they are ready to have a forum at the June 10th Planning Board meeting. Ms. Reid commented that many Carlisle residents leave for the summer once school finishes, so it needs to happen by mid-June or not until the fall. Chair Grady opined that the Subcommittee would not be ready or able to execute a forum in mid-June very well. Ms. Reid commented that she'd prefer to do a good job.

They talked about having a listening session with visuals of what this could look like at the June 10th meeting. They gave a few examples of properties nearby with densities that are absorbed well by their context and/or housing typologies of a scale that might be appealing to Carlisle residents. There was hesitation that this could be pulled together in time. Chair Grady suggested the Subcommittee could do other things during the summer such as

surveys, focus groups, and info sessions. Ms. Fantasia suggested having a poster at Old Home Day on June 22nd and talking to people individually. Ms. Christodoulopoulos suggested that the poster could also be displayed at Race Amity Day on June 9th.

Ms. Mercier pointed out that the strategy outlined is really contemplating a new conservation cluster that is better than the one in current zoning because it preserves more land and clusters the homes.

Members of the Subcommittee agreed and liked framing it this way. Mr. Mariano referred to it as a win-win situation for the town, and suggested messaging it as “Carlisle approaching MBTA housing mandate as a conservation cluster.” Chair Grady expressed hesitation about being definitive on a strategy without broader buy-in from other boards. Ms. Mercier said that at a minimum the Planning Board should know about, weigh in on, and come to some agreement on the approach/strategy, but she also noted that creation of a new conservation cluster bylaw is a Master Plan recommendation.

Ms. Christodoulopoulos suggested framing it as a question in the survey: “should the Town approach this mandate as a conservation cluster?” Other members suggested the survey would be a good tool to ask for feedback on development on the edge of town, and the idea of allowing single-family conversions. Ms. Mercier agreed to work on a survey and noted the importance of threading some education and visuals into it.

Ms. Mercier asked for public comment. There was none.

Ms. Reid made a motion that the next Subcommittee meeting will be on Tuesday, June 4th at 2:00 PM. Mr. Mariano seconded. The Subcommittee agreed by roll call vote:

Reid – aye

Grady – aye

Mariano – aye

Christodoulopoulos – aye

The meeting was adjourned at 3:17 PM.

These Minutes were approved on 6/4/24.

Materials Reviewed at the Meeting:

- Agenda for 5/14/24
- Thought Process for Carlisle’s Potential MBTA Communities Approach