

3A Task Force Meeting
3A Task Force & Planning Department
Monday, September 25, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. remote via Zoom
Meeting Minutes

Member/Staff Attendees: Toni Mooradd, Sarah Player, Lindsay Randall, Ken Redford, Carolyn Britt, Chase Delano, Glenn Gibbs, Andrea Bates, Brendan Conboy

Member/Staff Absent: Chris Doktor

MAPC Attendees: Josh Fiala

Josh opened the meeting at 7:00pm and introduced himself and the MAPC project team. Task Force (TF) members and Planning Staff introduced themselves. Josh provided an overview of Section 3A and Andrea provided an overview of the Town's work-to-date.

Josh requested feedback from TF members about specific considerations that have arisen related to 3A.

Glenn commented on present Ipswich zoning stating that 3A density requirements are already allowed in several Ipswich zoning districts, and that the main difference here will be via special permit. He stated Town's desire to at least maintain the current 15% affordability requirement and some level of control via the site plan review process. Glenn said that form-based code zoning makes particular sense for a 3A district.

Lindsay said development concerns and considerations include infrastructure, particularly water, and school enrollment and whether tax increases could occur as a result of 3A.

Toni agreed with Lindsay that schools will be a consideration. She agreed with Glenn that Town Center zoning is generally compliant, but that 3A is also an opportunity to look at expanding housing opportunities, which may allow for other types of housing, in other areas of Town. She stated residents want choice in siting districts.

Sarah said some of the general concerns we hear is how to balance development with housing needs in a historic town and how to integrate new housing into the existing character of town. She expressed that information on this project needs to be accessible and visual, because zoning can be complex.

Lindsay said that Ipswich plans to complete the economic feasibility analysis in order to have a more than 10% affordability requirement, and that affordable housing should not be grouped into one area but should be located throughout town.

Josh provided an overview of the scope of work and timeline for the project, and noted this project will aim to advance the goals of other town plans.

Josh shared an initial map of excluded lands, which is land sensitive due to reasons such as environmental characteristics or use codes or restrictions, that is not possible or practical to create multi-family housing.

Carolyn asked if the land analyses will only be done on the station area. Josh said the mapping analysis will be the whole town. Carolyn said more in-person, public-input meetings need to be held earlier in the process. Josh agreed that engagement other than what is in the scope will be necessary and asked TF members share input on timing, format, etc. He stated meeting discussions and locations are subject to change depending on TF preferences. He also suggested best practice for engagement is aligning public meetings with a survey since reach is much greater. Carolyn suggested holding focus groups in specific neighborhoods where 3A districts are being contemplated. Josh said that targeted neighborhood focus groups could be held and these types of meetings are built into the project scope and budget. Carolyn stated that the tour of the station area should include the TF and not only Planning Staff. Josh affirmed they will be involved.

Josh stated that next steps will include detailing a community engagement strategy, undertaking a mapping analysis, and completing a local materials review. He also said that the purpose of the upcoming engagement sessions, including the focus groups, will be to establish principles and goals that we will use to guide the project. He requested TF members share names of groups or individuals who should be invited to the initial targeted focus group sessions with him or Andrea. Brief discussion about the focus group sessions ensued.

Carolyn said that other communities are allowing email distribution list sign-ups to notify of events. Andrea responded that we are keeping an email distribution list that we will use for this purpose, and will continue to request people share their contact information throughout the project. Carolyn said that we should go to existing Town events to promote this work. Andrea responded that while it may not make sense to have Josh and the MAPC team at all of those events, Planning Staff and the TF plans to do so.

Glenn said he is pleased with the presentation and what he is seeing so far and looks forward to working with MAPC on this project.

Public Comment

Helen Weatherall, 44 Fellows Road, said that she found it difficult to find meeting information. She said she is pleased this is a Zoom meeting but that she assumed it would be in-person also. She said that the town needs to study the money that Ipswich stands to get and what it would cost to comply with 3A. She said she is concerned 3A is one-size-fits-all and does not seem to consider specific concerns to individual towns. She said that the MBTA should be fully functioning before we add this density and it leaves towns to figure out how to accommodate this. She stated concern for affordable housing and that it seems it is being pushed to the side in this project.

Chris Florio, 44 Fellows Road, asked when this would be brought to town meeting. Josh responded that when the TF first assembled there was discussed about spring 2024 town meeting, but that fall 2024 is what is now being planned for.

Odile Breton, 9 Soffron Lane, said that the MBTA service it is not yet up to pre-pandemic service levels and that that she thinks traffic is heavier. She said that if people move to the community they may find the transit system failing their needs and they may need to get a car. She said that the excluded lands map does not define all resource areas in the community. Josh said that the map does not account for all present constraints and does not account for some future constraints such as flood risk, so as we get into parcel-level detail we will consider these factors.

Torii Bottomley, said that we should study other options such as removing the MBTA station in Ipswich in order to not have to comply. She said she agreed with Helen what that 3A is one-size-fits-all and that costs to town and non-compliance are not being considered. Andrea responded that the scope of work for this project is bringing a compliant district option to town meeting where voters will decide to comply with 3A or not.

Taylor Armerding, 22 Oakhurst Ave, said that further into this process he would like to talk about possible visions for the downtown area and that 3A compliance is not optional.

Lyle Folkstead, 23 Oakhurst Ave, said he looks forward to discussing some of the physical aspects of the downtown, how it has historically developed, and what it was intended to be. He said that some land use areas are underutilized.

Charlotte Kahn, 39 Spring St, said she does not think there is real community deliberation in this process and that there should be a greater level of engagement. She said she thinks the TF should share preliminary ideas at spring town meeting to see how the community reacts. She said that she fears that putting this zoning downtown would give up the special permit powers the PB and Ipswich have downtown. She said she does not want this to be a consultant-run process and is concerned that it is and that it will not provide a good outcome for the town.

Janet Woodman, Rowley resident at 86 Redwood Ave, said that she has attended to see how Ipswich is addressing 3A and she is concerned that Ipswich is not looking at other options.

Town Manager Stephen Crane said that the best choice forward is to pursue compliance and give town meeting voters a chance to decide for themselves, which is our form of government governance. He encourages everyone to assume good intentions because no one wants to bring harm to Ipswich and that everyone involved is trying to do what they think is right for the town, and said that baseless attacks on those involved simply because we disagree about what is right to move forward is not necessary or appropriate for the level of discussion we are at.

Josh said that he and Andrea will coordinate dates for an October meeting to talk about the engagement plan in more detail and the initial mapping review.

Meeting adjourned at 9pm.

Minutes taken by Andrea Bates.

Adopted on November 30, 2023