

RIO Task Force Meeting #2 – Meeting Minutes

June 18, 2025, at 7:00PM – Wellesley Town Hall, Great Hall

Task Members Present: Sheri Kassirer, Kara Reinhardt Block, Mary Kloppenberg, Joan Minklei, Peter Welburn, Paul Criswell, Amy Gottschalk, Odessa Sanchez, Marc Charney, Erin Reilly, Tom Taylor, Don Shepard, Mary Prosnitz.

Call to Order/Confirmation of Participants

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. Tom Taylor, the chair, welcomed everyone to the Wellesley planning board RIO task force meeting. He noted that the meeting was being held in a hybrid fashion from the Town Hall Great Hall, with some members joining via Zoom and others present in person.

Mr. Taylor proceeded to introduce the task force members and staff present in the Great Hall:

- Sheri Kassirer, Kara Reinhardt Block, Mary Kloppenberg, Joan Minklei, Peter Welburn, Paul Criswell, Amy Gottschalk, Odessa Sanchez, Marc Charney, Erin Reilly, Tom Taylor, in person, with Don Shepard and Mary Prosnitz joining online.
- Planning Staff: Eric Arbeene, Planning Director, and Brad Downey, Senior Planner.

Task Force Organization Updates

Chair & Vice Chair

Mr. Taylor informed the group that the Planning Board had formally voted to approve the leadership of the Task Force during their meeting the previous Monday evening. He stated that he would be serving as the chair, and Peter Welburn would serve as vice chair.

Precinct B Representative

Mr. Taylor explained that following the discussion from the previous week's meeting, there was interest in expanding the group to include a representative from precinct B. He announced that on Monday night, the planning board had agreed to add an extra slot to the slate. Erin Riley was introduced as the new representative for precinct B.

Task Force Member Introductions

Mr. Taylor invited the members who had not introduced themselves at the previous meeting to do so. The following members provided brief introductions:

Odessa Sanchez introduced herself as a Precinct E member. She shared her family background and her experience with multi-family housing and serving on the Wellesley Housing Authority. Ms. Sanchez expressed her interest in the task force, citing her perspective on balancing multi-family housing with preserving historical neighborhoods.

Amy Gottschalk introduced herself as a resident of in Precinct C. She mentioned her background and her interest in making a difference for the town through the task force.

Mary Kloppenberg introduced herself as a Precinct A member. She shared her background as the former executive director of the Wellesley Community Children's Center and expressed her belief in participatory democracy.

Sheri Kassirer introduced herself as a resident in Precinct D. She shared her background as a senior executive in healthcare and analytics, and her interest in housing policy stemming from her involvement in racial justice initiatives.

Erin Riley introduced herself as the new Precinct B representative. She mentioned her background as an architect and her interest in making Wellesley a more welcoming place to a wider range of the community.

Don Shepherd, joining remotely, introduced himself as a resident of Precinct C. He shared his background as a professor at Brandeis University and his interest in studying the cost-benefit analysis of solving housing issues, such as homelessness.

Task Force Administration

Operating Principles

Mr. Welburn presented a set of proposed operating principles for the task force. He emphasized the importance of treating each other with respect, holding members accountable for participation and preparation, starting and ending meetings on time, engaging with other town boards, seeking broad consensus, communicating with constituents, and holding all meetings in public.

The task force discussed various aspects of the operating principles, including:

- The process for reaching consensus, defining a quorum, and voting on recommendations.
- The importance of transparency and education in community outreach.
- The need for clear communication, and providing members with meeting materials in advance of the meeting to give members a chance to review and prepare for the meeting.
- The possibility of including dissenting opinions in final recommendations.

There was a discussion as to whether a simple majority or 2/3 majority would be required to change the zoning bylaw at Town Meeting. Members discussed that changes to the zoning bylaw that increases affordability in housing would only require a simple majority, where changes making affordability more restrictive would require a 2/3 vote.

Mr. Taylor suggested that they would refine the operating principles based on the discussion and revisit them at the next meeting.

Task Force Meeting Schedule

Mr. Taylor noted meetings will begin at 7:00 PM, not 6:30 PM, moving forward. Mr. Arbeene presented the challenges in scheduling future meetings, considering the availability of the meeting room, Wellesley Media for live streaming, and the 16 task force members. He proposed a few tentative dates.

All future meetings will be held hybrid for those who cannot attend in person. The in-person meetings will take place at the Town Hall Great Hall, where technology is preferred.

Due to conflicts and the need for further coordination, it was decided that a Doodle poll would be sent out to Task Force members to determine the best dates for future meetings. Mr. Taylor emphasized the importance of prompt responses to the poll.

RIO Bylaw Discussion

Overview of RIO Approval Process

Mr. Taylor and Mr. Arbeene provided a comprehensive overview of the RIO (Residential Incentive Overlay) approval process. They explained the following key points:

- The purpose of the RIO is to provide incentives for residential reuse and increased density on parcels greater than 1 acre located near commercial districts and public transportation. It is an overlay district, meaning it overlays a base zoning district.
- The role of the developer in educating the Planning Board and the wider community about their proposed project prior to the approval of RIO district, the role of Town Meeting in approving the district, the role of different town Boards in permitting the project, and the role of the Town in monitoring the project through construction.
- An overview of how housing developments are approved across town, and how developments adhere to various sections of the Zoning Bylaw.
- The history of RIO in Wellesley, including its creation for the Waterstone project and its use in subsequent developments, and the amendments that were made to the bylaw in 2019.
- The zoning map change process, including Planning Board sponsorship, advisory committee analysis, public hearings, and town meeting approval. This included a discussion on what criteria the Planning Board uses in deciding whether to sponsor a project.
- The special permit process, including the RIO permit and the Project of Significant Impact (PSI) permit, which looks at a project's impact on municipal systems and services. Mr. Taylor notes that for these permits, if the projects meet the criteria of the bylaw, they are typically compelled to grant the permit.
- The site plan review process conducted by the Zoning Board of Appeals, which looks at a project's on-site impacts.

The task force discussed various aspects of the process, including:

- The role of development agreements and their enforcement.
- The importance of clear communication and community outreach throughout the process and beginning early on. Mr. Arbeene provided an overview of the Planning Department notification procedure, which has recently changed in response to feedback from town residents. Further discussion on this subject followed.
- The challenges of conducting and verifying traffic impact studies at different stages of the process and the need for a more comprehensive approach to addressing traffic and infrastructure issues in areas where multiple RIOs might be considered.

Mr. Taylor notes that the section of the bylaw outlining the RIO approval process is not the RIO bylaw itself, but in another section of the bylaw.

Overview/Discussion of Allowed Uses

Due to time constraints, this agenda item was not discussed in detail. Mr. Taylor mentioned that the permitted uses in a RIO would be covered in a future meeting.

Overview/Discussion of "Close Proximity" as noted in Section 3.2.A

This agenda item was also postponed to a future meeting due to time constraints.

Task Force Chair Updates

Mr. Taylor provided the following updates and reminders:

- The task force will consider allowing public comments at future meetings, likely after the initial learning phase is complete.
- Members who haven't taken their oath of office should do so with the town clerk, and members who haven't completed the paperwork related to open meeting law and conflict of interest sent by Alissa Keane should complete those.
- Meeting materials are available on the Planning Department website. The Zoning Bylaw can be found on the town website.
- Members were reminded of the open meeting law requirements and the suggestion to create separate email addresses for task force-related communications.
- Members were encouraged to reach out with any questions, comments, or suggestions between meetings.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM. The next meeting date was tentatively set for July 9th, pending confirmation through a Doodle poll.