

RIO Task Force Purpose Discussion Summary

Includes what was discussed at meeting and what was sent to us by members who were absent.

Initials Key:

TT (Tom Taylor)	JH (Joe Hassell)	MP (Mary Prosnitz)
EC (Ed Chazen)	PC (Paul Criswell)	SK (Sheri Kassirer)
ER (Erin Reilly)	MC (Marc Charney)	JM (Joan Minklei)
AG (Amy Gottschalk)	MK (Mary Kloppenberg)	KRB (Kara Reinhardt Block)
OS (Odessa Sanchez)	HS (Heather Sawitsky)	PW (Peter Welburn)
DS (Don Shepard)		

PURPOSE STATEMENTS

- To create an overlay district that encourages the development of housing, at a scale, density and aesthetic that are compatible with existing surrounding uses, to contribute to housing diversity and housing affordability of the Town - **TT**
- Provide developers with clear guidelines where high(er) density multifamily and mixed—use development can be approved in an efficient permitting process. - **EC**
- The Town will benefit from establishing a clear process that ensures best practices in planning for new development. - **EC**
- To allow for a more diverse housing stock in Wellesley; to allow for more socio-economic diversity of people in Town. - **ER**
- To promote a town population that includes all levels of income and wealth. - **ER**
- To facilitate diverse housing stock and economic growth in strategic locations in Wellesley, in pre-determined locations that can handle increased density and have in place supportive infrastructure. - **JH**
- To promote redevelopment of existing structures or the creation of new structures for housing or for mixed housing and commercial use - **MP**
- To create varieties of housing types for households having a mixture of needs and income levels - **MP**
- To promote housing in areas that enhance the walkability of neighborhoods by building near schools, parks, shops and services - **MP**
- To promote housing created from new or redeveloped structures that preserve the architectural and aesthetic character of the town - **MP**
- To provide a vehicle whereby the Town can enable the development and construction of multi-family housing units that meet the Town's criteria and goals for community multi-family development. The RIO Bylaw enables multiple stakeholders – the Town, Developers, Community Organizations etc. to propose such developments - **PC**

- Create an opportunity to take advantage of real estate offerings in a timely way that would otherwise be denied by Wellesley's zoning rules in order to: To create more housing options for people at different stages of life; encourage affordable housing by requiring projects comply with the Town's inclusionary zoning; guide growth in the right places **-SK**
- It would be wonderful to live in a town where grandparents, parents and children could thrive together **-SK**
- The RIO has outlived its usefulness and no longer serves a distinct purpose. **-JM**
- With as-of-right multi-unit housing districts now in place and the MBTA Communities Act, the objectives of the RIO are already addressed more directly and predictably. **-JM**
- Retiring the RIO streamlines our zoning bylaws, removes redundancy, and provides clarity to property owners, town boards and residents. **-JM**
- Summary: The RIO is no longer necessary given that as of right multifamily and mixed-use zoning already achieves its objectives. Eliminating the RIO simplifies the zoning framework and provides clarity for both applicants and residents. **-JM**
- Removal of single-family districts from the RIO bylaw would eliminate a large portion of the town where RIOs could be built. Believes this approach directly responds to Town Meeting concerns about where a RIO could be built. **-MC**
- Believes purpose for RIO does not exist as there are many districts in town that allow by-right construction at 17.4 units per acre, exceeding the 15 units per acre required by the MBTA Communities Law. **-AG**
- RIO has been used for a variety of extenuating circumstances (Waterstone and response to hostile Chapter 40B projects) but is now used as a way to circumvent intentional and comprehensive zoning. **-AG**
- There has been a piecemeal approach to RIO, most recently in Lower Falls. The area would benefit from a plan. The same is true elsewhere in town, including the Cedar Street intersection, the Gateway on the north side of Route 9 and 888 Worcester. study but not a comprehensive plan. **-AG**
- While RIO is an overlay, in practice it functions as a form of rezoning, as the land is always developed under the overlay regulations. If it is to be rezoned for multi-family, the base district should be rezoned. **-AG**
- Residents who live in each precinct should have a say in what they want to see in their precinct, which informs planning and zoning initiatives. **-AG**
- If RIO is eliminated, the Town still has options at its disposal to develop multi-family housing, including its existing zoning as well as Chapter 40B, Chapter 40R. **-AG**
- Wellesley has exceeded its 10% affordable housing requirement, complied with the MBTA Communities Law, and has a number of projects in the pipeline, including projects at MassBay, 49 Walnut Street, and 150 Cedar/192-194 Worcester Street. **-AG**
- Wants to be a representative community. **-MK**
- Better understanding of Wellesley's unique zoning requirements and implications for development as these decisions guide growth and flexibility in our community. **-MK**
- Consider housing access to transportation, shopping, schools, work. **-MK**
- Create more affordable and inclusive environments. **-MK**

- Going to need a lot of education of Town Meeting Members and the community so people can understand the bylaw and changes. Conversation should be a two-way street with residents. **-HS**
- Agreed with Marc Charney to eliminate single-family districts to minimize resident fears. **-HS**
- Noted need to consider senior housing in Town. **-HS**
- Believes it would great for Town to be more diverse.
- Believes that the current RIO process is broken and steamrolls current residents through its complex and lengthy process and review by many boards and committees. **-KRB**
- Noted that the Town has other avenues (other than RIO) to build multi-family and affordable housing, some of which is noted in the Strategic Housing Plan. **-KRB**
- Noted that the Town is not against multi-family or affordable housing as evidenced by almost unanimous support for MBTA Community Zoning compliance (which exceeded the Town's minimum number) **-KRB**
- Noted she agreed with many ideas previously presented, including caring about senior housing in Town. Supports mixed-uses, business diversity and sustainable development. **-OS**
- Noted development and streetscapes should be complementary to the area. **-OS**
- Encourage the development of a variety of housing types to meet the needs of Wellesley's current and future residents **-PW**
- Balance future housing development with residents' desire to preserve the single-family neighborhood character **-PW**
- Encourage multi-family housing development inside commercial districts (near transit) **-PW**
- Encourage development of multi-family units in proximity to commercial areas **-DS**
- Encourage travel within town by foot or bicycle **-DS**
- Increase availability of smaller and less expensive housing **-DS**
- Create options for young families, seniors and town workers to live in Wellesley **-DS**
- Encourage the development of a variety of housing types to meet the needs of Wellesley's current and future residents **-PW**
- Balance future housing development with residents' desire to preserve single-family neighborhoods' character in Wellesley **-PW**
- Encourage multi-family housing development inside commercial districts (near train stops) **-PW**

SUPPORTING IDEAS

- Near commercial districts to create a customer base for Town businesses **-TT**
- Near Town amenities/commercial/transportation to incent fewer cars and more walking/biking **-TT**
- Adds amenities for public/Town access or enjoyment **-TT**
- Goals supporting SENIOR HOUSING options **-TT**
- Environmentally sound construction (probably not required) **-TT**
- The Nines at The Wellesley Office Park is a successful example of high-density development close to regional highways that does not significantly adversely affect congestion on major Town roads- Washington Street/Central Street, Walnut Street and Linden Street. It is a good template to

duplicate, but with more creative land use and building designs to produce more of a local community feel around the new developments. - **EC**

- Careful planning and permitting can accomplish the goals of this proposed RIO initiative. - **EC**
- When people can afford to live close to where they work, you can recruit better people. - **ER**
- Having residents who are in the trades, who are artists, nurses, caregivers, etc. benefits everyone in the community. - **ER**
- By creating more diverse housing stock, we open up options to a variety of different residents in different stages of the life cycle (starter, missing middle, young professionals, aging in place), and the more options we have the more people will be able to shift around. - **JH**
- Better for environment to reuse and recycle, denser housing is more sustainable in the long run - **MP**
- Towns are more vibrant with diverse age, family sizes and household income; less traffic if more people can work and live in same town - **MP**
- People prefer to live in walkable communities and may be willing to pay extra to live in such a community - **MP**
- Uniform look for town structures gives the town a unique aspect - **MP**
- Develop evaluation criteria - **PC**
- Achieve broad buy-in from Town residents regarding goals - **PC**
- Planning Board evaluates proposals based on how they meet the Town's goals - **PC**
- Base TM presentation on how goals are achieved - **PC**
- Require commitment to proposal as it relates to goal setting - **PC**
- "201 building permits per 100,000 were issued in 2024 in MA – the sixth lowest rate in the nation (Texas 225,756). Texas also has a lower homeless population - **SK**
- 190,141 people were homeless in 2024 in MA - **SK**
- Homelessness is a structural problem not a product of social deviancy – see Homelessness is a Housing Problem by Colburn and Aldren - **SK**
- African Americans prevalence in MA about 13%; in Wellesley 1.7% - **SK**
- MA and Wellesley have outgrown their zoning rules - **SK**
- Massachusetts faces a shortage of approx. 193,000 housing units; Wellesley's shortage is estimated to be 7%, our proportional share of that shortage is 664 units, per the American Enterprise Institute Housing Center. - **JM**
- Wellesley currently has 9,428 housing units and almost 1,000 additional units approved and in the pipeline, including 180 at MassBay, 675 at The Nines (Wellesley Office Park), 28 units at 49 Walnut Street, and 34 at 192-194 Worcester Street. - **JM**
- These development alone more than cover Wellesley's share of the statewide housing shortfall, showing that our housing goals can be achieved without reliance on the RIO. - **JM**
- The RIO requires Town Meeting approval and special permits which adds time, uncertainty, and potential inconsistency in outcomes. - **JM**
- Removing the RIO eliminates confusion for applicants and allows the Planning Board and Design Review Board to focus on clear, predictable standards. - **JM**

- Wellesley is on track to meet or exceed its housing obligations through existing projects. Eliminating RIO will not necessarily slow housing production. **-JM**
- Summary: Wellesley is already on track to meet or exceed its proportional housing obligations through existing projects. Eliminating the RIO will not slow housing production but will remove redundancy and create a clearer, more predictable zoning system. **-JM**
- Wellesley has 9,428 housing units, according to US Census & 10%+ are affordable units. **-PW**
- Wellesley is currently in compliance with State laws such as the MBTA Communities law (Massachusetts' 40A Section 3A) & Chapter 40B, which allows developers to bypass certain local zoning rules if proposed development projects include affordable units. **-PW**
- Schools consume about half of Wellesley's budget and costs vary with the number of children in Wellesley Public Schools. **-DS**
- Seniors are unlikely to have school age children in their household **-DS**
- Foot and bicycle traffic is quiet and generally desirable, in contrast to motorized traffic **-DS**
- Wellesley has 9,428 housing units, according to the US Census, and +10% are affordable. **-PW**
- Wellesley is currently in compliance with State Laws such as the MBTA Communities Act and Chapter 40B, which allows developers to bypass certain local zoning rules if proposed development projects include affordable units. **-PW**

RISK/OPPORTUNITY STATEMENTS

- No hard parameter or rule (like 1 acre minimum) should be defined in the ***Purpose Statement***. Define those lower in the bylaw. **- TT**
- Purpose becomes an important guide to all what is considered by Planning, ZBA, DRB, and the developer, and citizens **- TT**
- LHR is an example of applying 6 criteria, some of them quite fuzzy, to fundamentally guide the permitting and approval. **- TT**
- Opportunity to create broader housing choices for young families to move to Town and for empty nesters to downsize and continue to live in Town **- EC**
- It is inevitable that community members will have strong opinions that need to be heard. However, a well-managed public hearing process can result in a new housing plan that ultimately benefits existing and future residents. **- EC**
- Risk of neighborhood opposition to potentially greater congestion and change in local neighborhood character **- EC**
- Risk – People will claim that they had to work hard to “get to” live in Wellesley, and others should, too. **- ER**
- Opportunity – Having residents from wider range of income levels will bring much needed talent and varying perspectives. **-ER**
- Neighborhood opposition, perceived property devaluation, traffic increase, character change **- JH**
- Risk: residents resist change to neighborhood density **-MP**
- Opportunity: chance to develop underused properties and to preserve open space by using already developed land **-MP**

- Risk: residents object to change from majority single family zoning to more areas having multi family zoning **-MP**
- Opportunity: enhance the town by creating more family starter homes, senior homes and affordable homes **-MP**
- Risk: walkability may not entirely offset increased vehicle traffic **-MP**
- Opportunity: enhancement of village character of neighborhoods **-MP**
- Risk: may be too costly to replicate style of older homes in town **-MP**
- Opportunity: preservation of the visual character of town may encourage more resident acceptance of change to more multi family housing **-MP**
- Proponents give short-shrift to meeting goals **-PC**
- Residents ignore buy-in when presented with actual proposal **-PC**
- Commitments not deemed binding in the absence of a Development Agreement **-PC**
- Enhance our ability to have children, parents and grandparents to live in the same community **-SK**
- Enhance the ability to create a more diverse community across generational, race and socioeconomic barriers **-SK**
- Participate in solving Massachusetts' housing crisis **-SK**
- Create a liveable environment **-SK**
- We have a great opportunity and the ability to overcome risks **-SK**
- Opportunity: Eliminating the RIO removes a parallel, duplicative permitting track, reducing complexity and uncertainty. **-JM**
- Opportunity: Greater predictability for both developers and residents strengthens confidence in the town's zoning framework. **-JM**
- Risk: Minimal: the bylaw's objectives are already met through existing zoning mechanisms. Wellesley already has many hundreds of approved units in the pipeline, so our housing goals will be met without relying on the RIO. **-JM**
- Summary: Removing the RIO presents more opportunity than risk: it eliminates redundancy, reduces complexity, and ensures greater predictability and permitting. The risk of removal is minimal since existing zoning tools already meet community housing reuse needs. **-JM**
- Recognize changes in neighborhoods can be serious and can have legitimate impacts to traffic patterns, congestion and businesses. **-MK**
- Create more diverse neighborhoods, encourage community development and incentivize developers. **-MK**
- Risk. Neighborhood pushback. Strong opposition may arise from residents concerned about increased density, traffic issues, and perceived threats to neighborhood character or property values. **-PW**
- Risk. Traffic is getting progressively worse in Wellesley **-PW**
- Opportunity. Additional development reduces Town's vulnerability to Chapter 40B developments by increasing the subsidized housing inventory. **-PW**
- Risk: Pushback from residents concerned about traffic, and change in neighborhood character or esthetics. **-DS**

- Opportunity: Increased opportunities for residents to walk or bike to commercial districts will benefit the Town's economy. **-DS**
- Opportunity: Retaining senior residents in town will contribute to town finances. **-DS**
- Risk: Neighborhood pushback. Strong opposition may arise from residents concerned about increased density, traffic, perceived threats to neighborhood character and open space, and decreased property values. **-PW**
- Opportunity: Additional development reduces Town's vulnerability to Chapter 40B developments by increasing the Subsidized Housing Inventory. **-PW**

RISK MITIGATION STATEMENTS

- Specific rules / limits, NOT in the Purpose statement **- TT**
- "ENCOURAGE" – without some incentive, there is no value to having a bylaw. Density enhancement is appropriate. **- TT**
- "COMPATIBLE WITH ..." – Rules/limits/restrictions later defined in RIO bylaw **- TT**
 - Density – a function of the underlying district, not a universal 24
 - Location – some definition of where is clarifying and useful
 - Distance from commercial, maybe even abutting for SR
 - Maybe ID specific areas of Town (although that's limiting).
 - NOT prohibit by zoning district
 - No REQUIREMENT for Public Transportation
 - Near train is covered by MBTA Communities
 - Near Bus or Catch Connect too hard to administer. Leave those things as a GOAL but not a REQUIREMENT
- Coordinated public hearings and transparency in the process and thought process in rezoning **- EC**
- Show several examples in other communities that are similar to Wellesley where such rezoning and high(er) density development has been successful without adversely affecting congestion or fundamentally altering a community's character. **- EC**
- It is critical that local community stakeholders be heard and that they have confidence in a transparent zoning process, and see that similar communities have successfully implemented similar rezoning initiatives. **- EC**
- Remind residents that the people we interact with on a daily basis in town all need a place to live, including the kids who have grown up in Wellesley, too. **- ER**
- Modernizing the bylaw to achieve current and future housing goals will be good for the towns residents and financial well-being. Planning for the future while honoring the past. **- JH**
- Partner with groups such as Sustainable Wellesley to educate residents about benefits of preserving open space by building only on developed parcels **-MP**
- Emphasize need for senior homes and for participation in statewide need for more homes **-MP**
- Educate residents about concept and desirability of the 15 minute city **-MP**

- Allow creative approach to styles found in town and promote displays of renderings that show the aesthetic conformity of proposed structures **-MP**
- Achieve as broad a consensus as possible in the absence of a specific proposal **-PC**
- Planning Board as gate-keeper and proponent **-PC**
- TM still has final word **-PC**
- Development Agreement when deemed necessary **-PC**
- Set specific growth target (perhaps using Healey's goal) and engineer risk mitigation accordingly **-SK**
- Because Wellesley's pipeline of approved projects already exceeds our 664-unit proportional share of the statewide shortage, removing the RIO poses no risk of underproduction. **-JM**
- Instead elimination reduces legal and procedural risks by removing a duplicative bylaw that confuses applicants and consumes Planning Board and Town Meeting resources. **-JM**
- All housing and reuse opportunities intended under the RIO are still achievable through as-of-right zoning districts and overlays already adopted. **-JM**
- Predictability, clarity, and alignment with state law serve as built-in mitigations for community concerns. **-JM**
- Housing growth will continue through existing as of right zones and will release that are already aligned with state requirements. **-JM**
- Summary: Removing the RIO is itself a form of risk mitigation, ensuring clarity, predictability, and efficient governance while maintaining steady housing growth. By relying on as- of-right zoning tools, the town lowers legal and procedural risks while offering residents and developers a more predictable system. The town's existing pipeline and zoning tools provide more than enough capacity to meet our housing needs. **-JM**
- Need to be very concrete in explaining the bylaw and changes. Noted learning is visual. **-MK**
- Community engagement. Include residents early and often in the process **-PW**
- Design guidelines. Create clear architectural and site design standards for RIOs. **-PW**
- Infrastructure planning. Coordinate RIOs with capital improvement plans. **-PW**
- Location Specific. Limit RIOs to areas with adequate infrastructure and walkability. **-PW**
- Encourage developers to fund independent traffic studies at the first stage of zoning discussions to provide objective information. **-DS**
- Require developer to provide amenities near multi-family units such as plantings, benches, added lighting, decorative sidewalks, walking trails, attractive signage, playground's and bike paths. **-DS**
- Community engagement – include residents early and often in the process. **-PW**
- Pre-design – partner with an architect to create 1-acre, 2-acre pre-design options to help accelerate developer velocity/approval. **-PW**
- Location specific – limit RIOs to commercial/business areas with adequate infrastructure and walkability. Preserve open space. **-PW**
- Development agreement – require a development agreement for each RIO & affordable housing prior to Town Meeting approval. **-PW**

OTHER THOUGHTS

- Town employees don't necessarily want to live where they work. – **KRB**
- Consider live/work spaces for artists **-EC**
- Noted that he has studied workforce housing for years and in his research found that many times town employees don't necessarily want to live where they work. One reason is residents and employees being on different socioeconomic levels. **-EC**
- Noted that for as many people who may not want to live in the town they work in, she believes that there are many would love to live in town. Cautioned against generalizations. **-MK**
- Noted that the Town has an inclusionary zoning bylaw in place to develop affordable housing units. Noted that the Town is very affluent and the RIO bylaw on its own will not develop a sufficient supply of affordable housing. **-MC**
- Reminded the Task Force that their job is to figure out ways to make the bylaw more usable and supported in Town. – **MC**
- Changes to the RIO bylaw will not drastically change the Town's demographics, but it can contribute to the town's housing needs and make the Town slightly more diverse. **-PC**
- Believed that residents object more to the location of a potential RIO rather than the re-zoning of land. **-EC**
- Noted that zoning is the greatest tool to make changes in the socio-economic characteristics of a community and believes the Task Force has a great opportunity in front of them. **-EC**
- Noted that more supply drives down prices. Stated that 30-unit developments will not drive down prices. **-EC**
- Believes projects should be situated away from Washington Street (due to traffic). **-EC**
- Stated the American Enterprise Institute noted that the country is 6 million housing units short; Massachusetts is short between 193,000-215,000 units; and Wellesley is short 7% or 664 housing units. Based on this she believed the Town is doing its part to help solve the housing crises. **-JM**