

November 17, 2025

Eric Arbeene, Planning Department Director, [REDACTED]

Marc Charney, Planning Board Chair, [REDACTED]

Tom Taylor, RIO Task Force Chair, [REDACTED]

Peter Welburn, RIO Task Force Vice Chair, [REDACTED]

Re: Recommendation to Eliminate the RIO Bylaw

Dear Planning Officials and RIO Task Force Leadership:

I write in response to the recently published [Variable Density RIO White Paper](#) and tomorrow's meeting agenda. I urge the Task Force to recommend eliminating the Residential Incentive Overlay ("RIO") Bylaw entirely. At a minimum, its application to single-residences "in or near" commercial districts must be abolished.

Historical Rationale no Longer Applicable

The RIO bylaw was created for a narrow purpose that no longer exists. Originally developed in the late 1990s for the Waterstone project and amended in 2019 to meet the 10% affordable housing threshold and deter hostile 40B projects, its rationale has expired—Wellesley has already met that threshold.¹ Continuing to rely on this outdated tool risks compounding inequities and accelerating overdevelopment in select neighborhoods while leaving others untouched. Wellesley deserves a housing strategy that is fair, effective, and forward-looking—not a relic of a past challenge that perpetuates imbalance.

RIOs are Unnecessary

I fully support increasing affordable and public housing in Town. The RIO, however, is not the right mechanism. It is blunt, inequitable, and unnecessary—particularly now that the threat of hostile 40B developments is extinguished. Recent projects prove that multi-family housing can—and does—happen without requiring a RIO. Here are a few recent examples:

- **888 Worcester St** – 200 units – *not a RIO*
- **Mass Bay sale** – 180 units – *not a RIO*
- **49 Walnut Park** – *not a RIO*
- **The Albion (16 Stearns Rd)** – 24 units – *not a RIO*
- **Highland Park (680 Worcester St)** – 20 units – *not a RIO*
- **Wellesley Park** – 850 units – *not a RIO*

These developments underscore a critical point: Wellesley already has zoning tools to achieve density without the RIO. Why cling to a bylaw that adds complexity, fosters inequity, and fails to deliver meaningful benefits?

¹ See Rio Task Force Meeting #2 – Meeting Minutes, available at <https://wellesleyma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/47438/DRAFT-Minutes-for-61825-RIO-Task-Force-Meeting-2>

The White Paper's attempt to make RIOs more palatable misses the threshold issue: RIOs are rarely the best way to create housing. Restricting density or limiting application to parcels "in or near" commercial districts does not solve the problem—it entrenches it. Aside from "in or near" being impermissibly vague, Precinct D, with its many one-acre lots (and many smaller lots that can be combined), bears the brunt of this policy, while other precincts remain insulated. This is not balanced growth; it is targeted overdevelopment.

Infrastructure Strain and Safety Risks

Every new development strains roads, schools, and public services—yet the RIO process disregards these realities entirely. Concentrating dense housing in a few areas without corresponding infrastructure upgrades will worsen traffic congestion, increase safety risks, and erode quality of life. We cannot afford a policy that accelerates growth without accountability (especially when the Town has demonstrated its reluctance to zealously enforce developers' legal obligations to build affordable housing or make good on other promises, like with the Bristol).²

Equity and Accountability

Residents expect transparency and equity in planning decisions. The RIO undermines both. It creates winners and losers—developers win, while certain neighborhoods shoulder disproportionate burdens. Because RIOs lack a legally binding development agreement, developers can radically alter approved projects with no obligation to honor initial commitments—leaving the Town powerless to enforce promises. Preserving trust requires policies that distribute growth fairly across Town, not ones that codify inequity.

Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, I urge you to recommend its repeal.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your continued service to our community.

Sincerely,



Genevieve Aguilar Reardon



² See Bob Brown, "Wellesley housing: The latest on The Bristol's non-luxury neighbor," *The Swellesley Report*, June 16, 2025, available at <https://theswellesleyreport.com/2025/06/wellesley-housing-the-latest-on-the-bristols-non-luxury-neighbor/> (noting that while luxury units filled quickly, the developer failed to even begin construction on the promised affordable housing and ignored traffic audit obligations.).

From: [KATIE SCHULLER](#)
To: [Thomas Taylor](#); [REDACTED]; [Arbeene, Eric](#); [REDACTED]; [Marc Charney](#); [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Decision of RIOs in single family zoned neighborhoods.
Date: Monday, November 17, 2025 7:17:12 PM

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Dear Rio Task Force Members,

I have lived in Wellesley for 49 years & the single family nature of the Town is what makes it special That said there are commercial areas of Town which offer space for multi family units & are appropriate for such housing. I am writing to oppose the idea of RIOs in single family zoned areas. As I understand it when RIO were first approved in the !990s they were restricted from single family zoned areas. I believe this was the correct approach to RIOs. Please listen to your residents & do not allow RIOs in single family zoned areas of Town.

Katie Schuller
[REDACTED]

From: [Michael Schnitman](#)
To: [Thomas Taylor](#); [REDACTED]; [Marc Charney](#); [Amy Gottschalk](#); [Arbeene, Eric](#)
Subject: RIO task force meeting
Date: Tuesday, November 18, 2025 10:19:02 AM

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Good morning,

I am unable to attend this evening's meeting so I am writing to submit the following comments in advance of tonight's meeting:

When RIOs began they were restricted from being placed in single family zoned areas. At this time I support returning of this restriction. Multiple family units are best suited for commercially zoned areas in Wellesley.

Thank you,

Michael Schnitman
[REDACTED]

From: [Andrea Harding](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Subject: Rio Task Force Feedback
Date: Tuesday, November 18, 2025 5:21:54 PM

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I appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the proposed zoning changes which includes allowing the use of RIOS in single family neighborhoods. This is not a proposal I support.

Residential incentive overlays should be denied because they erode the integrity of established neighborhoods, strain infrastructure, and unfairly privilege developers over residents. These overlays invite speculative development that inflates property values and taxes, displacing long-term families while undermining affordability. They set a dangerous precedent that weakens zoning protections, destabilizes community character, and burdens schools, roads, and public services beyond their capacity. Denial is not obstruction—it is a defense of fairness, stability, and the promise that zoning commitments made to residents will be honored.

Welcoming new residents is important, but it should never come at the expense of those who sacrificed to build their lives here.

Sincerely,

Andrea Harding

From: [M Collins](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Subject: Eliminate RIO
Date: Monday, December 1, 2025 5:56:03 PM

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FOR THE RIO TASK FORCE

I am contacting you as a resident and not a member of any town committee.

I recommend eliminating the RIO for several reasons:

- It was originally designed for a specific purpose/problem for a specific property when Wellesley was being challenged by hostile 40Bs
- There is a considerable development going on now in Wellesley, without the RIO
 - 192-194 Worcester Street & 150 Cedar Street
 - 49 Walnut
 - 999 Worcester
 - 40 Oakland?
 - Sisters of Charity?
 - Haynes properties turnover under MBTA Communities
 - Apartments at The Nines not completely full
- Any proposal that “pushes” development into residential neighborhoods which are close to commercial districts or services appears “discriminatory”
 - This is where more “affordable” homes in Wellesley are, negatively impacting these neighborhoods disproportionately
 - if you would not want a RIO in your neighborhood, why put it in someone else’s?
 - Are the areas you identified well-represented by residents on your task force?
- Building more \$1.5 mil+ units with 15% affordable is an inefficient way to solve the housing challenge for middle income residents of MA
 - Are there ways to augment town-owned affordable housing?
- **Please consider pausing for two years and evaluating where we are as a community then**

Thank you,

Martha Collins

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] mobile
[REDACTED] home office

December 2, 2025

To the RIO Task Force:

I appreciate the time and effort the task force has put into the subject of the RIO bylaw. I am in favor of **eliminating the RIO entirely**. The reasons are as follows:

1. It is **reactionary** zoning and not planned zoning. RIO is only triggered by a builder, not by the town. It can suddenly appear anywhere in town as it stands, surprising neighbors and neighborhoods with no warning. This is why residents feel our processes favor builders.
2. It **incentivizes** builders to build multifamily units in what Wellesley has already zoned to be single family. It's a back door to override the existing single family zoning which basically makes the entire town multifamily zoning. Wellesley has already designated areas zoned for multifamily and other types of higher density housing.

I'm instead in favor of **Planned** zoning which to me means "by right" zoning. It is transparent to everyone what can be built where in town. There is no need to go to extra approvals to build what the town has already said is appropriate in a particular area. It directs the builders to build denser multifamily type housing in the areas zoned for it already. Everyone understands what the zoning is in their neighborhood.

Voting to keep the RIO bylaw in any form is voting to allow multifamily housing anywhere in single family zoning in a less transparent way to residents.

Finally, it might be helpful to do a town wide poll about whether residents really want to have a zoning overlay that allows multifamily housing anywhere in single family zoning at a builder's request given that task force hasn't had a lot of feedback so far. It could help with making decisions.

Thank you for your time and effort on this Task Force,

Sincerely,



TMIM, Precinct F

From: [Dawn McGrew](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Subject: Letter for public opinion to Planning Board and RIO Task Force
Date: Monday, December 15, 2025 5:00:01 PM

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Dear Planning Board and RIO Task Force,

My home is located at [REDACTED] I have lived in Wellesley for 24 years. My neighborhood was involved in opposing the RIO proposal on Washington street last year.

The purpose of this letter, since I cannot attend tonight's meeting, is to express my support of removing the Residential Incentive Overlay as a tool for multi-family housing projects.

While I do recognize the need for planning in support of multi-family housing, I find the RIO is a redundant vehicle given the present landscape of "by-right" zoning, MBTA communities zoning, and "by-right" ADUs. Additionally, the current development reality – over 500 units built in the last 5-6 years, 400+ additional units expected without RIO- make RIO an unnecessary tool.

Thank you for your gift of time and thoughtfulness to make our town a wonderful place to live.

Sincerely,

Dawn McGrew

From: [Doug Youngen](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Subject: Planning Board RIO Recommendation to Town Meeting
Date: Monday, December 15, 2025 4:06:42 PM

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Please forward to all the members of the Wellesley Planning Board and RIO Task Force

December 15, 2025

Dear Planning Board and RIO Task Force Members:

We are writing to express our strong support that both of your governmental bodies recommend to Town Meeting to **not allow RIOs in Single Residence Districts without exceptions**. The leadership of the Town of Wellesley, through the direction of the Planning Board, has created a pragmatic rulebook that gives strong guidance to residents around the regulations related to housing activities. Additionally, town officials have done an excellent job strategically separating out areas for greater density, heavy traffic, and commerce whether designated as “By-Right”, Commercial, and/or Industrial zones.

There are multiple reasons why eliminating the RIO process for Single Residence Districts makes clear sense; however, we will focus on two. First, presently and historically, single family neighborhoods are clearly a societal foundation of Wellesley. The fabric of the town is so importantly linked to our neighborhoods and the subcommunities they provide. People make decisions to move into neighborhoods based on what each one uniquely provides including schools, parks, neighborhood feel and charm, along with adjacent resources, businesses, etc. To allow a developer to buy a lot (or multiple lots) over an acre in size and put upwards of 24 plus units haphazardly within a long-standing neighborhood makes little or no sense at all. There is a reason why these zones are called Single Residence. Second, as we all know, the town and state need housing. The best way to increase housing in Wellesley is to have a pragmatic, well-thought-out, multi-year plan centered on areas in commercial and industrial zones that are much better suited for greater density, especially when it comes to concerns about traffic and congestion. In fact, these commercial and industrial areas are significantly more conducive for the creation of modern, mixed-use, transit-orient developments, and these zones will better support future needs for infrastructure expansion.

It appears that the RIO Task Force is moving in the right direction on this issue. We energetically support the recommendation to eliminate the RIO process from Single Resident Districts without exceptions. We have spoken to many friends and neighbors throughout Wellesley who also feel strongly about making this compelling and reasonable modification. In the long run, the more you research and dig into the RIO process, it becomes apparent that RIO served its purpose. Between both state and town zoning changes, the Town of Wellesley has more than enough zoning rules and tools to accommodate housing modernization without the need of RIO as a zoning mechanism. This concept warrants future deliberations.

Thank you for taking your valuable time to handle these complicated subjects!

Lynn and Doug Youngen
[REDACTED]

From: [Lillian Lau](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Subject: Thoughts on RIO Bylaw
Date: Wednesday, December 3, 2025 9:03:21 AM

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Dear Members of the Planning Board and the RIO Task Force,

Thank you for the ongoing work you are doing on the Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) bylaw and for inviting residents to share input during this important stage. After reviewing the purpose of the RIO and understanding how it fits within our existing zoning framework, I'd like to offer my perspective as the Task Force begins shaping recommendations for Annual Town Meeting.

I support the removal of the RIO from single-family parcels. While the RIO has served a purpose in creating pathways for increased housing, applying it to single-family lots does not seem to align with how Wellesley's neighborhoods function socially or structurally. Our single-family and smaller multi-family areas are where community relationships naturally form: long-term neighbors, children playing together, and families who invest deeply in their blocks. These environments cultivate a sense of stability and connection that large, high-density developments often struggle to replicate, especially when those developments tend to attract more transitional residents.

At the same time, I believe Wellesley can and should expand its housing supply—but in a way that reinforces, rather than erodes, our neighborhood character. To that end, I encourage the Task Force and the Planning Board to consider rezoning more single-family areas into multi-family zones (e.g., general residence or limited residence) without relying on RIO overlays. Allowing more two-families, triple-deckers, or small multi-unit buildings **by right**, in a distributed and predictable manner, could:

- increase housing availability,
- reduce reliance on large “one-off” developments,
- maintain a consistent neighborhood scale, and
- support stable, long-term community ties.

This middle-density approach would add meaningful housing—much more so than occasional RIO-driven projects—while still preserving what residents value about Wellesley's streets and neighborhoods.

Task Force discussions can understandably become dominated by a few strong voices, whether focused primarily on housing production or on strict planning considerations. Resident input provides essential grounding, and I hope these comments help contribute to a more balanced, community-supported path forward.

Thank you again for your thoughtful work and for seeking resident perspective. I appreciate your time and your commitment to ensuring that changes to the RIO bylaw are well-vetted and well-received.

Sincerely,
Lillian Lau

From: [Leigh AO Thomas](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Subject: RIO vote
Date: Monday, December 15, 2025 4:49:06 PM

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Dear RIO Task Force and Planning Board,

Thank you for the many hours of service to Wellesley and the thoughtful discussions about RIO.

I am writing to ask you to vote to end RIO altogether. In the event that is not possible at this time, I would ask you to vote to remove "Single-Residence with a Development Agreement" as a requirement for all RIOs on the Town Meeting Warrant.

As a resident of Lower Falls and a Town Meeting Member, my precinct and immediate community is under disproportionate development stress with the current RIO bylaw. Also there are many development changes coming in the near future which will add housing including likely development at MssBay, 888 Worcester, the many parcels for sale in Lower Falls and changes to ADU (accessory dwelling units) bylaws. Please continue the conversation and community involvement. I would like to see Wellesley move away from patchwork, opportunistic, developer-driven change. Let's move Wellesley toward building a cohesive development plan reflecting the community's desires to the maximum extent reasonable.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Leigh

--

Leigh Thomas

[REDACTED]
Town Meeting Member - Precinct D

From: [Rhind, Nick](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Subject: Preserve RIO as a Useful Planning Tool in Wellesley
Date: Monday, December 15, 2025 9:29:47 PM

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Dear RIO Task Force,

I am writing to implore you to retain the RIO mechanism as a useful tool for creative planning solutions in Wellesley. Wellesley, along with every other town in the Commonwealth, faces planning and development challenges. RIOs are a small but useful tool to make some solutions more efficient. You are all aware of the complexity of approving creative housing solutions, just as you are aware that there are many mechanisms for preventing bad housing projects, Planning Board and Town Meeting approval high among them. RIOs reduces the complexity of rezoning creative projects while removing none of the other approval safeguards. As such, RIOs can only make addressing Wellesley challenges easier.

I am sure the RIO bylaws can be improved, and I trust you are working to do so. However, it is clear to me that to exclude Single-Family Residence Districts from the RIOs would gut the mechanism and leave it a as useless farce.

Please find a way to preserve RIOs as tools that can be used in good faith to make Wellesley a better town to live in.

Thank you,
Nick Rhind
[REDACTED]
Precinct C
Wellesley MA 02481

From: [Nathan Jones](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Subject: RIO task force
Date: Thursday, February 12, 2026 12:54:21 PM

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Dear Planning Board,
Thank you for all of the work that you do for the town, I truly appreciate the sacrifice of time that you all make for us. I have been following this week's development on RIO's and Development Agreements and I hope that my thoughts can be shared with you and the RIO task force members.

While I am supportive of removing single family properties from RIO inclusion the developments of this week with the possibility that Development Agreements are not possible has me wondering, like others have expressed, if RIOs have run their course and should be eliminated entirely. There are other ways to develop properties in town with a density of 17 units per acre that would prevent the inclusion and conversion of single family parcels into high density development. I fully understand that the Lower Falls area will likely have more development over the years, but I hope it can be thoughtful and preserve the single family neighborhoods while also allowing development of housing and potentially mixed use space that could tremendously benefit the neighborhoods.

Thank you,
Nathan Jones
[REDACTED]
Wellesley, MA 02481
[REDACTED]

From: [Elizabeth Kaplan](#)
To: [Planning Department](#)
Cc: [DL: Select Board](#)
Subject: Please Eliminate the RIO Bylaw
Date: Thursday, February 12, 2026 4:56:43 PM

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Dear Members of the RIO Task Force,

I am writing to encourage you to please support full elimination of the RIO Bylaw, not just eliminating it in single family zones. Without the protection of a binding Development Agreement, the RIO creates disproportionate density in certain precincts (D & E) that have much more commercial/industrial zoning than other precincts. Developers are already able to build 17 units per acre by right in these areas (for example, the 28-unit development at 49 Walnut Park), as well as both of the MBTA Communities zones near Lower Falls.

With all the redevelopment potential on Washington Street and Walnut in Lower Falls, the area needs thoughtful planning. And the town needs to consider broader impacts of potential development at 24 units per acre on so many lots in one area.

It is time to do away with the RIO.

Thank you.

Elizabeth Kaplan
[REDACTED]