

RIO Task Force Meeting #8 – Meeting Minutes

December 2, 2025, at 7:00PM – Virtual Zoom Meeting

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

Call to Order/Confirmation of Participants

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM via Zoom by the Chair, Tom Taylor. He noted the meeting was live streaming on television, and would be available for later viewing on Wellesley Media. In attendance were staff members Brad Downey, Senior Planner, and Eric Arbeene, Planning Director. He noted Task Force members present included himself, Mr. Taylor, Vice Chair Peter Welburn, Mary Prosnitz, Joan Minklei, Don Shepard, Amy Gottschalk, Sheri Kassirer, Erin Reilly, Odessa Sanchez, Paul Criswell, Kara Reinhardt Block, Marc Charney, and Ed Chazen.

Citizen Speak on Matters Related to the Residential Incentive Overlay Zoning Bylaw

There was a brief discussion about the handling of citizen input received via email. Mr. Taylor noted that citizen emails would be posted online after being redacted. He explained that citizen input, whether heard in person at meetings or read in emails, was essentially one-way communication from residents to the Task Force, which members could then incorporate into discussions if relevant.

Approval of Meeting Minutes – 11/18/25

Ms. Reinhardt Block requested several corrections to the November 18 minutes. On page 3, she stated that she had cautioned against making "judgmental" statements rather than "hyperbolic" statements as recorded. She also stated that she had called for "more data-driven decision making versus ideologic" approaches. Additionally, she requested modification of a statement that implied a connection between the RIO and a death that had been mentioned.

Ms. Reinhardt Block further suggested corrections on page 4 regarding a statement about Jumbo Capital's assisted living proposal at 888, which should indicate it was "a requirement of zoning." She also suggested reviewing the language describing Mr. Taylor's motion to postpone delivery of recommendations to the Planning Board, as the minutes were confusing on that point.

Ms. Reinhardt Block motioned to approve the minutes from November 18, 2025, with the suggested amendments. Ms. Minklei seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 13-0.

Data Overview

Housing Units

Mr. Taylor presented data on the size of Wellesley's zoning districts, highlighting that a very large percentage of the town's area consists of single residence districts. The data showed that single residence districts comprise an even higher percentage when considering household count. Mr. Taylor noted that some initial data had been updated to include 350 units at William Street that weren't in the original dataset.

Ms. Gottschalk clarified that while looking at zoning district percentages, it was important to remember that properties like Town Hall, schools, and the RDF are all zoned within single residence districts despite not being residential uses, which affects area calculations.

Multi-Unit Parcels

The Task Force reviewed data showing multi-unit parcels throughout town, with many located in districts that wouldn't currently allow new such developments. Single Residence 10 was identified as the district with the most existing multi-unit parcels (122), primarily consisting of two-unit dwellings. Overall, 153 of the 262 multi-unit parcels are located in single residence districts.

Several members noted apparent omissions in the data, such as the Waterstone. Mr. Taylor explained that some properties might be listed differently than expected or might appear lower in the spreadsheet as it was sorted by size.

Subsidized Housing Inventory

Mr. Taylor presented the town's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), which shows the units that count toward the state's 40B requirements. He explained the difference between SHI units and actual affordable units, noting that for rental buildings with 25% affordable units, 100% of the units count toward the SHI.

Mr. Taylor highlighted that the town currently stands at 10.95% on its subsidized housing inventory with 1,006 units counted against a total of 9,184 housing units. This provides a cushion of 87 units above the 10% threshold required for safe harbor from 40B developments.

There was discussion about potential expiration dates for affordability restrictions at the Nines development, with Ms. Reinhardt Block expressing concern about a notation indicating units might leave the inventory in 2050. Mr. Taylor agreed to seek clarification on this point.

Mr. Taylor noted state-level discussions about potentially allowing only rental units that are truly affordable to count toward the SHI, which may impact Wellesley's numbers.

Ms. Minklei asked whether Accessory Dwelling Units counted towards the denominator. Mr. Arbeene noted he will seek clarification on that point.

Single Residence Near Commercial

The Task Force reviewed data identifying 27 parcels of one acre or more that are either in single residence districts abutting commercial districts or are partially in single residence and partially in commercial districts.

Mr. Taylor analyzed these 27 parcels and found that 11 are owned by permanent owners (8 by the town), 5 already have multi-unit housing, 9 are used for offices or medical offices, 1 is a National Grid site, and only 1 parcel (Washington Court) is not densely developed and could potentially be more densely developed with a RIO.

Ms. Gottschalk presented additional analysis she had conducted on hypothetical rezoning of these parcels. Her analysis suggested that rezoning based on the predominant characteristics of each parcel could result in a more coherent approach than allowing exceptions through the RIO.

Mr. Shepard raised a question about whether property assessments take into account proximity to higher-density or commercial areas, wondering if data on property values might inform the Task Force's understanding of how the market values these border properties. Mr. Charney noted property assessments inform taxation, but are not typically considered during planning. He noted that while this could be an interesting theoretical question, but wasn't sure it would yield actionable insights for the Task Force's immediate work on the RIO.

Discussion and Votes for Draft Recommendation

Elimination of RIO v. Adjustment of Key Aspects

The Task Force engaged in a lengthy discussion about whether to recommend elimination of the RIO or to recommend adjustments to it. This discussion took place in the context of timing considerations related to the Spring Town Meeting warrant.

Ms. Reilly discussed a letter that was received from a resident by the Task Force and highlighted some of the observations noted therein.

Mr. Taylor and Mr. Charney explained that for any zoning bylaw changes to be considered at Spring Town Meeting, they would need to be on the warrant by December 23rd, which would require Planning Board approval at their December 22nd meeting. He noted that at the Planning Board's recent meeting, concerns had been expressed by some members about having adequate time for public input if proposals were advanced for Spring Town Meeting.

Mr. Taylor was skeptical that requiring Development Agreements by the Select Board was a recommendation that could be incorporated into the Zoning Bylaw.

Several Task Force members, including Ms. Kassirer, and Mr. Welburn, expressed reservations about moving too quickly, suggesting that more time was needed to build consensus. Others, including Mr. Criswell and Mr. Chazen, argued that after eight meetings, the Task Force should be able to provide some concrete recommendations. Others, such as Mr. Shepard and Ms. Prosnitz, suggested giving a progress report to the Planning Board or Town Meeting, and then continuing to work towards a final recommendation.

Ms. Reinhardt Block emphasized the need for more public engagement, noting that MassBay discussions had diverted community attention from the RIO issue. She wondered whether the Town Meeting warrant could include a placeholder for this subject to include broad language that would not necessarily eliminate any of the three options discussed by the Task Force. Mr. Taylor and Mr. Arbeene noted more specific language would be required for the Town Meeting warrant.

Mr. Criswell noted that there had not been much public interest in the RIO Task Force, based on the few individuals who have attended meetings to speak, or who have addressed the Task Force via email. He suggested that by giving the Planning Board a recommendation to discuss for inclusion on the warrant, it would increase the visibility of the work of the Task Force and provide greater opportunity for public input.

Mr. Taylor noted that if nothing is done, the existing RIO allowing 24 units per acre in every district would remain in place, though developers would likely be hesitant to propose RIO projects until the town completed its review process.

There was discussion as to whether the RIO Task Force could make a recommendation that would require the Select Board to enter into a development agreement before a proposed RIO is brought before the Planning Board. Many members agreed it may not be something that could be legally mandated, but they felt requiring it in a recommendation would send a message to the Select Board that development agreements were desired by residents. Mr. Charney noted that developers themselves want the certainty that development agreements provide.

After extensive debate, Mr. Charney motioned to recommend to the Planning Board: 1) removing single residence zoning districts from RIO eligibility, 2) removing the Parks, Recreation, & Conservation, Transportation, Planned Development, and Limited Apartment districts from the RIO, and 3) requiring a development agreement for any RIO project. Mr. Chazen seconded the motion. The motion passed 10-2, with Ms. Kassirer and Mr. Welburn voting against.

Several members who supported the motion emphasized that it directly addressed the concerns expressed in citizen feedback about high-density development in single-family districts. Mr. Welburn clarified that his opposing vote was due to process concerns about engaging with the Planning Board and Select Board first, not because he disagreed with the content of the recommendations.

The Task Force agreed that their recommendation would be presented to the Planning Board at their December 15th meeting, and members were encouraged to attend that meeting to provide their perspectives directly.

Task Force Chair Updates

Preview Agenda for Next Meeting

The Task Force briefly discussed the agenda for their next meeting on December 16th, which would include a review of the Planning Board's response to their recommendations.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:15 PM.

DRAFT