

# **RIO Task Force Meeting #9 – Meeting Minutes**

December 16, 2025, at 7:00PM – Virtual Zoom Meeting

**Task Members Present:** Tom Taylor, Mary Kloppenberg, Joan Minklei, Peter Welburn, Kara Reinhardt Block, Amy Gottschalk, Odessa Sanchez, Ed Chazen, Mary Prosnitz, Heather Sawitsky, Joe Hassell, Don Shepard

## **Call to Order/Confirmation of Participants**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. Chair Tom Taylor confirmed Task Force members present included Mary Kloppenberg, Joan Minklei, Peter Welburn, Kara Reinhardt Block, Amy Gottschalk, Odessa Sanchez, Ed Chazen, Mary Prosnitz, Heather Sawitsky, and Joe Hassell. Staff members Brad Downey and Eric Arbeene were also in attendance. The meeting was broadcast live on Wellesley Public Media.

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

Two citizens addressed the Task Force:

Resident Katie Schuller expressed appreciation for the Task Force's work and raised concerns about the warrant language not reflecting the consensus reached at previous meetings. She felt, after consulting with a zoning lawyer, that the proposed warrant did not appear to limit the location of RIO eligibility despite the Task Force's previous consensus to eliminate RIO in single-residence districts. She urged the Task Force not to put forth a warrant that did not align with their consensus.

Leanne Lalor, a resident at 66 River Street, emphasized that while she supports affordable housing and development, she hopes for thoughtful consideration of surrounding neighborhoods. She expressed concerns about the RIO allowing higher density than what's permitted under by-right zoning in industrial and commercial areas, noting that the cumulative impact of parcel-by-parcel, developer-driven projects could result in inappropriate density levels. She suggested the RIO might no longer be needed given the volume of proposed development in Wellesley in recent months and advocated for its elimination.

## **Approval of Meeting Minutes – 12/2/25**

The Task Force reviewed the minutes from the December 2, 2025, meeting. Ms. Reinhardt Block requested an edit on page 2 regarding subsidized housing inventory to add the word "incorrectly" to clarify that there was an incorrect notation indicating units might leave the subsidized housing inventory. Mr. Taylor confirmed that the 350 units referenced would not leave inventory in 2050 unless the 40B law is no longer in place.

Ms. Gottschalk suggested an addition to the section on single residences near commercial areas to include language about allowing exceptions through the RIO "and still allows increased density that may be more appropriate for the area without overwhelming it."

Ms. Reinhardt Block motioned to approve the minutes from December 2, 2025, with the suggested amendments. Ms. Gottschalk seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 10-0.

Task Force member Don Shepard joined the meeting at approximately 7:20 PM.

## **12/15/25 Planning Board Meeting Debrief**

Mr. Taylor reported that the Task Force's three-part recommendation was presented to the Planning Board on December 15, discussed, and voted on favorably with a 3-1 decision for the Planning Board to sponsor the warrant language.

There was extensive discussion about the distinction between warrant language and motion language. Mr. Arbeene explained that warrant language is intentionally broad to establish the "four corners" of what can be addressed, while the actual motion language that town meeting votes on is more specific and will be developed in January and February. Ms. Sawitsky noted that the warrant language is intentionally broad and intends to let Town Meeting members know what issues will be before Town Meeting, allowing for residents to propose other motions related to the issue.

The Task Force debated the limitations of the current warrant article language, particularly regarding development agreements. Several members expressed concern that the language requiring a development agreement for a RIO permit application but not for a map change didn't fully address their goal of ensuring project details are locked in before town meeting votes on zoning changes.

Mr. Chazen questioned what would be included in a development agreement, and Mr. Taylor suggested the bylaw could outline elements required in a development agreement. Ms. Reinhardt Block expressed concern that without requiring a development agreement before the map change, the situation wouldn't be different from the current process where the Select Board could decline to enter into such agreements.

Ms. Sawitsky suggested ensuring the language is broad enough to allow for town meeting approval of development agreements, noting there is precedent for this with past large developments. She gave further background on the process for developing Town Meeting motion language, explaining that much of the work of developing motion language will take place in January and February. Ms. Gottschalk asked if it would be possible to make RIO approval contingent on the project going forward as approved by town meeting.

Mr. Shepard asked whether certain aspects of a project, such as traffic studies, could be required prior to town meeting approval of the overlay map change. He also asked about whether development agreements could require affordable units be brought online at the same time as the market units. Mr. Reinhardt Block felt that traffic studies provide a false sense of security and that data may be massaged to fulfill certain narratives.

Mr. Welburn felt the Select Board should be consulted before language requiring a development agreement is suggested as a bylaw change and reiterated his feelings that a development agreement should be in place before a map change can be brought before Town Meeting.

Mr. Taylor explained how the process works when a developer who has had plans approved by the appropriate boards decides to sell their project to another developer, noting the new developer would need to get any potential changes to the plans approved by the approving boards.

Several members expressed concerns with not having a development agreement in place early in the process and felt if the development agreement did not hold the developer to certain standards and expectations it would not be of much value.

Mr. Hassell, a developer, shared that in his experience with other municipalities, development agreements or similar documentation are typically required earlier in the process and are binding to receive permits, with consequences for non-compliance. He also explained the process for traffic study review and approval by municipalities.

## **Review Recommendation and Vote on Amendments**

The Task Force confirmed that Single Residence A district should be included in the list of single residence districts where RIO would not be allowed. Ms. Minklei motioned to include Single

Residence A in the list of Single Residence Districts where RIO would not be allowed. Ms. Sawitsky seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 11-0.

Mr. Taylor noted that some minor technical clarifications to the bylaw regarding terminology inconsistencies (such as definitions that refer to "assisted living" and "assisted elderly living" and clarification on the minimum site area) would not be addressed in the current warrant article but could be part of future work. He noted that the Purpose statement is not legally binding and the mandatory requirements of the law are in the other sections of the bylaw.

### **Next Steps - Annual Town Meeting**

The Task Force discussed next steps for preparing for Town Meeting, including developing an updated purpose statement for the RIO Bylaw. Ms. Gottschalk asked for additional materials to be included on the website, and Mr. Welburn reminded everyone that the public comments are available as well.

Mr. Taylor discussed a framework for preparing a written recommendation summarizing the Task Force's concerns.

### **Next Steps - Task Force - Phase 2**

The Task Force discussed a future meeting schedule. Members agreed that more frequent, shorter meetings would help maintain momentum. The Chair proposed using a survey to find dates that work for most members, with a preference expressed for days other than Tuesday.

Mr. Welburn suggested a joint meeting with the Select Board to discuss development agreements, and the Chair agreed to coordinate with the Task Force's liaison to the Select Board.

The meeting ended with expressions of appreciation for Mr. Arbeene, who would be leaving his position after this meeting.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM.