

**Site Details:** Mixed use development, 3 acres, 130 residential development, 15,000 sq ft. retail

**Zoning:** B-5 (Allowed high density residential with business), special permits

**Funding:** Private developer

**Date(s):** - late 1990s (2 years to complete)

**Goals:** downtown revitalization, site revitalization, downtown housing



Site plan for The Legacy at Arlington Center.  
Source: Town of Arlington Planning and Community Development

## Background

Arlington Center in the late 1970s was in a rundown state, characterized by multiple automobile dealerships, pizza parlors, small retail stores, and a handful of banks. The traffic induced center, along Massachusetts Avenue, was not as vibrant as it is today, and city planners and officials sought to remedy this area to become more pedestrian friendly by redirecting future developments toward providing residential units. The first opportunity to do this came when John Mirak, the owner of the largest Chevrolet dealership in New England, decided to move his dealership from Arlington Center to another site on Massachusetts Avenue. At the time his dealership was an old decrepit showroom building sitting on top of infill from a 1900's coal ash factory. His decision to move was supported by the city of Arlington which also saw the need to redevelop the site in a way that would help the city to become a much more open and welcoming place for Arlington citizens.

## Site Development

In the late 70s, the Arlington planning board worked closely with Mirak in moving his dealership to another location and also in deciding how his old property would be used. When Mirak moved out he rented the space to construction companies as storage space. During this time, the market for development was soft, many big box stores and large scale chains became attracted to purchasing Mirak's land. However both Mirak and Arlington officials were keen on establishing a residential component to the square and waited patiently for the housing market to improve. Together in the late 1980s, Diversified Funding, Inc., a Boston based real estate company, moved forward with a residential development that contained a retail component- the first of its kind in Arlington. To start with construction, the original building that housed the dealership, two triple decker apartments, an auto body garage, and the Irish American building needed to be demolished. Because the site was built on infill of an old drainage site, special precautions had to be taken and major sewer lines needed to be relocated. After the project was completed, The Legacy stood on three acres of land with 130 apartments and 1,500 square feet of retail space, adjacent to the MBTA station and in close proximity to the Minute Man Bike Trail.

## Development Process

In 1975, the town of Arlington went through a major rezoning process where the Arlington Redevelopment Board passed the



Street view (along Massachusetts Ave.) of The Residences at The Legacy, 2011.



Multi-family housing units, 2011.

1975 zoning by-law, which among many regulations, required a special permit before building multi-family houses and apartment buildings in the downtown center. This development was one of the first to incorporate both multi-family housing as well as commercial space after obtaining special permits to do so. Although the zoning was in place for this development, which allowed to high density residential with business (B-5), there were still a number of environmental reviews and new procedures before development could occur. However throughout the negotiations, it became clear that both the city and the developer had similar goals. There was little opposition to this project aside from a handful of abutters. Throughout the special permitting and design evaluation process, there was a large amount of public participation.

## The Legacy and MetroFuture Goals

### Community Vitality

The main goals for this development were to help support the downtown district and revitalize both the area as well as the site. The Legacy was significant in that this development was the first to promote ideas for mix used commercial and residential space in Arlington Center in order to support a better quality of life for Arlington residents.

### Transportation Choices

One of the most important aspects that The Legacy promotes is its accessibility for its residents. It is adjacent to the Minute Man Bike trail and even supplies residents with bicycle parking. Further it is about 2 miles away from the Alewife Red Line Station and its location downtown allows many to utilize multiple buses routes that connect residents to other parts along Massachusetts Avenue.

### Contact Information

For more information about the development The Legacy, contact former Arlington town planner Alan McClen-  
nen at [alanboats@aol.com](mailto:alanboats@aol.com).



The Computer Café is a commercial space located on the first floor of the development, 2011.

*“The Legacy is the first downtown mixed use development that has significantly helped to boost the quality of life of the downtown area. The success of this development and the legacy that it has marked on Arlington’s town center is a result of the trust and cooperation between the Mirack family, the Town of Arlington, and developers.”*

*- Alan McClen-  
nen, former Town Planner, Arlington*