

Answers provided by: Audrey Clement

ASF Questions for Candidates to the Arlington County Board August 2022

PART ONE QUESTIONS: Missing Middle Housing

1. Affordability/Equity

Question 1A – Why promote policy to benefit those with healthy incomes, for whom the County says the private market provides adequate supply, ahead of -- and at the expense of -- those who are more cost-burdened and known to need help more urgently?

Question 1B – If the majority of residents of color, of residents 65 and over, and of residents with disabilities, earn below 80% of AMI, how does Missing Middle directly promote diversity here?

Question 1A.

The County has advised that by its very nature “Missing Middle” is not designed to help low income families—that other County programs meet their needs. Assuming that dubious proposition to be true, the question is whether Missing Middle meets the needs of an average family with a household income of about \$125,000.

According to [County's own data](#) the most the average family will be able to afford is a 2-3 BR unit in a 4-plex (p. 20). This isn't much in the way of housing for the middle class. If MM cannot meet the needs of the average family, it certainly can't meet the needs of the economically disadvantaged.

Question 1B.

According to [County's own data](#) an economically disadvantaged person would have to earn at least 80% AMI or \$108,000 in order to qualify for a 1-2 BR unit in an 8-plex (p. 20). But according to the [County's own race and ethnicity data for 2019](#), Black median household income was about \$62k and Hispanic median household income was about \$80k (p. 8). So the average person of color will not qualify for a mortgage on a MM condo, let alone a townhouse or duplex.

Obviously MM does not promote ethnic or racial diversity. That's why the County cynically qualified the definition of diversity to mean diversity of housing type, not ethnic diversity.

2. Ownership vs. Rental Units

Question 2A

What are the pros and cons you see of having fewer home ownership opportunities countywide, and increased numbers of teardowns of lower-cost starter homes?

Question 2B

Before any vote on Missing Middle, will you push for deeper analysis of the consequences of much greater private equity and investor involvement in our housing market?

Question 2A.

The [County's own data](#) indicate that the vast majority of households will be unable to afford anything more than a 2-3 BR unit in a 4-plex (p. 20). If as ASF alleges, 80 percent of these plexes will be apartment units, then there is no realistic path to home ownership for those in the market for a modest condo. A middle class family has a better chance buying a starter home in a non-speculative housing market than the one envisioned under MM, which will rapidly overheat.

Question 2B.

Absolutely. [Recent reports indicate significant penetration of the U.S. housing market by foreign investors, including the Chinese](#). Since these investors are unlikely to inhabit the houses they purchase, the residences they buy are likely to be flipped. Buy/sell transactions of this type naturally inflate housing values in the surrounding neighborhoods, driving out homeowners on fixed incomes. The County needs to monitor this situation, although there is a question what it can actually do about it.

3. Transit-Oriented Development

Question 3

Do you believe rental units will be sought away from transportation corridors? If so, why, based on current occupancy data? If not, how would you enhance and pay for mass transportation options along these corridors to promote accessibility and avoid automobile congestion?

Question 3.

Because I don't own a car, I'm a big fan of ART bus. I simply can't say good enough about it. One outstanding feature of ART is that unless you're riding during rush hour, no one else is on it. That's nice for the ART commuter like me who pays next to nothing for what amounts to limousine service. Unfortunately running empty means that most county residents have rejected ART bus.

Given the longstanding aversion to bus transit, I seriously doubt whether an influx of new MM renters is going to increase transit use. Instead the influx will

add more automobile traffic to major arterials and clog neighborhood streets. Since additional public transit is unlikely to reduce SOV use in upzoned neighborhoods, the problem of where to put all that additional car traffic remains.

4. Community Engagement

Question 4

If you were on the Board now, would you demand a delay of at least 120 days to ensure enhanced public engagement, including a broad, county-wide forum after ordinances are shared publicly?

Question 4.

Because I believe that Missing Middle upzoning is a nothing more than a ploy to raise additional tax revenue through highly inflationary, high density development, I would not demand a delay of 120 days for a hearing on the plan. I would demand that plan be scrapped altogether.

If despite my objections a hearing were scheduled, I would point out that all the so-called “community conversations” were conducted before the public had had an opportunity to review the proposed zoning amendments. So essentially the public was ignorant of what the County actually proposed to do when it weighed in. At a minimum these “conversations” were a waste of time, because no actionable plan was on the table at the time they were conducted.

PART TWO QUESTIONS – Arlington Development

Question 5 - Defining Development Population Expansion and Costs:

If you are elected, will you press for Arlington to adopt a better system to capture and disclose in advance of final approval the long term costs of adding significant new population numbers and to also disclose the expected maximum populations being enabled by all major new land use, zoning, and bonus density approvals, including the Clarendon and Pentagon City Updated Sector Plans, Missing Middle, Plan Langston Boulevard, Crystal City height plan, and the move away from the bullseye concept along the Metro corridor?

Question 5.

I am a long time advocate of fiscal cost benefit analysis, whereby the costs of any major development are weighed against their benefits. Under these requirements, all of the plans mentioned above would require fiscal cost benefit analyses.

I understand that other local jurisdictions rely on fiscal cost benefit analyses to evaluate their plans, and there is no reason why Arlington can't do the same. The reason why it doesn't is that it doesn't see the need. From the developer's standpoint—which is the County's standpoint—the only cost benefit analysis that matters is the developer's. If the expected ROI matches his target, the project is a go. Otherwise no.