

# ASF | ARLINGTONIANS FOR OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

April 6, 2023

Please reply in no more than 300 words per each of the 4 answers, inserting answers directly below questions as shown. Please send your replies to [asf.virginia@gmail.com](mailto:asf.virginia@gmail.com) by COB on Friday, April 14. All candidate answers will be posted to the ASF website and shared with ASF subscribers via email. Please read the full questions to ensure you capture all intended elements of the query.

## Questions for Candidates in the June 2023 Primary for Arlington County Board

**Question 1.** If you supported the County's recently approved Missing Middle rezoning, what are the top 3 goals you think it will achieve and how will we track those? If you did not support it, how do you think the community should be approaching housing policy and what are the top 3 needs and some solutions you'd offer? **For all candidates**, what would you change about Missing Middle if you could?

### Maureen Coffey Answer 1:

The primary aspect I would change is to develop a comprehensive vision of housing and land use in Arlington that describes how we are going to meet all of the needs for housing and infrastructure. The DC region and Arlington specifically are growing - we need to have a plan to accommodate that while protecting our quality of life and county services. Growth cannot be mutually exclusive with maintaining what we love about Arlington. In order to achieve that, we need a plan that builds intentionally on what we have to get to what we need. (more details in response to question 3).

I see the goals of the recently passed expanded housing options (EHO) ordinance and would propose tracking/assessing them as follows:

1. Increasing the stock of housing

- a. Track by the net gain in new units produced on lots granted a permit under the expanded housing options ordinance.
  - b. Success would mean having more units added in total.
2. Creating options for higher-income renters to progress on the housing ladder and stop competing with moderate income renters
  - a. Track by proxy through rent inflation
  - b. Success would mean a slower rate of increase year over year relative to our base year (2023).
3. Diversify the types of new build housing in Arlington
  - a. Track by the proportion of each category of housing across Arlington
  - b. Success would be increasing the proportion of housing in the duplex, townhouse, and other mid-density categories.

**Question 2.** The county-wide commercial vacancy rate is at an all-time high of over 20%, which is more than **double** what it was from 2007-2011. What is the impact on our budget and what are your plans for addressing this gap?

**Maureen Coffey Answer 2:**

As we have traditionally maintained a unique split on commercial vs residential property taxes, increased vacancy in the long-term is a major problem. My plan to address them would include three major points:

1. **Make it easier to do business in Arlington.** Our permitting process is not modernized, takes way too long, and creates barriers for people who want to do business in Arlington. There is no reason to make it difficult on those who choose us. We need to empower our business ombudsman alongside Arlington Economic Development to solve problems systematically across departments. We need to continue reassessing our zoning code so that it outlines activities that we do *not* allow rather than listing every permissible type of business. This will allow greater innovation without unnecessary regulatory burden.
2. **Recruit/develop businesses that fit our new lives.** We have all changed how we live and work in the last several years; our economic development strategy should recognize that. We need to develop a pipeline of opportunities that emphasizes services, experiences, and community because these sectors are seeing growth as people seek ways to reconnect after several years of isolation. We also need investments in businesses that are critical social infrastructure, like child care and mental health services.
3. **Increase our competitiveness in the region.** Arlington offers many competitive

assets but increasingly has a downside: it is prohibitively expensive for workers to live here. If an owner is looking at recruiting and retaining employees in Arlington versus Reston they know there are different tradeoffs. They will either need to pay higher salaries to support living in Arlington or their employees live further away, reducing their quality of life and the likelihood of retaining the most competitive employees. Addressing these root issues is critical to being a good place to do business.

- 4. Question 3.** Board member Garvey has expressed interest in the past year in reviving long-term planning for the county, a 20 or more year look ahead (similar to the Missing Middle efforts of both Portland and Minneapolis.) One of ASF's key platforms is the need for the County to proactively plan *and budget for* infrastructure and services for new residents. Do you share the Garvey view and what are 2-3 concrete steps you would propose as a new board member?

**Maureen Coffey Answer 3:**

The need for a long-term plan is central to why I am running for the County Board. If we build a long-term plan that integrates all needed county services investments alongside housing, we should be able to (1) relate individual development projects plans to the overall plans and (2) break down the silos between housing development and infrastructure planning that lead to strain on our existing systems. This type of planning will allow us to develop specific criteria for projects supporting larger goals, such as affordability, greenspace, environmental sustainability, and community building amenities.

The first concrete step I would take is to segment our analysis of the housing market to let us assess the specific needs of each group. We need to be conscious of prioritizing diverse types of housing: family-sized units, accessibly designed units, deeply affordable units, and moderate-income units. Developing annual goals that are specific about the number of units needed within each segment will create accountability for the County serving the diversity of housing needs in Arlington and not just the easiest to build housing. From there, we will have a concrete measurement to work toward.

The second concrete step is to develop a needs assessment for services and infrastructure based on housing type - similar to the student generation rates

that APS uses to predict school enrollment. These generation rates give us estimates on a per-unit basis, subdivided by type of unit, to help predict future needs. Once we have a plan that segments and quantifies the housing we should be adding, we need to translate that into quantification of the infrastructure investments that need to accompany the housing.

4. We have recently seen high-profile site plan projects stopped in their tracks (Pen Place, Marriott redevelopment). Both projects had promised "community benefits" as part of Arlington's site plan review system and these are also now on hold. Do you think this "community benefits" system has any inherent risks? Would you consider some type of a "pay-as-you go" funding system for new development, or a proffer system as we see in other nearby jurisdictions, if you are elected to the board?

**Maureen Coffey Answer 4:**

The community benefits system often serves us well but does create exposure to the success of development projects moving forward. I am open to a discussion around how Arlington handles community benefits vs proffers but I am conscious of the legal limitations that constrain what we can expect to gain.

Proffers are voluntary agreements and both Virginia and federal law highly restrict what any municipality is able to receive on property development in exchange for approval. Federally, the Supreme Court has ruled in *Koontz v St. Johns* that under the 5th Amendment, municipalities have to demonstrate that there must be a demonstrated direct impact of the development on the public infrastructure to even make a request for monetary contribution, and the contribution must be proportional to that direct impact. In 2016, Virginia restricted proffers even further through Title 15.2 of the Code of Virginia which created even more heightened requirements for very direct connection between any proffer and what the money can be used toward. Additionally, accepting monetary contributions as proffers may also put us in the position of having to go through the procurement and notice of funding processes rather than tapping into the efficiency of completing projects with community benefit concurrently with private development.

My initial assessment is that many of the community benefits we gain from our current system might be difficult to achieve in a proffer system but I would be interested to hear from community members and others with interest or knowledge to decide what is best for the County.