

January 5, 2021

Members of the County Board
County Manager Schwartz
Assistant County Manager Helfer
Director Munter

Dear Chairman de Ferranti, Members of the County Board, County Manager, Ms. Helfer, Mr. Munter:

Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future (ASF) has provided comments to the county's Missing Middle Survey (see attachment 2). This survey -- as opposed to several others we have seen this year (e.g., Forestry and Natural Resources, Metropolitan Park, Shirlington GLUP) -- was severely flawed. This survey is in fact a classic "push poll" in that its true objective is to sway respondents using loaded or manipulative questions.

Summary

We are writing to you today to urge each of you to take a few moments to read these survey questions yourselves (see attachment 1). Once you have read them, we believe you will conclude—as we have—that any summary of the responses to these questions will be as hopelessly biased as the questions themselves. Sadly, the design of this survey reinforces the already widespread impression that the county is so "hellbent" on up-zoning that it will tolerate subjective and selective information sharing for Phase 1, ensuring we do not arrive at a "Common Understanding" of the problem by Spring of 2021.

ASF urges you to investigate for yourselves how many responses were received in Spanish, by residents many of whom are barely scraping by in a pandemic, by residents who could not spare 2-3 hours or did not understand you had to click 19 times on separate feedback buttons? It also appears that anyone could take the survey multiple times; ASF as an organization did not do this, but it raises the prospect that the county is allowing the survey to become a "contest" among a highly skewed sample of activists. To guard against that perception, the county should discard all but one identical survey reply submitted by the same IP address.

Discussion

ASF found several specific flaws in question format and context, which we outline as part of the list of questions in the attachment (See attachment 2).

In addition to concerns with the survey mechanics and question content as noted above and in attachment 2, we note that the survey reiterates assumptions from the county government's "Missing Middle research" document, which were generated without substantive public input and rejected substantive inputs from skeptics. As but one example, the [board has ignored conclusions of Dr. Jon Huntley showing that MM would be affordable only in very few areas of Arlington](#). The county's first public webinar on MM research was conducted as a joint session with AHS, an organization known to strongly favor Missing Middle housing, justifiably leading to the conclusion that Housing Arlington favored AHS's views. These examples - and the Board's decision to not authorize and engage a public Working Group of ordinary residents -- send clear messages that not all voices will be given equal weight and that public inputs need to be "managed," not widely debated.

Finally, and most unfortunately, the county has used provocative claims in its public presentations to link opposition to up-zoning to racism. We presume this is an effort to deflect community attention from the hypocrisy of the county's own policies, far more recent, and perhaps equally harmful to zoning exclusions and redlining of the 1930's, that have helped push home ownership and population numbers of African-American and Hispanics and Vietnamese down over the past 30 years. See our own ASF replies to questions 8 and 22 in the survey for details.

Conclusion

We have listed serious flaws with the survey and the process it is based on. This is a time to re-establish trust between government and residents and we ask that you take our comments in that spirit. Arlington's forward-thinking leaders should use the difficult circumstances of a pandemic and national reckoning on race to engage residents in ways that will make us more unified and more resilient to significant shocks. ASF would be pleased to contribute to such dialogue.

Sincerely,

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Attachments

1. ASF Comments on Survey Questions/MM Survey Questions
2. ASF responses to MM Housing Survey