

April 3, 2020

Arlington County Board
Ellen Bozman Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Request to Postpone Missing Middle Study Until Fall

Madam Chairman, Members of the Board:

For those in the County who are aware, the County's Missing Middle initiative and the prospective Missing Middle study, with their potential for dramatic changes to zoning in single family neighborhoods, are of great concern and indeed controversy. At the same time, the vast majority of County residents very likely are not aware of this County initiative and are certainly not sufficiently informed about its potential impacts.

Earlier this year the County Board implemented a process of public engagement as a necessary prerequisite to adopting, in the April timeframe, a final form of scope of work for the proposed Missing Middle study. As part of that process, the County had extended the deadline for public participation in a survey to solicit input as to that scope as well as scheduled a series of Board member briefings of civic associations and other community organizations to both share with the public background information as well as solicit further public input.

The coronavirus crisis has put a premature halt to all of these public engagement activities, further reinforced by the stay-at-home order newly issued by Virginia extending through June 10th. The County has also precluded any face-to-face meetings of Commissions that could help provide important input. Although a few meetings may still be held virtually, many people in the County who would otherwise desire to provide input to this process will simply lack the technology or training to participate. At the same time, many members of the community are understandably focused on their health and financial well-being and will be much less likely to participate in online meetings.

Additionally, because of the dramatic negative impact of the current shutdowns on anticipated revenue, County staff and many County residents are necessarily being compelled to revisit and focus in the short term on the proposed operating budget and CIP plan against statutory deadlines to the exclusion of many other issues. The revised budget and underlying economic conditions will also provide a new baseline, further invalidating any conclusions drawn from the very incomplete outreach and survey, which likely represents a small sample of residents' views, undertaken before the pandemic.

What is clear is that there will not be the equitable opportunity nor public focus in the midst of the current health crisis for adequate and necessary community engagement and understanding of the proposed Missing Middle scope of work between now and certainly the end of June. At that point the County will be entering its traditional summer recess during the months of July and August. Therefore, we are requesting that the Board postpone any further consideration of the draft scope of work for the proposed Missing Middle study as well as any study activities until at least this fall after the currently suspended public engagement process can hopefully be reinstated and completed. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future