

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 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?

Candidate JD Spain Answer 1. (249 words)

I support the County's recently approved Missing Middle rezoning, acknowledging that historical zoning policies have contributed to environmental racism. I think the County Board's decision to remove exclusionary zoning will **enable the development of additional attainable housing options** such as duplexes, townhouses, and multi-unit buildings; **expand Arlington's tree canopy** and **support its carbon neutrality goals**; and increase the County's attractiveness for those moving into the Greater Washington DC region. Arlington's Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development

will report annually on approved and built EHO development details to track the County's progress. **Additional tracking measures could be considered to analyze progress on the other program goals beyond infrastructure.**

While I support this decision, I also look forward to being able to build upon it to continue making Arlington a more affordable place to live. One thing I would change about Missing Middle is the division it sparked within our community. If elected, I will work diligently to provide additional attainable housing options that include input from the community, promote an inclusive community where everyone feels heard, and an environmentally sustainable Arlington.

Additionally, I want Arlington County to **explore the possibility of Community Land Trusts (CLTs)**, where nonprofit entities maintain community control of real property outside conventional, speculative land and housing markets. Several studies have shown that CLTs are effective in expanding affordable housing. Across America, many cities increasingly support them in various ways, including policy. While president of the Arlington NAACP, I worked with the housing committee to host a [discussion on CLT](#).

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?

Candidate JD Spain Answer 2. (300 words)

Commercial vacancies depress the assessed value of commercial property by reducing the income generated by a property, which is one factor considered during the assessment process. When commercial assessments drop in value, and residential assessments remain the same or increase, homeowners' tax burden falls disproportionately. In 2023, residential properties are 55% of the assessed value; two years ago, they were 51%. This is unsustainable, and we must ensure that our existing commercial property stock lives up to its income generation potential. In addition, we must design our tax base to **fairly allocate the costs of our amenities and built environment among those who use them** - including tourists and foreign-domiciled businesses, not just homeowners.

In 2005, BRAC's base closings and government office relocations impacted Arlington. The County responded by reaching beyond agency and government contractors to reduce our vacancy rate. Now almost two decades later, the pandemic has created new challenges. The County must **collaborate with business partners** - among them the Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) and other business partners - to understand how the landscape is changing and **what zoning and policy levers the County government may exercise** to facilitate adaptive reuse of existing space for other purposes.

Office vacancies are a national trend due to new telework patterns, Arlington can position itself to **attract new sectors of the economy that require a physical footprint: specifically, research labs and biotech firms**. We should leverage GMU's Institute for BioHealth Innovation and its hub for Virginia Bio-Connect and attract GO (Growth & Opportunity) grants to invest in lab incubator spaces and other research facilities that will draw new business. I will prioritize evaluating how Arlington can attract biotech firms by leveraging our proximity to federal regulators, cutting-edge university programs, and highly educated workforce.

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?

Candidate JD Spain Answer 3. (298 words)

Yes, it's the County Board's responsibility to address present challenges and plan long-term to guide Arlington's future development. I propose that any long-range planning process be **adequately budgeted and include a comprehensive communications plan** outlining community involvement, education, long-range forecasting, and consistent, transparent communication. We should learn from the Missing Middle public engagement shortcomings and do better.

Key to any planning is ensuring we have an **inventory of County-owned land** and current uses. Therefore, I would propose a **study** to surface plans for future use of County-owned land that come from **existing site plans, sector plans, or**

comprehensive plan elements. This is a necessary precursor to any robust planning process, so I would call for the County to prioritize this study as a first step and a comprehensive inventory as one of the key products of that study.

A decade ago, Arlington embarked on the Community Facilities Study, a community planning conversation for schools and public facilities. While some recommendations have been acted upon, beginning the work with APS to **create a Schools and Public Facilities Master Plan** is a crucial step I will pursue. Arlington has approved several projects that will increase density, and it is long past time we embarked on long-range planning with APS for our schools and with staff to ensure the vision for accessing sports, libraries, arts and culture, fire, and other safety facilities keep pace with the County's growth.

Last, any such plans should include creating **a policy and process for procuring additional land to meet the County's future needs.** Arlington has limited land, and we have missed several opportunities to add land to the County's holdings because we needed to have policies or funding in place.

Question 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?

Candidate JD Spain Answer 4. (299 words)

Virginia has a history of conditional zoning that allows a developer or applicant to enter into a voluntary yet legally binding agreement with local governments to provide community benefits, the rules of which are governed by statute. When the developer asks something beyond what is allowable by-right that the County can negotiate with the developer and obtain community benefits.

It is reasonable to ask **whether Arlington's current system of site plan exceptions is achieving Arlington's goals.** While the delayed construction of Pen Place and the Marriott redevelopment is independent of the County's processes for obtaining community contributions, I understand and share the concern that stalled site plan

projects delay the delivery of those benefits. The **timing and delivery of many negotiated contributions are logically dictated by the completeness of the project** - undergrounding utilities, street, and sidewalk improvements, and the delivery of a finished park and/or open space - these can be achieved as a project is nearing completion or immediately afterward. In addition, benefits delivered off-site, like cash contributions or affordable off-site housing, could theoretically be uncoupled from the completion of the project.

I would **first confer with the County attorney** on what is allowable for Arlington under the Dillon Rule and then **work with the development community and our Virginia delegation to consider and promote changes to the law** and the delivery of certain community benefits. As a County Board member, **I support examining alternatives to Arlington's site plan exception process for achieving community benefits** to determine if Arlington's current system is the most productive in achieving our goals. Arlington's decisions must be data-driven. I am committed to our county government applying process improvement practices to ensure we work efficiently to enhance the lives of the people we serve.

Submitted by Julius D. "JD" Spain, Sr.
Democratic Candidate for Arlington County Board
April 16, 2023