

ASF | ARLINGTONIANS FOR OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

April 24, 2020

Dear Board Members:

The Covid-19 pandemic is affecting Northern Virginia in unprecedented ways. Recently, ten Alexandria Civic Associations sent an open letter to the senior officials of Alexandria urging them “to formally postpone all city meetings relating to matters that do not involve the health crisis and budget decisions until all residents and council members can once again work together to make thoughtful decisions about the future of our city.” We find such an approach particularly applicable in Arlington given our value of meaningful public engagement and the importance of land use and development decisions that have such a long term and significant impact on Arlington residents.

Governor Northam’s Stay at Home order will apply through June 10, and even after that date there undoubtedly will be significant restrictions on meeting size in the State’s densest jurisdictions. Arlington, as the densest county in Virginia may well decide or be required to extend the duration or extent of such restrictions to ensure the health of our citizens.

On April 2 we wrote to the County Board noting that the Missing Middle outreach program to Civic Associations was of necessity suspended due to the crisis. We noted further that the County “has also precluded any face-to-face meetings of Commissions that could help provide important input (on the Missing Middle concept) ... 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.”

These considerations apply equally to any proposed zoning changes and development projects that in the latter case are not “by right”. Certainly, the Missing Middle concept as a potentially broad and far-reaching endeavor required uniquely broad county input. Similarly, many specific proposed development projects and zoning changes can not only impact individual communities in the county but also collectively could impose burdens on the county infrastructure, transportation, schools and quality of life as great as Missing Middle. The bar for community input on such projects is thus as high as for Missing Middle Phase 1.

Accordingly, we urge the County to formally postpone all County decisions and processes on specific development projects and potential zoning changes until all residents, staff and Board Members can once again work together transparently to make land use decisions on which the sustainable future of our County depends.

Sincerely,

Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future