

October 24, 2022

To:

Ms. Katie Cristol, Chair
Mr. Christian Dorsey, Vice Chair
Mr. Takis Karantonis, Member
Ms. Libbey Garvey, Member
Mr. Matt de Ferranti, Member

From: Local Real Estate Professionals

RE: Upzoning Proposal

We are Arlington County residents and represent a cross-section of real estate professionals ranging from developers, owners, and managers, to brokers, architects, engineers, and lenders. Apart from sharing a professional affiliation, we are also united in our opposition to the County's effort to eliminate single-family zoning. While this opposition may strike some as counterintuitive, it is in reality grounded in our professional real estate experience.

At the outset, it's important to note that as a general premise we support the creation of additional density in Arlington and the creation of additional housing choices. We are also supportive of a community that reflects a range of socioeconomic and ethnic diversity, aspects of Arlington that drew us here in the first place.

As supporters of density, the process and resulting land-use policies that enabled creation of the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor ("R&B Corridor") that we know today, and that are transforming Columbia Pike, benefit the entire Arlington community. Similarly, the recently published Langston Boulevard Concept Plan offers much that is laudable and could, with further refinement, in the coming decades support the creation of a diverse range of additional housing types, more places to work, and additional locales offering goods and services all in an attractive, mixed-use environment. The shared hallmark of all these plans is that they place density along transit corridors and are easily and safely walkable, both for those who will be living on the corridor itself as well as for those in the nearby single-family communities.

An important aspect of the County's work along the R&B Corridor, Columbia Pike, and Langston Boulevard was the deliberate, multi-year process it undertook (and is undertaking) to engage with County residents, especially those most impacted by the potential changes, and which incorporated analysis of the broader implications of the potential policy changes with regard to schools, public safety, utilities, community services, and other needs that would result from them.

This more slowly paced process allowed more voices to be heard, new ideas to be surfaced, refinements to be made, and ultimately a broader array of constituents to be supportive of the new land-use policies.

The strategy of community engagement has played out as well with regard to another important County initiative related to land-use. Specifically, the County undertook a multi-year and considered process of

working with community residents under the Arlington Neighborhood Program to develop neighborhood conservation plans, documents that in many cases dive deeply into the sort of neighborhoods Arlingtonians want to live in and which often highlight the preservation of single-family housing stock against the encroachment of multiple-unit developments.

We find it ironic then, that given this history, and at a time where the County is doing a year-long study of a potential traffic circle, that it would not devote more time, and create a more inclusive process, for considering what would be the most sweeping land-use change in the County in 50 years.

The Missing Middle Housing Study as proposed will require a fundamental change in the County's General Land Use Plan, which for decades has sought to "preserve and enhance existing single-family and apartment neighborhoods." Real estate professionals and citizens have relied on the County's policy to concentrate high-density development along metro corridors.

The County's Zoning Ordinance will have to be substantially amended to allow by-right development of multi-family units in what are now single-family zoning districts. And those zoning districts that now allow multi-family units, but require a site plan or use permit, will have to be re-examined to determine if these areas should retain these requirements or allow by-right development.

As real estate professionals, especially as developers, owners and investors, we value stability and consistency in land-use regulations. We value clarity around what is expected from a regulatory perspective when we undertake a new project or make a new investment. The current process and proposal do not accomplish those goals because the County is not taking the time in a considered way to think through the myriad issues that will flow out of this change. Absent that, the change will surely meet legal challenges and, assuming it survives those, will generate a series of one-off projects that will have negative unintended consequences for the communities in which they are located and which will in turn generate new policies and regulations on a reactive basis to avoid a repeat of them in the future, all of which could be avoided, or significantly reduced, through a more careful process now. We would prefer to see the full "suite" of changes associated with this policy rather than pursue the "salami slice" process the County has embarked upon.

Interestingly, Arlington is already doing very well in creating new housing and in fact at a faster pace than the goals for it. The DCist recently published an article¹ that finds as follows:

In 2019, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments [COG] studied current and future local housing needs and concluded that the D.C. region overall needs to build at least 320,000 units between 2020 and 2030, with 75% of them being affordable to low and middle-income families, and many built near activity centers and transit hubs. An Urban Institute report from the same year projected a similar need, finding that the region would need to build at least 374,000 more units by 2030.

The article goes on to say:

Things are going ... okay. In 2021, housing production increased across the board in the D.C. region. According to an analysis from the Housing Association of Nonprofit Developers (HAND), which tracks annual housing production compared to the COG and Urban Institute projections, the D.C. region as a

¹ <https://dcist.com/story/22/08/23/northern-virginia-affordable-housing-inflation/>

whole fell just shy of its 25,000-unit yearly target in 2021, building just over 24,000 units — the closest jurisdictions have come to hitting the goal.

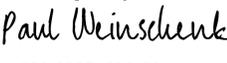
Arlington, Alexandria, and Loudoun County have all exceeded the overall numbers of new units they've needed to produce in the last three years, since HAND began tracking. Arlington County housing director Anne Venezia sees that trend continuing into 2022 and beyond.

"We can confidently say we do have enough capacity within our current plans to enable the production that COG has for Arlington targets," she says. (Emphasis added.)

Given that the County is meeting its goals and that its very own housing director states that current plans will meet its future goals, why is the Board rushing forwarding and discounting the possibility of a more thoughtful and comprehensive evaluation of its proposal? There is real disconnect here.

As real estate professionals, we wish to see a process that in the past the County has employed to create more transparency, more engagement, and ultimately better policy that drove better development.

Sincerely,

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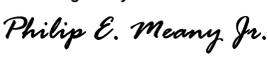
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cc: Long Range Planning Committee