

July 13, 2022

The County Board - chaired by Katie Cristol -- held a [Missing Middle Housing Study Work Session July 12](#). County staff presented a [new slide deck](#), which spelled out their plan but included options for the Board to consider beyond what staff released as the initial Phase Two concept released on April 28. Links to the draft framework and multiple other county resources on MM can be found [here](#).

Staff briefed that if they get green light to proceed with the framework (spoiler alert, they did), they anticipate bringing new ordinances back to the Board in November, which must then vote on whether to advertise the newly-amended General Land Use Plans for residential areas R-5, R-6, R-8, R-10 and R-20, as well as new zoning code to expand allowable density on the single family lots in these areas. A second vote to approve the new land use/zoning ordinances (very likely unchanged from those presented in November) would take place in December. The Board indicated they would be conducting [robust community engagement](#), including 11 sessions with the Board and other opportunities.

Slide 7 describes the "Core Elements" that were the crux of the April 28 framework, i.e., putting 2-8 units per lot in R-5 through R-20 reducing on-site parking requirement to 0.5 spots, and keeping the "footprint" and setbacks of new units the same as that for single-family homes being built now. Below are summaries of Board/staff engagement on the details.

Public Feedback. Pages 9-25 summarize (and staffer Erica Moore) spoke to the various feedback given to staff via surveys, popup engagements around the county, direct emails, etc. The popups occurred at Metro areas in Crystal City and Rosslyn. Staff admitted no one at popups had any idea about the policy, but they seemed "very interested." Moore briefed that SFH owners were predominantly opposed to the proposal, while most renters favored MM. Of the various forms of feedback received, staff reported they got only 3167 written comments. (NOTE: Out of a total population of about 238,000.) Of those 3167, 279 were emails. Ms. Moore said that was the only feedback form that more broadly favored MM than opposed it. It was not briefed in this fashion but ASF notes that 279 represents a fairly small

percentage of the written comments, indicating the proposal received MORE NEGATIVE THAN POSITIVE FEEDBACK. Slide 22 shows that the majority of those who opposed certain types of new housing gave as their main reason "I do not think the benefits outweigh the disadvantages." Concerns about parking, and the county's inability to "handle all these new people" were second and third most popular responses. Vice Chair of the Board Dorsey praised the public engagement process, which he said was very effective, "not like engagement of the past." Although he noted it had produced an "extreme polarization of views."

All Board members mentioned they received direct feedback, but only Board Member de Ferranti, who was the first Board member to utter "concerns" about 8-plexes, indicated the volume, with up to 30 contacts per day.

Providing the Board New Options. The staff presented several possible amendments for the Board's discussion. The Board did NOT support any further densification (NOTE: some MM advocates are asking to remove height limits, increase the number of units allowed, and remove the on-site parking requirement entirely.)

With regard to the options given wider discussion, Page 27 of the presentation describes them as "Options for Discussion" including putting a cap on building type per zone, limiting the number of units per building, shrinking the coverage to areas closer to transit, and looking at other options for parking.

Size, Design, and Number of Units per Type of MM Unit. Mr. de Ferranti said first he was not comfortable with but later said "I don't support" 8 plexes. Board Member Garvey also said she was not comfortable with 8-plexes but wanted them included in Phase 3 options, saying she would not opine "until later." Mr. de Ferranti said "other tools could be used to help us get the lower cost units that 8-plexes allow." Board Member Karantonis said he has heard from seniors who want to "age in community" and want to downsize, presumably into MM units. He asked "how hard then would it be to do a special use permit for a six-plex?"

There was substantial focus on lot size and buildout potential. Mr. Karantonis asked in this regard "how many 12,000 square foot lots do we have?" (NOTE: The implication was that only those lots would hold an 8-plex and there was more extensive conversation on this point.). Matt Ladd, lead CPHD staffer on Missing Middle, said "12,000 is the minimum lot you could put a

six-plex on." (NOTE, page 38 of the [Missing Middle April 28 consultant report](#) shows a six-plex on 6,000 square foot lot.)

There was some discussion of lot consolidation in R-5 and R-6; staff assured the Board that the existing "maximum main building footprint" limitation will dissuade builders from such consolidation.

Mr. de Ferranti asked what other cities had done. Mr. Ladd said Minneapolis went to triplexes, Portland to fourplexes but said Arlington lacks the "low lot sizes of these cities" implying Arlington could go large. Mr. de Ferranti suggested staff look at the option of by-right MM versus special use permitting that would require each project to get Board approval (and add to builders' costs as staff noted). (NOTE: County staff told the Housing Commission the previous week that "by-right" was the only way to go to ensure maximum output of new housing to boost supply.)

Chair Cristol summed up the problem from her perspective: after staff reiterated that the top community priority for this this housing study was "affordability, she wondered would the board be "taking the top priority off the table if we codify exclusions of certain types?" The Board did not resolve this in its guidance for Phase Three.

Chair Cristol and Vice Chair Dorsey discussed using "pattern books" as the first ever (for Arlington) use of "design standards" to guide what would be built and ensure new units not look "out of context" in existing neighborhoods. Vice Chair Dorsey referenced Norfolk as having adopted such practice. Several of the Board members noted that we had not seen examples of this type of infill in other jurisdictions, so we didn't know what to expect. (ASF notes that similar infill has occurred in the Seattle area of Ballard.)

Limiting Geographic Scope of MM. The Board considered but did not accept an idea to limit MM homes to areas within 3/4 mile of Metro and "premium bus routes." Mr. Karantonis mentioned equity concerns for his opposition.

Parking. The Board seemed particularly attuned to tweaking the parking issue. They brought in County Parking Manager Melissa McMahon (the only outside expert other than the County Attorney who spoke at the meeting). She said that less than 50% of curbside parking is fully utilized in residential areas and differences range from one block to the next in ways that mean

"you will only have to walk one block to your car" in most cases.

Most Board members, with Vice Chair Dorsey speaking most forcefully, said they favored a "variable" approach to parking, meaning the requirements could vary by zone or type of housing. None supported the idea of reducing the parking beyond current MM proposals. Ms. Garvey instructed staff "not to eliminate any options."

Mr. de Ferranti voiced support for staff's brief of preserving a 40% tree canopy; Garvey offered mild support. Staff "previewed" a slide showing elements of the upcoming Forestry and Natural Resource Plan (FNRP). This indicated staff is now considering some change to lot coverage for single family homes (ASF observes this is too little too late, if MM is approved as per the April 28 framework, the single family home tree canopy replacement requirement will go to 10% from 20% in these zones). The FNRP slide indicated Arlington would be going to Richmond for unspecified assistance on tree canopy, and it indicated the county would consider increasing height limits on homes to allow shrinking lot coverage or setbacks to aid in canopy retention or replacement (See ASF note above, it will be moot if new zoning is passed). The slide also mentioned "working with owners and developers to voluntarily add trees."

Ms. Garvey asked if the Board could set a cap on the number of MM housing units constructed each year. County Attorney Corr said yes but it would be much easier to do that for by-right projects, vs. special exception or special use permit construction. Ms. Garvey asked if the County Board could rescind the MM zoning ordinances (and land use designations) if the effort did not meet expectations. County Attorney Corr said the Board has jurisdiction and can amend its zoning code, although any permits already approved would be allowed to proceed. A member of the audience from our side interjected with disagreement. ASF agrees with the dissenting audience member on this issue.

Mr. Karantonis asked about "targeted programs to provide homeownership" which did not lead to much additional discussion, but provided an opening for some interesting follow on points for community engagement, in ASF's view.