

**ARLINGTON COUNTY BOARD
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS ON MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING
MID-SEPTEMBER 2022**

Key Takeaways from “Community Conversations” (closed-door; unrecorded)

1. **Residents strongly criticize the County’s process & notice; all support affordability / diversity / inclusion, but overwhelmingly oppose Plan specifics.** Generally, the ~20-resident meetings are about 5:1 or 6:1 opposed (with a small handful neutrals). Passions are heated, but civil. People can’t grasp the need to rush a massive change this year (“in the dead of night”), without any public dialogue featuring critical viewpoints. Residents ask to hear diverse views, not just County talking points. Many praised Arlington’s balance of high density, middle-density, and low-density, but don’t see how the Plan addresses community goals. Mr. Karantonis (9/15) admitted *even he* didn’t receive the County’s postcard about its Plan, yet conceded no process flaws. Many reported to ASF that neither he nor Ms. Garvey seemed moved by a single comment opposing the plan.
2. **Board admits its Plan is *not* about housing affordability; even many erstwhile supporters are shocked.** Ms. Garvey noted MM doesn’t deliver true affordable housing (9/15) Many who came in with open minds were visibly taken aback and seemed to be reconsidering when the meeting ended. Ms. Garvey blamed the public for not understanding, and dismissed concern that the Board continued touting “affordability,” “firefighters,” etc.
3. **One Board member per session, no key staff.** Residents hear differing facts, but no one can “fact check” or clarify, leaving trailing complaints of being left in the dark. Residents were left to debate each other on current land use ratios (9/13) and on tree canopy rules (9/15).
4. **Absent informed Staff, Board members give wrong information.**
 - a. Mr. Karantonis (9/15) said the Council of Governments (COG) found the area faces a “housing **shortage** of 320,000 units” and he “can’t sleep at night.” In fact, COG says ([p. 3, 10](#)) the “shortfall” is only 75,000, only 25% of it away from “high-capacity transit,” and only 25% of *that* at the Plan’s prices.
 - i. Moreover, Arlington is <1% of COG’s area of analysis. And, since the study came out, and Missing Middle project began, [Arlington lost 3,100+ residents](#), lessening supply pressure.
 - b. Ms. Garvey (9/13) spent the entire time assuring residents the Plan is non-intrusive & will create only “20 housing units per year,” until a resident at the end correctly said the County says it’ll be 94-108 units per year (p. 23, [link](#)).

- c. Ms. Garvey (9/13) said the Plan changes areas “zoned for *single-family homes only*,” ignoring new rules allowing [Accessory Dwelling Units](#).
 - d. Ms. Garvey (9/13) said the Plan reduces home prices (“[it] gets back to basic economics, if you increase supply, price goes down”). Yet Staff FAQs ([p. 22, K10](#)) state the Plan is “unlikely to have an impact on overall housing prices.”
 - e. Ms. Garvey (9/13) said, “I’ve been told [new homes] are maximizing what they can cover” and Missing Middle will be no different. In fact, Staff states ([p.10, D6](#)) “the County does not maintain a database of lot coverage.”
5. **Board backs off strict timing.** On the website, and as handed out in person, the County declares new rules will be [published in November and voted on in December](#). Yet Ms. Garvey (9/13 and 9/15) told the closed-door attendees, “I don’t see us voting on this in November, or December, and maybe not even January.” Mr. Karantonis privately told one resident in the parking lot a vote is “highly unlikely” this year. Board Chair Cristol also hedged on timing on WAMU’s Politics Hour two weeks prior. Until a formal change is announced, the staff timeline shows a vote to advertise new zoning in November.
 6. **Board unclear on tree canopy.** A resident quoted [reports](#) that the rezoned areas are 60% of Arlington’s trees and the new rules cut replacement canopy in half leading to a loss of 34,000 trees. Ms. Garvey (9/13) called this an “extreme” view. Mr. Karantonis (9/15) similarly provided no clarity.
 7. **Confusion persists on whether the Plan could be undone.** Ms. Garvey insisted (9/13, 9/15) “safety brakes” could undo rezoning with a vote “in 30 days.” Yet she was unable to address whether if that were true, why nothing had been done to downzone single-family lot coverage as long promised.
 8. **Board members admit they haven’t looked at potential displacement of fixed-income seniors as a result of upzoned property values.** A resident said Board Member Matt de Ferranti told Lyon Village he knew of no such analysis. Ms. Garvey (9/15) seemed completely unaware of possible problems.
 9. **No answers to key questions.** Why break from a successful 50-year strategy of density near mass transit and allowing *the choice* of single-family areas? Why not focus first on commercial to residential conversions, like [DC](#) and Alexandria are [successfully doing](#)? What other options are there? Why not phasing or pilots? Why zone all areas when you promised not to?