

Reply from Arlington County Board Chair Libby Garvey on Land-Use Decisions During Pandemic

From: CountyBoard@arlingtonva.us
Date: Wed, May 6, 2020 at 11:38 AM
To: asf.virginia@gmail.com
RE: ASF Request

Dear Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future,

On behalf of my colleagues on the County Board, I am responding to your message of concern both about public engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the pandemic arrived in Arlington, County government has been working very hard to make our new virtual processes transparent and inclusive. We have found that our virtual Board Meetings, COVID-19 Town Halls and Open Door Mondays have actually made it easier for some to participate, because they no longer have to travel to a specific location to be physically present in order to make comments or voice concerns about issues or agenda items. That said, we welcome suggestions on how we might improve on our efforts.

I respectfully disagree that there is a need for the County to postpone all decisions and processes on specific development projects and potential zoning changes, and in fact, I believe it would be irresponsible to do so. We expect that it will be quite some time before it will be safe for large gatherings of people to come together in close physical proximity to participate in land use and zoning decisions not only in Arlington, but across the country. It is possible that we will never quite return to how we managed processes before COVID-19. However, local government must make it possible for the work of government to continue, including decisions on development and zoning, and we must ensure that the process is transparent and inclusive.

Which brings me to the Missing Middle Study. Public engagement is integral to the Missing Middle study. As you noted, the Board had begun to reach out to civic associations and other civic organizations on Missing Middle housing before the coronavirus reached Arlington. We found those conversations to be constructive, and very much look forward to resuming them in some form in the future. While we work on a process that both protects public health and provides ample opportunity for participation in the decision-making process on this important community issue, our staff is re-evaluating the work plan and timeline for the study, and continuing to do their research while we all follow the Governor's Stay-at-Home order. Once a new work plan, timeline and transparent, constructive planning process have been determined, we will share the new path forward with the community.

Any action the Board may take on new policies connected to Missing Middle housing will be taken only after engaging with our community and conducting the study.

Thank you again for reaching out to the Board to share your concerns. I hope that you find this information helpful.

Sincerely,

Libby Garvey, Chair
Arlington County Board