

Donaldson Run Civic Association

May 10, 2022

Katie Cristol, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Cristol and County Board Members:

On behalf of the Donaldson Run Civic Association (DRCA), I am providing this initial response to the County's "Phase 2 Analysis and Draft Framework" concerning the Missing Middle Housing Study, dated April 28, 2022.

Since the public has only recently received this draft framework, DRCA is not yet in a position to advise the Board as to the views of our members on it. In light of the importance of the issues raised by the draft to our neighborhood, we have scheduled a DRCA membership meeting for June 8. We will inform the Board of these views prior to the Board's consideration of the draft, now scheduled for the Board's July meeting.

In the interim, however, we would like to raise two issues for the Board's consideration.

First, the Phase 1 report recommended (p. 27) that the Phase 2 "scope of analysis" respond to community concerns by evaluating "typical lot dimensions, lot coverage, setbacks, [and] building height." The draft framework does not do this. Instead, it would simply "[d]uplicate the same design standards as required for single-household development (height, setbacks, lot coverage)." It would not contemplate any changes to these standards -- other than recognizing that state law would significantly reduce tree canopy protections from 20% (applicable to single-family homes) to 10% to 15% (applicable to multi-family homes). Rather, the "further study . . . directed by the County Board" on Zoning Ordinance reform would only come later. See pp. 13-15, 23, 27.

This puts the cart before the horse. As the Board is aware, DRCA has for many years pointed out the irreparable damage to single-family neighborhoods resulting year after year from the scope and scale of new residential construction permitted under inadequate and inappropriately measured lot coverage, height, and setback limitations established over 15 years ago. Whether this construction is single-family or multi-family makes no difference, in terms of its impact on the established stormwater management and neighborhood compatibility goals of zoning regulation, and the increasing loss of large trees that is plainly inconsistent with both of these goals.

The Board should not hold needed reforms of these Zoning Ordinance provisions hostage to the likely delays associated with addressing missing middle proposals that, as the Phase 1 report recognized, are quite controversial. These proposals long postdated the County's own recognition, as early as the 2014 Stormwater Management Plan, that "the issue of single family home redevelopment and lot coverage deserves a more comprehensive look." The plainly visible and long-term consequences to DRCA and other neighborhoods from any further delay on this score require delivering on this commitment now.

Second, the prior Phase 1 report also undertook in Phase 2 to examine the impacts of various proposals. These impacts for study would "focus on issues identified as key community priorities and concerns," including "implications for transportation networks" as well as "energy consumption" and "impacts on school enrollment." (P. 30.) The Phase 2 draft framework includes (pp. 19-23) certain assumptions about some of these impacts, and also the potential opportunities afforded by the proposals, including what kinds of multifamily homes would likely result and the range of family incomes that might make such homes affordable. It would be very helpful to make available for public review the data on which the draft framework bases these assumptions.

Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Richardson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bill Richardson
President
Donaldson Run Civic Association