

June 3, 2022

Dear Chair Cristol:

As you know, [Arlingtonians for our Sustainable Future](#) (ASF) has repeatedly called for improved county planning and transparency. In the context of the emerging Missing Middle (MM) initiative being considered this summer, we are now updating our concerns about the MM process and substance.

We have previously called for the county to:

1. Defer [Phase 3 of the Missing Middle Housing Study](#) until September;
2. Project total population of maximum Missing Middle buildout (as per [April 28 report](#));
3. Release all existing long-term operating budget forecasts;
4. Prepare three county forecasts comparing current zoning with up-zoning vis-a-vis:
 - Long-term operating budget;
 - Long-term environmental impact;
 - Long-term household income by quintiles showing projected disparities among different household groups compared to national average.

In addition, ASF now calls to your attention two other points relating to MM analyses to date:

- A. In a [draft report](#) regarding other communities that enacted MM housing policies, Arlington's own Joint Facilities Advisory Commission (JFAC) concluded: "It was not clear from Commissioner research that the Missing Middle housing in the jurisdictions researched were able to accomplish the goals of affordability, diversity or inclusion."

Without convincing evidence that MM achieves the goals of affordability, diversity, or inclusion, what is the justification for it? Urban planning is a very tricky business, with a history of unfortunate unintended consequences for planners and communities who didn't think things through carefully. Any benefits are purely speculative.

- B. Arlington is now a tech-fueled supercommunity. The economic and housing realities differ significantly from those in other communities. As Richard Florida [writes](#):

- “Expensive cities have much larger clusters of leading-edge tech and knowledge industries and of highly educated, skilled talent. It’s this, rather than differences in housing prices, that is behind growing spatial inequality.
- “A key factor here is the growing divide between highly-paid techies and knowledge workers and much lower-paid people who work in routine service jobs.
- “Upzoning does little to change this fundamental imbalance. While building more affordable housing in core agglomerations would accommodate more people, the extra housing would mostly attract additional skilled workers.
- “Upzoning is far from the progressive policy tool it has been sold to be. It mainly leads to building high-end housing in desirable locations.”

The County’s MM initiative is not only potentially damaging if its currently projected minor population effect is superseded years from now, but it fails to deliver any of its promises in a futile quest to manage market dynamics. It is either modest in effect – so why now? Or it is potentially quite consequential in the future with effects for which no analysis has been provided to residents. Therefore, the MM initiative should be stopped until these questions and others have been addressed satisfactorily.

Sincerely,

Peter Rousselot for ASF