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Subject: Warrant Article 45 Endorsement

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Town of Arlington Redevelopment Board

Dear Board Members:

Envision Arlington's Diversity Task Group (DTG) is writing the Redevelopment Board to voice its support for Town Warrant article 45, a zoning bylaw to increase the percentage of affordable housing units, submitted by Laura Kiesel, Judith Garber, and John Sanbonmatsu. The warrant seeks to change the affordable housing earmarks in our inclusionary zoning policy, boosting them from their current rate of 1 out of 6, or 15% of units in new private developments, to one out of four, or 25%. On March 8, the DTG voted unanimously to endorse this warrant, and we urge the Redevelopment Board to do the same.

As a matter of social justice and equity, DTG believes that it is paramount that we prioritize housing for those who need it most. Even before COVID-19, the Boston metro area has suffered from enormous racial disparities when it comes to employment, income, wealth, and housing. The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston found that the median wealth of Black households was only \$8 in the Boston metro area, compared to \$248,000 for white households. The median income for Black households in the Boston metro area is \$45,000 and for Latinx households is \$42,000; by contrast the median income for white households is \$85,000. Rates of homelessness and housing insecurity have increased dramatically in our metro area in recent years.

And now, the pandemic has greatly exacerbated these existing inequities. Low income people, Black and brown people, people with disabilities, and the elderly have faced increased risks of infection, unemployment, homelessness, and death due to COVID. We are in an unprecedented economic recession that is disproportionately impacting those of the lowest income distribution in ways that no other prior recession ever has.

Unfortunately, Arlington is behind many of its neighbors in providing affordable housing. Somerville, Cambridge, Lexington, and Billerica are all approaching or exceeding the 10% affordability threshold, while Arlington has just 5.7% housing. Medford and Belmont, while not at 10%, still surpass Arlington in their proportions of affordable housing. The data show that Arlington's current inclusionary zoning policy is inadequate to realize meaningful advances in

affordable housing, or to meet demand. From 2001 to 2018, our inclusionary zoning (at its current rate) increased affordable housing stock by only 0.1%--*one tenth of one percent*.

Without meaningful affordable housing, market-rate housing is set at prices that are exclusionary to most Black and brown people, as well as those populations more likely to live on fixed incomes or rely on housing vouchers, such as people with disabilities. In the absence of rental price regulations, increasing the availability of affordable housing stock is one significant way to ensure greater economic and racial diversity in our town.

The Warrant submitted by Kiesel, Garber, and Sanbonmatsu represents only a modest step in the right direction, but it is nonetheless a step. DTG joins with City Life / Vida Urbana, the Boston Tenants Coalition, the Disability Policy Consortium, the Mystic Valley NAACP and other organizations in urging the Board to support this important initiative. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Members of the Envision Arlington Diversity Task Group