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Date: Wed, 10 Mar 2021 21:12:08 +0000  
Subject: Section 8.2.3A of the Zoning Bylaw

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Hello,

I am a resident of Arlington and I am writing to you in the hopes that as a member of the Redevelopment Board of Arlington you will consider voting to amend section 8.2.3A of the zoning bylaw to increase the percentage of affordable housing units required in any development subject to section 8.2 of the Zoning Bylaw from 15% to 25%.

There are many local organizations that support this change, including City Life/Vida Urbana, The Boston Tenants Coalition, The Disability Policy Consortium, the Boston Center for Independent Living, MassADAPT, Action for Equity, The Arlington Chapter of Progressive MA, the Mystic Valley NAACP, and the Envision Arlington Diversity Taskforce Group.

Increasing the proportion of affordable housing units in Arlington is supported by myself and these groups because Arlington is horribly behind on the goal that Massachusetts has set for communities to have 10% of their year-round housing be affordable housing. Arlington currently offers only 5.7% affordable housing while Arlington has 5,185 affordable-housing eligible households, including the elderly. We have a lower percentage of affordable housing than most neighboring communities (Belmont 6.5%; Cambridge 14.8%, Medford 7.2%, Somerville 9.7%, Lexington 11.2%, Winchester 3.7%). Cambridge requires 20% affordable housing (by residential floor area)--and this recent increase did not adversely impact the level of development.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected so many people, including those in Arlington, and there are many more now than before who cannot pay their rent, or who are foregoing necessities like food and heat in order to afford their very high rent.

You may be concerned that Arlington needs more housing that caters to middle-class demographics and more "workforce housing"--for people like police officers, teachers, and firefighters. However, this makes many false assumptions about who lives in and needs affordable housing. Specifically, when we defer to the need for "workforce housing" as a rebuttal to calls for more lower income housing, we reinforce the dangerous myth that people who live in affordable housing do not work, or if they do, their jobs are not as valid or as valuable to our society or economy as middle-class jobs. As pointed out by BIPOC housing activists, the "all housing matters" response to calls for more affordable and low income housing is the equivalent of the "All Lives Matter" response to the assertion that "Black Lives Matter" (especially as those more likely to need affordable housing are often BIPOC and our market rate rents are set well above the AMI for Black and Latinx households in the Boston metro area). Approximately, 40% or more of residents in most affordable housing are part of our workforce and those who cannot work due to disability or age, or other extenuating circumstances (such as being a caretaker) are just as worthy of housing as any other demographic and their need for housing is greater as there are no incentives on the private market to provide for them.

As explained by Tori Bourret of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, creating more affordable housing for low income renters removes more of them from competing in the private market, thereby freeing up many of those units for middle income renters, while also stabilizing rental prices in a given area in ways that directly benefit middle income renters and contribute to them being less rent burdened. Due to a serious lack of genuine affordable housing in Arlington and the larger metro area, lower income populations are often forced to rent on the private market and are therefore usually severely cost-burdened, paying 50% or more of their income to rent, forcing them to forego other necessities like food or heat in the winter. Furthermore, many of the job positions cited by the Redevelopment Board as worthy of consideration for “workforce housing” are actually compensated at levels that would qualify those workers for affordable housing under the 70% AMI index by which we define affordable housing earmarks in private market rate developments in town. According to the 2018 salary report for the Town of Arlington, a quick count reveals there are nearly 100 teachers and instructors employed in the Arlington Public School system making at or under \$62,720 (which is 70% AMI for a single family household).

I hope you will consider these factors and vote to increase the percentage of affordable housing units in Arlington. I don't want to live in a town that does not welcome people who may struggle with a disability and cannot work or who may work important jobs but are paid poverty wages. I would like to live in a town that welcomes diversity in practice, not just with empty words.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

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