

From: annadot1@aol.com

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To: JRaitt@town.arlington.ma.us, ebenson@town.arlington.ma.us, KLau@town.arlington.ma.us, MTintocalis@town.arlington.ma.us, dwatson@town.arlington.ma.us, rzsembery@town.arlington.ma.us

Subject: Support of Warrant Article 45

Reply-To: "annadot1@aol.com" <annadot1@aol.com>

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Dear Redevelopment Board Members,

My name is Anna Henkin, resident in precinct 6. I'm writing in support of Article 45, to increase the percentage of affordable housing units in new private developments from 15% to 25%. Arlington needs more affordable housing. This statement should not need to be qualified. Everyone deserves to be housed.

In speaking on the topic of affordable housing in the past, the ARB made statements suggesting that residents of Affordable Housing were substantially less welcome in this town than "workforce" residents. This language implies that only people who are able to work deserve to live here, or who work jobs that the board considers worthwhile. This is an unacceptable attitude for a member of the Arlington government to hold and use to guide decisions about the wellbeing of residents. Teachers were specifically mentioned as being workforce residents, however, over 100 Arlington school teachers make below 70% AMI. Supporting affordable housing is supporting Arlington teachers. It is supporting young working families needed to sustain our town's future. It is needed to support elderly residents who are our town's history.

My hometown, a similarly sized and high income suburb in Illinois, drastically reduced affordable housing, increased rents, and gave power to developers over the course of my childhood. A town that once had many local shops and young families turned into a ghost town. The rents became too high for any businesses to stay aside from large chains. No new families could afford to move in to a first house or apartment. Elderly residents couldn't afford to move into smaller condominiums near their former homes. Half the main street is now closed, empty shops. The school population dropped by a third. The town died. But the developers made out like bandits, and so did several local politicians who had invested in them.

Arlington should not let itself die out of greed and a misplaced sense of propriety. We choose what we prioritize as a town, and we choose how we incentivize new building. Perhaps this new requirement drives away some of the current developers. There are many more developers who would still build here happily and successfully. Change is not always bad. Growth is a project we work on together.

The argument that building "workforce" and market-rate housing will result in more available affordable housing is simply not correct. This version of the trickle-down economic argument has been disproved in study after study. But economic and cultural diversity has been shown to improve communal outcomes. Affordable housing stabilizes rents, removes competition for market-rate housing, and reduces the number of residents who are rent-burdened. When residents spend lower percentages of their income on rent, they have more left to spend locally, and this amplifies the power of each income in town.

Increasing the percentage of affordable housing via the inclusionary zoning rate is an important component of the march towards a more equitable Arlington, and towards a more economically sustainable Arlington.

Thank you, and please be guided accordingly,
Anna Henkin