

TO: Select Board, Town Manager, Redevelopment Board, Director of Planning and Community Development
FROM: Arlington Residents for Responsible Redevelopment
RE: 2019 ATM Articles Related to Mixed-use and Multi-family Zoning Bylaw Amendments, and Accessory Units (Articles G, H, I, J, K, M, N, O, P, Q, S)
DATE: Monday, January 14, 2019

The Arlington Redevelopment Board is proposing a host of Warrant Articles for 2019 Annual Town Meeting that would amend Arlington's Zoning Bylaws to promote multi-family developments, and allow accessory units in single-family districts. Efforts to publicize these plans have been limited so far to forums that did not allow for general Q & A. We feel that this has likewise limited public understanding of the likely scale of the changes these plans will allow.

These are significant changes to the Zoning Bylaw, yet the Town Meeting warrant closes in less than two weeks, public hearings for these Articles will be held in March, and Town Meeting starts barely a month later. Neither the Housing Plan Advisory Committee, the Residential Study Group, nor the Zoning Bylaw Working Group have had a chance to study these amendments and make recommendations. For many Town Meeting members and concerned citizens, this will be their first introduction to a large suite of Articles that have the potential to transform our town. One month isn't nearly enough time for them to consider these Articles, and the process should be slowed to allow a more-thorough exploration of related issues, and of unanticipated consequences.

Any plans for amending Zoning Bylaws to allow multi-family development, and thus greater density, must prioritize a solid, enforceable commitment to affordable and low-income units. Yet the proposed warrant articles don't specifically address affordability at all.

While Arlington desperately needs more affordable and low-income housing, this housing must also be appropriate for the town in terms of enhancing, and in some areas preserving, the character of our varied streetscapes. To prevent an explosion of market-rate units that will only continue to drive up prices, in styles and locations that negatively affect their surroundings, we need to ensure local control over how this goal is implemented, rather than having a one-size-fits-all plan imposed on us by non-local agencies.

Denser housing is more expensive to build per square foot, and there is evidence that this kind of development tends to push out existing residents in favor of new residents able to afford market-rate new units. It also increases demands on city services, which leads to higher property taxes. Many Arlington residents are already struggling with high rents or yearly tax increases, with the debt exclusion and override still to come. These are existential issues for many long-time residents.

The issues yet to be fully addressed include:

- Arlington is a town, and many residents appreciate that aspect of life here. These changes will have a large effect on the character of the town's commercial corridors, making it look more like a city. How has it been determined that there is any general agreement that such changes are desirable?
- Why are most of the efforts on these initiatives being outsourced to outside agencies, instead of being performed by planning staff who have more knowledge of and accountability to the town?

- How will increased pressures on our schools and other services, and the corresponding rise in property taxes, be handled?
- How will we prevent new housing, with its higher build costs, from pushing out existing residents?
- How will the commercial tenants for mixed-use buildings be attracted?
- What are the environmental impacts of allowing greater hard surface, impermeable development and reducing open space requirements?
- How does allowing accessory units in single-family districts fit with the Master Plan's finding that "there is a general sentiment that the town is built out," and with the implicit goal of mixed-use and multi-family development along transportation corridors as a means to provide relief of the pressures on these districts?
- How are neighboring communities addressing increased housing needs, and are our efforts proportionate to theirs?
- Have innovative housing solutions, such as co-housing in single large (preferably refurbished, existing) buildings, been considered?
- Has redevelopment, which reduces pressure on land prices, and allows efficient use of under-utilized areas, been considered?

For these reasons and more, we believe all of these warrant articles should be delayed until next year, and the focus first placed on the "Why and What" of these initiatives, rather than rushing forward to amend the Zoning Bylaw before the substance and implications of the proposed changes are fully understood.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Gersh, TMM pct. 18

Jo Anne Preston, TMM pct. 9

Elizabeth Pyle, Residential Study Group, TMM pct. 10

Michael Ruderman, TMM pct. 9

Carl Wagner, TMM pct. 11

John L. Worden III, Historic Districts Commissions, Secretary-at-Large,
Zoning Bylaw Working Group, TMM pct. 8

Patricia Worden, Housing Plan Advisory Committee, TMM pct. 8

Wynelle Evans, Residential Study Group

Asia Kepka

Chris Loreti, former ARB Chair, former TMM

Paul Parise

Mark Rosenthal

Don Seltzer