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Subject: Comments on Articles 6 through 14

Dear ARB Members:

Thank you for your work, and for your patient listening at the lengthy public forums.

I wanted to send my comments in written form; they are similar to those made at the March 11 and 18 hearings.

My understanding is that Articles 6 through 15 have two intents: one, to promote more housing by reducing current zoning restrictions, with the intent that, along with more market-rate units, we will see an increase in affordable units; two, to make Arlington more attractive to commercial tenants.

### **Intent One:**

These proposed Bylaw changes would allow builders to build more units overall, but still avoid the trigger for including an affordable unit, by decreasing required lot sizes. I mean absolutely no disrespect to builders by stating this. They are in business to make a profit, and if they can avoid building affordable units, they'd be foolish not to do so. A recent article about the housing crunch in the Boston Globe makes this further point:

"Although we laud the legislation's focus on zoning reform, it is likely that very little of the housing built under this legislation will result in homes that the families we work with can afford," said Metro Housing Boston, an affordable-housing and homeless services nonprofit in Boston. "In a state with finite room to grow, every lot developed with a market rate apartment eliminates the opportunity to develop an affordable one."

As I've mentioned at both hearings so far, and in a previous ARB meeting, this development will also mean the inevitable displacement of current tenants, whether of apartments or small businesses, when the properties they occupy are redeveloped. If they are able to wait out that construction period and want to stay in Arlington, it's highly likely that the rents for the redeveloped spaces will be out of reach for many of them.

We also have not addressed the pressures that this population growth will put on Town services. We're already looking at the largest debt exclusion in our history to fund the overdue rebuild of AHS, pressures on our schools, worsening traffic, and all the other issues that come with being a desirable place to live.

### **Intent Two:**

I've been thinking about the issue of "vibrancy" in mixed-use areas, and how these proposed amendments may or may not encourage more businesses to come to Arlington. One of the "for" arguments advanced at the first ARB public forum was that Arlington doesn't provide a welcoming location for small businesses because our commercial spaces are simply too small.

So when I am out and about, I've been paying attention to what lively town centers look like, and I'm not sure that idea holds up. Belmont, for example, has some very small storefronts, many of which have been in business for well over a decade. Davis Square is home to many small storefronts, ditto Concord, and I'm sure others.

The town centers of Belmont, Concord, Lexington, Davis Square, Woburn, etc. also max out at one or two stories, with a few three-story buildings sprinkled into the mix, as opposed to the five stories and increased heights proposed for some districts here.

Yet somehow these places don't have the large number of empty storefronts that plague Arlington Center. As others have pointed out, the ground-level retail space in the new mixed-use building by AHS is still vacant, though the market-rate apartments above look to be occupied. One Town Meeting Member I know has speculated that the rents for the apartments are high enough that the owner can afford to leave the retail spaces empty indefinitely. Since this is a good example of what kinds of structures we could expect to see more of if these amendments are passed, it's important to consider what's happening with it.

Finally, despite the many hearing and outreach events the Planning Department has created, there is still a lack of knowledge that these proposed changes are in the works. (There's a related issue here, about how to engage an entire town, and not one I have a clue about how to solve.) But Town Meeting Members need adequate time to fully understand the consequences, intended and unintended, of these amendments. Our Planning Department has acknowledged that they are behind on providing visual materials on what would be allowed, and the Redevelopment Board has expressed significant concerns about the lack of these materials. I think visualizations, even 3-D models, are necessary to help residents and TMMs grasp what is being discussed, *\*before\** they are asked to vote on these Articles.

It is my hope that your Board will vote "no action," so that the effects of these Articles can be studied and disseminated much more comprehensively in the coming year.

Thank you for your time and attention to these extremely significant issues.  
Wynelle

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