

From: "Jenny Raitt" <JRaitt@town.arlington.ma.us>  
To: "Rose Udics" <udigom@rcn.com>  
Cc: <EBenson@town.arlington.ma.us>, <ABunnell@town.arlington.ma.us>,  
<KLau@town.arlington.ma.us>, <DWatson@town.arlington.ma.us>,  
<MMuszynski@town.arlington.ma.us>  
Date: Thu, 21 Mar 2019 07:52:19 -0400  
Subject: Re: Changes to the Arlington Zoning By-Laws

Rose,

Thank you for your comments.

Best,  
Jenny

Jennifer Raitt  
Town of Arlington  
Director of Planning and Community Development  
781-316-3092

> On Mar 20, 2019, at 7:14 PM, Rose Udics <[udigom@rcn.com](mailto:udigom@rcn.com)>  
> wrote:  
>  
> Dear Redevelopment Board Members:  
>  
> I am writing in regard to the proposed changes to the  
> Arlington Zoning  
> By-Laws. As you may know, there has been a robust discussion  
> of the pros and  
> cons of these changes on the Arlington e-mail list, and much  
> of what follows  
> is what I posted there today, March 20, 2019, and within the  
> past week or  
> so.  
>  
> Here are my concerns:  
>  
> Some people are arguing for more structural density, but  
> creating more  
> apartments above storefronts will add to Arlington's already  
> high population  
> density. No guarantees are in the proposed guidelines to  
> ensure that new  
> apartments/condos will be affordable for the majority of  
> Arlington residents

> who want to keep living here. The Boston Globe reported very recently that  
> about 15% of the people looking for housing in Massachusetts are actually  
> from the New York City area, where living costs are even higher. So, we  
> residents are competing for affordable spaces in our town with people who do  
> not even live in Massachusetts yet. Bidding wars will continue to drive up  
> costs for the new housing spaces. Arlington does not need more people. We  
> must advocate hard for mass transit lines to be extended to other parts of  
> the state where more space for office and housing is abundant.  
>  
> That being said, a high percentage (60-75%) of housing units in any  
> appropriately sized new or remodeled smaller buildings should be required to  
> be affordable, in order to close the affordability gap. We do not need any  
> more luxury-level units until this gap has been filled. At least 33% of  
> those new, affordable units should be suitable for mobility-impaired and/or  
> disabled people, including seniors. This means one-floor living spaces, with  
> universal design, elevators and ramps, and no stairs, for easy access into  
> and within the building to any shared facilities (e.g., laundry). All  
> affordable units must come with at least one parking space, for those who  
> need to drive to jobs, as many do. Not everyone can walk far (to a municipal  
> lot overnight), bike, or take public transportation. Heart, lung,  
> orthopedic, and balance conditions can make a having a car and close access  
> to parking for it a necessity. See the "Affordability Mismatch" section of  
> the Master Plan (though its data are now outdated) at  
> <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showdocument?id=28425> ); also see  
> Recommendation 5: "Study and plan for increasing the supply of smaller,

> over-55 active senior market-rate housing and for  
affordable/subsidized  
> housing to meet Arlington's population trends" (p. 89), and  
the section on  
> parking.  
>  
> Zoning changes should encourage and financially assist  
homeowners of larger  
> single-family homes to convert them to 2-3 affordable-rate  
> condos/apartments, if they so desire, perhaps in collaboration  
with the  
> Housing Corporation of Arlington or similar entity. Disallow  
owners of  
> existing homes to create "McMansions" on the same lot, whether  
by teardown  
> or "remodeling" loopholes, if additional affordable housing  
units are not  
> also created.  
>  
> I have witnessed the destruction of a Cape-style house in my  
neighborhood  
> (on Kenilworth or Robbins Ave., near the corner of Gray  
Street), where one  
> wall and an interior stairway were the only parts of the house  
remaining  
> (for months), until a completely new and greatly expanded  
house, with a huge  
> two-car garage, was built on the same lot, with a bit of the  
old foundation.  
> That is not remodeling but essentially all-new construction.  
This has  
> crowded the adjacent house, throwing it in to deep shadows  
that did not  
> exist before. The new house is out of character with the rest  
of the homes  
> on the street, though developers just completed two other huge  
houses (with  
> two-car garages) adjacent to it. Developers should not be  
permitted to do  
> this, and from talking with my friends and neighbors, I  
believe that most  
> Arlington homeowners in the various neighborhoods are against  
more of these  
> McMansions being built, crowding the lots without adding any  
more housing  
> units. Permitting additional parking garage space is unfair to  
lower-income

> people deprived of even one space for parking in affordable housing where  
> they live.  
>  
> Some proponents of the proposed changes to the by-laws have used the Capitol  
> Theater block as an example of "good" "street-wall" density, finding the  
> mixed-used theater building "architecturally pleasing" (I agree), with its  
> three stories, not five. Are new, more densely built structures required by  
> the proposed by-law changes to be "architecturally pleasing" and three  
> stories, not five? (No.) The Capitol Theater area "works" in part because  
> the entire block has a certain look to it. If we could be certain to gain  
> attractive office spaces and storefronts in lower buildings, with wide  
> sidewalks, in-ground large shade trees (not on balconies or in planters),  
> bike racks, and benches, then we might have some added "vibrancy" from such  
> density-vibrancy as the word promoted to describe a pleasant amount of  
> activity (commercial and residential).  
>  
> We know from the Arlington High School rebuild project that what is pleasing  
> to some is unacceptably ugly to others. Burlington's Master Plan process  
> included surveying town residents and employees (I was one) on what type of  
> buildings they favored in "gateway" commercial areas, showing pictures of a  
> number of styles and a range of "cutesiness" vs. austere streetscapes (e.g.,  
> Ye Olde Ice Cream Shoppe - type signage with sculpted old-style gas-lamppost  
> lighting, flowered planters, and park benches vs. office boxes built to the  
> sidewalk's edge, little or no greenery along building faces, industrial-look  
> bare-bulb-type lighting, and slab benches), and other features, including  
> various types of sidewalks and tree/shrub lawns/strips of

various widths  
> along curbing.  
>  
> Arlington, if I recall, had a similar online survey several years ago. Are  
> residents to be fully informed of the "look" that will be the aim of any new  
> development? Look at Main St. and Mt. Auburn Ave. in Watertown Square to see  
> what structural density to the edges of sidewalks gets you-traffic noise,  
> fumes, and dust, little or no shade, etc. It's unpleasant for walking, and  
> challenging to live in spaces above stores. Look at Arlington Center's and  
> Arlington Heights's mish-mash of storefront signage. What does it say to  
> visitors about those areas and our town? Vibrant? Confused? Interesting  
> blend of diversity and interests? Whatever-have the signage recommendations  
> been followed and enforced? Compare those areas with the Capitol Theater  
> area's (which is mostly cohesive and pleasing).  
>  
> Where can we now read the Todreas Hanley Associates Commercial Revitalization Plan for Arlington, in which they wrote (in what year?) that  
> they "provided retail tenant recruitment portfolio; initiated retail  
> development and lease discussions with major retailers and developer." (One  
> developer, or is that a typo?) Who are the "major retailers" and developer?  
> <http://todreashanley.com/Arlington.htm> Shops are closing and spaces remain  
> vacant throughout Arlington. Are current empty-store owners not renting  
> spaces, holding out to sell them to that developer or others, as is  
> happening in Boston?  
>  
> Note that a lot of the data on which the Master Plan was developed is  
> already outdated. Things have changed a lot in the past decade, with Amazon  
> fueling the closing of mall stores and smaller shops

nationwide. What is the  
> plan for ensuring the new storefronts are actually filled with  
goods and  
> services Arlington actually needs now? We have plenty of pizza  
shops, bank  
> branches, nail salons, and massage parlors, but adding beer  
parlors and pot  
> shops alone are not going to help raise the level of commerce  
to a higher  
> plane. Are there zoning changes to enable lab/tech spaces to  
be built, of  
> sufficient size to attract mid-sized companies here? This  
would help to take  
> the property-tax pressure off small businesses and homeowners.  
The point is,  
> there needs to be a community discussion about what people of  
all ages and  
> income levels need and want in stores and new spaces before  
assuming that  
> merely a denser wall of stores and offices will add to  
"vibrancy."  
>  
> Some have mentioned parking lots as a way to create a more-  
vibrant vibe  
> here. The only "vibrancy" I could see from that would be in  
requiring new or  
> existing garages or lots (e.g., behind St. Agnes and Not Your  
Average Joe's)  
> to be covered with solar panels. That would provide current  
residents with  
> some shade and protection from ice and snow and would generate  
actual  
> energy. Newton and Watertown are already moving in that  
direction with  
> regard to solar panels over municipal and private lots.  
Requiring new and  
> rehabbed construction to include solar panels (as Watertown is  
now requiring  
> in its new by-laws) AND keeping street-level green space  
around buildings  
> should also be in the by-laws. Street-level green space, to be  
enjoyed by  
> all who are walking or biking by, is critical to healthy and  
psychologically  
> beneficial urban/inner suburban living. Balcony planters and  
roof-top  
> gardens cannot benefit the public on the street. In-ground

shade trees help  
> control heat, absorb some fossil-fuel - generated carbon  
dioxide, and clean  
> the air of some pollutants. Other green space on the ground  
surrounding  
> buildings absorbs noises, rain, and snow melt. Furthermore, we  
must begin to  
> address global warming/energy use challenges ASAP by requiring  
> energy-efficient buildings (well-insulated, with energy-saving  
and/or  
> energy-generating devices).  
>  
> My apologies for such a long letter, but I wanted to explain  
in some  
> detail why the proposed changes to the by-laws are  
insufficiently detailed  
> to protect the interests of existing residents, whether they  
are homeowners  
> or renters, fully mobile or not, or young adults or older  
adults, who want  
> affordable housing so that they can remain in the town they  
have cared  
> about, contributed to, and in which they have friends and  
families they  
> would not want to leave. We cannot "just move elsewhere" in a  
region that is  
> facing all of the affordability and transportation challenges  
that Arlington  
> now faces. Arlington should not become denser while other  
parts of the state  
> remain relatively unbuilt or inaccessible. And Arlington  
should not become  
> denser without closing the affordable housing gap and  
attracting mid-sized  
> companies, not smaller stores.  
>  
> Thank you for your efforts on behalf of the residents and for  
considering  
> the points I have raised.  
>  
> Sincerely,  
>  
> Rose Udics  
> 77 Fountain Road  
> Arlington  
>  
> <winmail.dat>

