



TOWN OF ARLINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING and
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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MEMORANDUM

To: Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager
From: Jennifer Raitt, Director, Dept. of Planning and Community Development/kl
Date: 7/11/2019
RE: Report on Demolitions and Replacement Homes

From October 2018 through March, 2019, the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) studied the impact of residential construction projects (both large additions and replacement homes) on Arlington's low-density residential neighborhoods. The study evaluated the effectiveness of Arlington's current demolition delay bylaw (formally known as Title VI, Article 6: Historically or Architecturally Significant Buildings) to determine whether it should be amended. 2018 Special Town Meeting voted to study whether the demolition delay bylaw should be amended in scope or procedure relative to the demolition of residential buildings, including, but not limited to, determining if the definition of "significant buildings" and/or the inventory of historic buildings is sufficient, and whether substantive or procedural alterations to the bylaw should be made in the interests of preserving historically and architecturally significant residents in Arlington. The Manager directed the Residential Study Group (RSG) to study the demolition of Arlington residential structures and associated impacts on a number of factors in Arlington's residential neighborhoods, such as housing affordability, historic preservation, neighborhood demographics, neighborhood character, and the impact of construction activity on abutters.

The enclosed Report on Demolitions and Replacement Homes describes these impacts. The RSG developed a scope of work for the report, which includes the eight categories that were assigned for study by the Select Board. DPCD investigated these issues as they relate to residential demolitions in R0, R1, and R2 zoning districts over an eight-year study period from 2010 to 2017; DPCD later expanded the study period to 9.5 years, to include 2018 and January through June of 2019. This analysis was completed using data from Arlington's Inspectional Services and Assessor's Departments; Geographic Information Services; the US Census; the American Planning Association; interviews with staff from Arlington's Engineering Department; and discussions with planners and preservation agents in area municipalities.

The report discusses several key findings as they relate to large additions and replacement homes in Arlington:

- 1) Replacements and large renovations have occurred at fairly low rates in the last decade. Between 2010 and 2019, homes in Arlington's low density residential districts were replaced or renovated at a rate of 27 homes per year, representing a small proportion of homes in the R0, R1 and R2 zoning districts. The impact of new construction may feel different to a resident in an R0 or R1 zoning district, where a smaller, older homes tend

to be replaced by structures that maximize the square footage allowed by the zoning bylaw, compared to a resident in an R2 zoning district, where homes tend to be replaced by two-family structures, suggesting that any strategy for addressing the impact of new construction may need to vary by zoning district or neighborhood.

- 2) Housing affordability is a significant concern in Arlington, although expanding demolition delay is not the appropriate vehicle for increasing affordable housing. While newly-constructed homes are on average more expensive than smaller, older structures, the appeal of Arlington's community, increasing regional demand for housing, and limited housing production in town has a more significant impact on housing prices.
- 3) Concerns about the impacts of residential construction on the natural environment, particularly through increased stormwater runoff and tree removal, are issues that are actively being addressed by other Town departments and committees through the development of policies and enforcement strategies.
- 4) Demolition delay is a historic preservation tool designed to allow local historians the opportunity to work with property owners to preserve historic characteristics of a structure during renovation or redevelopment, or barring the ability to preserve a structure, allow adequate time for documentation of the property before it is demolished. It is not intended to be used to establish a de facto moratorium on development. The Arlington Historical Commission (AHC) currently manages an inventory of more than 1,200 properties subject to demolition delay. In early April, the Historical and Cultural Resources Working Group completed the Survey Master Plan. The Survey Master Plan recommends that before the AHC adds any additional areas or structures to the local inventory, the town should first amend the bylaw to clarify the process and criteria by which the AHC adds properties to the local inventory. It is particularly critical that clarification of AHC's process and criteria be completed prior to considering amending the bylaw to use a date of construction or the age of a structure as a threshold for triggering demolition delay.

The report was the result of a directive to determine how to best control the demolition of older, smaller homes which are replaced with homes that may not be consistent with the character or development pattern of the neighborhood. Demolition delay is a tool used to protect historic structures and should not be misconstrued as an effective tool to protect affordability and prevent development. However, there needs to be a method to bring new residential structures into conformance with the aesthetic preferences of the community.

With that in mind, DPCD recommends the following two-pronged approach: first, clarifying the process and criteria by which the AHC adds properties to the local inventory in advance of using the results of the Survey Master Plan to guide any future amendments to the demolition delay bylaw; and second, pursuing the development of residential design guidelines. Overall, these recommendations are a balanced approach and address the goals of the Town Meeting article, and are not in conflict with Arlington's Master Plan.