

15 Sept 2019

To: Arlington Redevelopment Board

From: Don Seltzer

Per your request I am enclosing the background research that I had hoped to summarize during the Open Forum portion of the Sept 9 ARB meeting. I believe that you will find it useful, and I am available to answer any questions at your next meeting.

The comments that I had been prepared to make at the last meeting were prompted by the Town Manager's presentation on housing to the Select Board on July 22 in which he declared a goal of seeking public engagement in the process. It is my understanding that he intends to give the same presentation to the ARB.

The attached documents address some aspects of the Town Manager's presentation, in particular digging deeper into what the numbers mean for Arlington.

One of the key numbers at the center of the housing crisis is the claim that the Boston metropolitan area needs 185,000 additional housing units by 2030. That was the number announced almost a year ago by the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition (MMC). There are reasons to dispute the assumptions behind this number which have been raised by others, but I will accept this estimate as valid and show what it means for Arlington.

The very same week that MMC pledged its 15 members, Arlington included, to meet this goal, Mayor Walsh announced that Boston's share would be 69,000 units. In the year since, town

officials have been asked what is Arlington's quota, but no answer has been given. In fact, very few of the MMC communities have responded, perhaps because the answer is mind-boggling.

The math however is very straightforward. After Boston's declared share, the other 14 communities are left with 116,000 units to allocate among themselves. This is a 34% increase in the current total housing for these 14 communities.

For Arlington, a 34% increase in housing is nearly 6,800 new units. Presumably these would go into the R4-R8 high density districts (which represent just 5% of Arlington's area) and some into our business zones. These same districts have 5,000 housing units today. To more than double their density is almost unimaginable. I will leave it to you to speculate on what that would do our infrastructure and particularly the burden on schools.

In the enclosed attachments you will find spreadsheet tables that relate to population and housing density. Most of the data is taken directly from the US Census Bureau website and reflects the official Bureau estimates as of 2017. I have sorted the tables by housing density. I have also added some additional columns which I will explain shortly.

Of the 13 cities and 2 towns in the MMC, Arlington is in the middle third by density. There are five other cities within the MMC that have significantly less density than Arlington. This brings up an interesting question: What If these other five cities were to build out to the same density that Arlington has already achieved?

The answer is given in the 6th column. If Medford, Quincy, Melrose, Newton, and Braintree to increase their density to Arlington's standard, the metropolitan area would have nearly 111,000 more housing units, going a long way to meeting the MMC pledge.

Along this same line of thinking, what about the MAPC Inner Core? Arlington has been lumped into this grouping by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in their master plans rather than as a Mature Suburb such as our neighbors Winchester and Lexington. What if the other Inner Core cities were asked to meet Arlington's density? That would mean that Lynn, Medford, Quincy, Melrose, Belmont, Waltham, Newton, Saugus, Needham, and Milton would have to build 218,633 more housing units, far surpassing the stated need of MMC.

I have also added some additional columns to these tables showing the property tax burden of these communities. The numbers are eye-opening. For the MMC communities collectively, nearly half (47%) of the property tax burden is non-residential. In Arlington, however, only 5.6% of the property tax burden is non-residential. This one number demonstrates that Arlington is unique, and the folly of trying to lump our town into the same pigeonhole as the MMC 15. It should also be prominent in any discussions of changes that threaten what little commercial base we have remaining.

Returning to the question of housing, it is widely believed in the community that Arlington's real need is not more market rate housing but specifically more affordable housing. In looking for solutions toward achieving that goal it is instructive to see just

who creates affordable housing in Arlington. Of the 1100 or so officially affordable units on the state's SHI list,

62% have been created by the Town through the Arlington Housing Authority. This includes 519 units in the Senior Housing developments and 176 in Menotomy Manor.

21% have been created to date by non-profits, notably 103 by the Housing Corp of Arlington and 137 by other non-profit groups.

18% have been created by private developers. Of these, the lion's share are the 146 units of subsidized (Sect 8) housing at Millbrook Sq. These units were built more than 30 years ago. We have had another 53 units added under the requirements of the 15% Inclusionary zoning bylaw in the last 15 years, mostly at the Symmes and Brigham Sq developments. One more will be added shortly by the Summer St mixed use development. But no private developer has voluntarily built an affordable unit in the last 30 years.

This is my contribution to the Town Manager's call for more public engagement. I hope that you will consider these viewpoints in the conversations ahead.

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