

Presentation to Arlington Redevelopment Board

October 7, 2019

Mr. Chairmen, members of the Board. I am Pat Hanlon, 20 Park Street, I am a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 5, an associate member of the Zoning Board of Appeals, and a member of the Residential Study Group, but tonight I speak only for myself. I have for many years taken an interest in land use and zoning issues, on the one hand, and housing on the other. I am here tonight to express my support for your working with the Select Board - and the citizens of Arlington- to devise a well-conceived, well-supported, and well-explained response to the regional housing crisis.

1. The existence of a regional housing shortage in the Boston metropolitan area is beyond question. [I moved here six years ago from the San Francisco area & felt quite at home.]
2. Failure to address the housing shortage may impair the region's competitiveness. It certainly will encourage people to move further from the city, exacerbating our world-class congestion and pumping huge amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
3. The Mayors' Coalition commitment to generate 185,000 new housing units by 2030 is a dramatic step toward addressing the housing crisis.
4. I welcome this initiative. I don't know where it will lead, but this is a problem that we have an obligation to think through. We feel the effects of the regional housing crisis as much as others do – maybe more. We need to be part of the solution.
5. What would that mean?
 - a. This is a chance for us to address housing in a broad, multifaceted way. The problem is housing, and zoning is just one aspect of it. Increasing investments in affordable housing, possible tenant protections in the event of redevelopment, establishing a housing trust fund: all are potentially a part of the picture. Because of that your cooperation with the Select Board is especially helpful.
 - b. The new commitment is also an opportunity for fresh thinking. The main message of 2019 ATM was that the proposal presented to it did not seem sufficiently thought out and explained. In pulling the proposal, you undertook to go back to the drawing board. The challenge is to think this out again, not to give up.
 - c. It may be, for example, that a better way to address housing might be to focus on special areas of opportunity and develop overlay rules that make sense in a particular area but which might not be valid elsewhere in town.
6. It is important to recognize that the problem is not just affordability, though affordability is huge, but choice – as our HPP put it, a full range of housing options for all price points in the community. For example: seniors who no longer wish to live in homes with too many rooms and too many stairs lack alternatives that will enable them to stay in Arlington.

7. In working out solutions to the housing problem, and in presenting these to the public, important questions need to be answered. For example,
 - a. How would potential solutions affect housing production? How would new housing affect choices? How would it affect affordability, with both capital and small A? It is important to have a realistic assessment of how the market is likely to respond to zoning or other changes.
 - b. What are the fiscal and financial implications of providing more multifamily housing in smart growth corridors? The answer to this question needs to be based on up-to-date data and a robust model that considers the number of new units, the size of those units, and the timing of buildout.
 - c. To what extent do we expect housing production to involve redevelopment of existing multifamily housing? How would that affect the availability of affordable housing in the town? What would need to be done to protect current residents from displacement?
 - d. What are the environmental consequences of new housing production? We need to think both globally and locally, and we need to build into zoning changes a way of optimizing environmental impacts. We also need to be clear on what tradeoffs are acceptable and what tradeoffs are not. Housing is important, but it is not the only thing that is important.
8. You and the Select Board and many other board and committees are taking the first steps on a complex and adventurous journey. It won't be easy. You are beginning well, and I trust you will succeed.