Arlington Redevelopment Board
March 11, 2019, 7:30 p.m.
Senior Center, Main Room, First Floor
Meeting Minutes

This meeting was recorded by ACMi.

PRESENT: Andrew Bunnell (Chair), David Watson, Eugene Benson, Kin Lau
STAFF: Jennifer Raitt, Director, Planning and Community Development and Erin Zwirko, Assistant Director, Planning and Community Development

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The Chair opened the meeting at 7:30 pm and turned to the first item on the agenda, Public hearing Town Meeting articles 6-9.

Ms. Raitt gave a slide presentation, and the Chair opened the floor to public comment.

Rachel Stark asked for a guarantee of affordable housing. Erin Zwirko stated the affordable housing requirement in the zoning bylaw would still apply. On March 25, there will be a public hearing on Article 16 which proposes changes to inclusionary zoning that the ARB would consider.

Pat Deal stated her biggest concern is that her fellow Town Meeting members and the town residents have no idea about what's in store, there is a lack of information. She suggested deferring the matter for another year until citizens can be informed. She also stated her concern about unequal impact on lower-income citizens. She stated the articles seem to be coming from someone's cookie-cutter template of urban development that may not fully reflect Arlington's intentions.

Don Seltzer stated he was surprised that existing studies had not been made available to the public before the evening's meeting. He presented visualization studies, one showing a "fortress"- like structure and another showing a structure overshadowing a city block. He asked rhetorically whether these represented progress. He also stated the building of 4-5 story structures in the Heights would cast shadows blocking the sun entirely for several months, sending shoppers to the mall instead of local businesses.

Steve Revilak stated he thought the proposed changes would benefit the commercial districts. He stated the 1975 zoning regulations were designed to limit the town's population by limiting development in town to only expensive single-family homes. He stated one of the easiest ways to address the high cost of housing is preserving and developing more multifamily homes.

Jon Gersh agreed with Mr. Revilak that there is a housing problem but sees the articles as an extreme and quick solution that would not facilitate affordable housing and a few wealthy people would benefit from the changes.

Keith Schnebly asked rhetorically if buffers and open space are removed, would people still want to live in Arlington. He asked if any environmental impact studies had been done to address environmental changes. The Chair stated this is outside of the Board's scope; environmental impact is part of the environmental design review special permit process.

Patricia Worden generally stated that the proposed changes go against the Master Plan. The only kind of housing Arlington needs, she said, is affordable housing, and the Master Plan does not indicate that affordable housing requires decreased open space or increased density. She also stated the proposed changes would be disastrous for residential and commercial renters. She requested that "monster buildings" not be allowed in Arlington.

Michelle Nathan stated she has studied the proposals to learn who would really benefit from the zoning changes. She cited Belmont's Cushing Square as a negative example. Ms. Nathan didn't think there is enough citizen input into the

housing production plan. She is concerned that the changes might push away existing small businesses and middle income residents, and become a town of haves and have-nots. She stated she did not see provisions in place to prevent excesses by developers; and that Arlington should have a higher ratio of affordable units to high priced ones. She stated that the new development does not include commercial space, and is concerned that upper-floor open space would not be maintained. She is also concerned about being pushed out by increasing taxes. The Chair requested comments stay in scope.

Barbara Thornton stated that more people would like to move to Arlington than are able to; McMansion owners would benefit if the proposal does not pass, the kids who are in high school now will not be able to raise their kids in Arlington, which will turn into "Chestnut Hill"; fewer families and more expensive homes means fewer walk-in shoppers for small businesses; the visual impact of density can be addressed further as part of the project review process; the town cannot wait another year until more residents get the information, which has been available for some time; and she supports the articles.

Five-Minute Recess

Pam Hallett stated she was concerned that there is not enough community spirit or support for affordable housing in Arlington. The proposed changes will support the small businesses in town and help build community and diversity.

John Worden presented a brief history of zoning bylaws he had helped develop. He stated in 2018 the MAPC proposed the current articles; Article 6 is the worst. He stated Mass. Avenue would become a street wall and requested the Board reject this.

Elise Selinger spoke in favor of density, which creates opportunities for diversity of housing types and populations and, would encourage public transportation and walking, as well as supporting local businesses. She hoped for future discussion of inclusionary zoning.

Wynelle Evans stated that the people who are resisting the plan are not opposed to affordable housing, but the amendments do not give developers any incentive to provide affordable housing. She is also concerned about displacement due to higher rents caused by redevelopment. She is happy about the affordable housing that the Housing Corporation is building. She would prefer a higher ratio of affordable units to market rate. She is opposed to moving green spaces to roofs because it would make them accessible only to those who could afford it.

Jo Anne Preston had just come from a meeting of Tenants for a Livable Arlington, who she believed would be displaced by the new development. She would like to keep these middle-income residents in the town and expressed her opposition to the amendments.

Susan Stamps thinks that the town is supportive of Pam Hallett and the Housing Corporation of Arlington and the Arlington Housing Authority, and called for a lot more affordable housing. She stated this can be achieved by including deed-restricted units for households earning 50% of the area median income. She stated the zoning bylaws would allow developers to charge more for small units. She suggested language be discussed over the next year and addressed at the 2020 Town Meeting. She is also concerned about the loss of trees and open space, counter to the goals in the Master Plan, and requested the town look at the Master Plan as a whole and be consistent.

Kate Casa stated her support for the social and economic benefits of the proposed amendments.

Beth Elliott supports the proposed changes, stating the amendments would help preserve existing uses, and that more density will result in greater affordability. She briefly discussed the high expense and complicated economics involved in building affordable housing.

Asia Kepka stated she worked hard to buy a two-family and struggles to keep it. She lives next to a tall building and there

are problems with lack of light and space, and with trash, noise, and access. She stated young couples and working people just starting out cannot afford to live in the town. She is not against affordable housing but hasn't heard examples of towns where increased development created more affordable housing. She requested the Board try to preserve the community and not pave/build out of control, and look at the larger picture of environment, transportation, and housing. Aram Holman began to discuss the high school but was reminded by the Chair that this is out of scope. He stated the primary purpose of the amendments is not affordable housing but increasing town revenues by increasing density. Operating costs in the town are increasing, while residents' incomes are not. He stated the proposals would not settle Arlington's problems, but only slightly mitigate them; Arlington cannot build its way out of the fiscal bind, housing shortage in general, or affordable housing shortage, and renters and those on fixed incomes will eventually be forced out. He stated this may be legal but not ethical; Arlington's record over the years has not been good, and the Redevelopment Board had not been helpful in requesting affordable housing from developers. Mr. Holman stated his opposition to the amendments and suggested the following: a one percent real estate transfer tax, due by the seller at the time of sale, with the money to go toward affordable housing; Redevelopment Board members should be elected, rather than appointed; and he suggested the "canyonized" main drags of Mass. Ave. in Cambridge or Cambridgepark Drive as examples of what Arlington's future might be.

Karen Kelleher supports the articles; increased density will benefit the retailers and create mixed income housing. She favored more discussion of trade-offs rather than putting off the project.

Carl Wagner stated the articles do not follow the Master Plan and do not have enough community involvement. He favors postponement until more residents are sufficiently informed.

Chris Loreti stated the articles are not consistent with the Master Plan.

Steve McKenna supports the zoning changes and stated defeat would harm the town's most important developer, the Housing Corporation of Arlington. He stated the zoning bylaws would create opportunities for new businesses; growth for existing ones; much needed safer and modern housing stock; and more income for the town.

Adam Auster requested that when the Board comes before Town Meeting, they explain technical matters, hand out graphics, and reassure members as to allowable setbacks, etc.

Beth Melofchik stated she is frightened by the possibility of a "dead city" created by the articles, which deviate from the Master Plan, are environmentally unacceptable, and favor market rate real estate interests rather than affordable housing.

Peter Bloom requested better communication with people that are hard to reach, about how the zoning would affect the areas where they live. He suggested everyone in town receive a copy of the zoning map, and that space in the Town Hall lobby be used to provide easy access to information. He stated open spaces on balconies and roofs would not benefit the general public.

The Chair invited e-mail comments to the Board and to Ms. Raitt from attendees, and stated maps and other information are available on the town website. He stated the next hearing is Monday, March 18, discussing articles 10-14 and 21. The Board will deliberate on March 27.

Mr. Lau motioned to adjourned. Seconded; Board voted in favor.

Meeting adjourned.