

Arlington Redevelopment Board
October 26, 2020, 7:00 p.m.
Remote Open Meeting
Meeting Minutes

This meeting was recorded by ACMi.

PRESENT: Rachel Zsembery (Chair); David Watson; Eugene Benson; Kin Lau; Katie Levine-Einstein

STAFF: Jennifer Raitt, Director, Planning and Community Development; Erin Zwirko; Kelly Lynema

The Chair opened the meeting at 7:00pm. Continuation of 10/22, Special Town Meeting warrant articles.

The Chair moved to the first item, Article 19, zoning bylaw amendment, accessory dwelling units. Ms. Raitt reviewed allowance of accessory dwelling units in all residential districts and introduced proponent, Barbara Thornton, who presented her case that accessory dwelling units would benefit the town.

The Chair turned the meeting to the Board.

Mr. Lau asked whether besides not requiring a special permit, all other rules still apply. Ms. Thornton confirmed no other changes.

Mr. Benson asked for clarification re duplex/two family dwelling. Ms. Thornton stated she favored the broadest interpretation possible. Mr. Benson asked why the amendment includes four or more rooms; she stated no reason to count number of rooms as long as there is kitchen, bathroom, and sleeping area. Mr. Benson asked whether accessory dwelling units would be in existing building or could be separate. She favored both.

Mr. Watson stated he was also confused about the number of rooms but did not pursue this. He also questioned accessory dwelling units in setbacks. Ms. Thornton stated setbacks are not a problem, but every request would be unique. Mr. Watson asked about possible AirBnB abuses. Ms. Thornton stated this would not be a problem. Mr. Watson asked why not see how it works and then open it up; Ms. Thornton preferred to start out broadly and narrow if needed. Mr. Watson asked Ms. Raitt whether the small number of applications were caused by restrictions; Ms. Raitt stated they were, as well as additional research. Mr. Watson asked how many would be built annually; Ms. Thornton stated per Lexington, possibly between 66 and 85 to date, which is a big increase.

Mr. Lau stated if new structures are not connected, each would have its own setbacks.

Mr. Benson suggested four issues to consider: short term rental; owner living on property; setbacks; and open space requirements.

Ms. Levine-Einstein asked about the town's capacity to manage the applications. Ms. Thornton she has discussed this with the Building Inspector and Fire Chief, who were not concerned about their capacity to respond.

Mr. Watson asked whether an accessory dwelling unit could be 50% of the entire structure; Ms. Thornton replied one-third. She also stated this would apply to existing garages.

The Chair turned the meeting to the public.

John Worden requested the Chair allow Wynelle Evans to present a substitute motion. The Chair stated Ms. Evans was on the list.

Patrick Hanlon stated the new proposal is stronger and simpler than previous year's.

Patricia Worden called Article 19 a disgrace, ignoring income/racial factors, among others.

Wynelle Evans stated the article lacks protections present in nearby communities and offers no provisions for affordable housing. She is submitting a substitute motion.

Steve Revilak spoke in support of the article.

Don Seltzer opposed the article, stating Inspectional Services would not be able to keep up with possible abuses.

Steve Moore spoke in support of the substitute motion and was concerned with tree removal.

Alex Bagnall spoke in support of the article as proposed by Ms. Thornton.

Carl Wagner stated Ms. Thornton is mistaken about the article promoting affordability and diversity.

David Pretzer spoke in support of the article.

John Worden stated Arlington is densely populated and needs only to provide affordable housing. He spoke in support of Ms. Evans's substitute motion.

Philip Tedesco spoke in support of the article.

JoAnne Preston stated building more housing will not make the price of housing go down, and there should be a stipulation that accessory dwelling units be affordable.

Chris Loreti stated accessory dwelling units should require a special permit, which the proposed article would bypass. He spoke in support of Ms. Evans's substitute motion.

The Chair turned the meeting to questions from the Board.

Mr. Benson stated an affordability stipulation would result in few if no accessory dwelling units. Mr. Lau agreed.

The Chair moved to the next item, Article 18, zoning bylaw ending single family zoning. Ms. Raitt summarized the article.

The Chair turned the meeting to the petitioner, Ben Rudick. Steve Revilak presented in his place, proposing 2-family housing be permitted in single family zones, which is a code for racially restricted housing. He also mentioned other benefits from this change.

Mr. Benson asked if there is any research about home values in other communities affected by new 2-family housing. Mr. Revilak stated he has not seen any, as ordinances are fairly recent. Mr. Benson gave a historical basis for racist origins of zoning.

Mr. Watson stated already 15% of structures in single family zones are not single family, so this is already in place. He stated there is no data on the effect of such a ruling in other areas and requested more information. Mr. Revilak brought up the examples of San Francisco vs. Seattle.

Ms. Levine-Einstein stated that recent evidence from Minneapolis did not show a massive permitting boom for triplexes, possibly indicating that there would not be overwhelming immediate teardown pressure. She also stated data shows that increasing the number of units might reduce housing prices.

The Chair turned the meeting to the public.

John Worden asked whether per the zoning bylaw, the petitioner has provided copies of the proposed zoning map change to all abutters and affected parties. Ms. Raitt stated this does not apply, since this is a change in the zoning bylaw and not the map. Mr. Worden disputed this, and stated this might leave the town open to litigation. He spoke against the proposed article.

Patricia Worden urged a no vote, stating that housing prices would be increased by the proposal.

Molly Brady discussed historical redlining in Arlington neighborhoods, and spoke in support of additional housing.

Wynelle Evans stated the article was well intended but would have the opposite effect and counters the Master Plan. Housing prices might drop somewhat, but only at the highest price points.

David [Pretzer] spoke in support of the article, and mentioned tree issues. He stated this would not solve Arlington's housing problems but could be a positive step forward.

Steve Moore spoke against the article, stating that correlation does not equal causality, a single family home does not directly relate to discrimination, and increased density would reduce Arlington's appeal.

Barbara Thornton stated zoning has had a horrific effect on the country and wants to see this remedied. She spoke in support of the article.

Jennifer Susse stated if Arlington does nothing under current trends, it will lose affordability and diversity. Adding housing might mitigate this. She spoke in support of accessory dwelling units.

Don Seltzer clarified ratio of students per household; Arlington should not be compared to Minneapolis; Arlington is not a gated community; and single family homes could be replaced by expensive duplexes. He spoke against Article 18.

Carl Wagner spoke against the article, stating that current zoning is not a problem for racial diversity, but part of the solution. He stated per available research, when such changes are made, costs and displacement increase.

Philip Tedesco spoke in support of the article.

JoAnne Preston spoke against the article.

Alex Bagnall spoke in support of the article.

Charles Blandy stated Arlington is no longer affordable anyway, and spoke in support of the article.

Chris Loreti objected to the proponents playing the race card, and stated increased building is really about more tax revenue and gentrification. He spoke against the article.

Brian Ristuccia stated new versus renovated home sales price comparisons were not valid; and that zoning was founded on racial segregation.

Steve Moore discussed tree loss.

Jennifer Susse recommended approving the article for further discussion at Town Meeting. She stated she is not as concerned about school overcrowding as losing generation diversity.

Don Seltzer stated Arlington needs to build 6800 units to make a difference, a 34% increase in the population. Along with other towns, this would temper price increases, but not lower them.

JoAnne Preston stated Arlington taxes are too high; she addressed tree loss. She did not see how luxury market rate accessory dwelling units would make Arlington more affordable.

Mr. Benson stated he would send his recommended changes to Ms. Raitt.

Chair requested a motion to continue to October 28. Mr. Lau so moved. Seconded. The Board voted unanimously in favor.

Meeting adjourned.