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Subject: Five-Year Housing Development Plan

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Dear Members of the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB), Planning Department, and Select Board:

I am writing with regard to the proposed Housing Production Plan that may be voted on by the ARB this evening. The recent fire that has made at least sixteen housing units uninhabitable by its elderly and disabled occupants underscores how precarious the supply of housing is for lower-income residents of Arlington. I am concerned that the proposed plan fails to emphasize the need for more housing that even middle-income households would find affordable, i.e., for which they would spend no more than one-third of the adjusted gross income.

A huge problem with this plan is that it fails to even mention the fall-out from the Covid-19 pandemic over the past two-plus years. Loss of income, more homeless and vulnerable people and families, more people working remotely from home, local business closures, more job loss-especially of older workers (age 45+) who are NOT of retirement age-are important considerations for meeting town residents' needs for housing that is affordable and usable. It is inconceivable that, except for mention of using ARPA funding to rehab and fix the town's existing public housing, no attention at all has been paid to the huge impact Covid-19 has had on the town's businesses, tax base, and/or residential inflow and outflow. This is unacceptable. The report should also not be accepted until it revises its projections after the actual 2020 Census data are available, which are forthcoming in just a few more months. Too much has changed in Arlington in the past decade to use old, thus inaccurate, data for this plan.

Now for some particular points:

Racial and Socioeconomic Diversity: I am not opposed to increasing the density of houses in residentially zoned areas and want greater racial and socioeconomic diversity in Arlington through home ownership or modest-income rental apartments. My children are not white and could have benefited from seeing more kids who looked like them living in our neighborhood and attending their schools. Arlington is already a very densely built "bedroom community." Its good schools are already overcrowded in the newer buildings (e.g., Brackett Elementary was overcrowded within four years of opening) that town residents have so willingly supported through overrides and debt exclusions over the years. The plan fails to provide details about the projected housing increases and school populations for the next fifteen years, and how those will affect school properties and staffing. It fails to explain exactly how families of color from lower-income backgrounds will be able to buy or even rent the units developers will create. It fails to plan for increasing salaries for teachers and other town employees of any color to enable them to move into Arlington and live here with their families. So

exactly how will the proposed increased density lead to greater racial and socioeconomic diversity when market-rate housing predominates once again? Unless the Town attracts more moderate-sized businesses, real estate tax burdens will be higher and higher for residents as more schools and town services need expansion. Concrete plans for this must be included in any plan addressing housing. Limiting construction of one-level commercial properties is not a plan to attract larger businesses. Exactly how and when will that be accomplished?

Senior Housing: Retirees who love this town and have friends and faith communities important to them here, but want to downsize into homes with few or no stairs (as they anticipate mobility problems should their health decline), are also not discussed in much detail in the proposed plan. The plan fails to say how will they be able to afford the luxury houses or rental units that are certain to be prevalent or to compete for the very few "affordable" units with low-income people who qualify for government subsidies. Despite the plan's attempt to downplay "McMansions" as a big problem, everyone can see the impact all over town. In my neighborhood smaller houses are still being torn down and rebuilt right now into very large homes-e.g., one on Kenilworth (5 bedrooms with an in-ground pool)-that families and seniors of any color with modest incomes will not be able to afford. The plan also fails to address the need for co-housing, with affordable one-level units for elders of modest income. This issue was raised multiple times in community forums on the proposed housing plan. Much more detail is required on this topic alone. For example, what provisions might be made for elders to pool resources to buy up several adjacent R-1 lots/parcels to create clustered co-housing in small buildings with several (3-6) multi-household units that would fit with the scale of existing neighborhood homes? How might this be done, in public-private partnership and mortgage support from local banks, with the town's assistance? More details, please. Examples from other towns exist.

There are developers working with the City of Cambridge and Boston to build multi-unit dwellings that have a much larger percentage of "affordable" units than required by by-laws. They do this by willingly accepting a smaller profit margin from those units, with costs offset with city/town and philanthropic land and monetary grants. These kinds of partnerships are mentioned but not detailed in the proposed Housing Production Plan. With the \$10 million of federal funds coming to Arlington, the ARB should not vote to accept the current proposed plan until it presents concrete steps to use some of those funds to create the partnerships with banks, willing developers, and community groups that would lead to creating more modest-income and affordable units.

Open Space and Other Environmental Impacts: Despite widespread community opposition, this plan continues to advocate for roof-top gardens and balconies to be considered "open space," rather than have set-backs for grass, trees, and shrubbery/gardens/courtyards at street level for all to easily see and benefit from. How about changing the zoning bylaws to restrict the width of driveways at the street entrance to accommodate passage of only one car? And to limit houses to just one garage door, if any? This would enable more open space to remain between houses/dwellings and to cut down on impermeable surfaces that are heat sinks and cause run-off problems. Adding areas within parking lots for grass, trees, etc., might also count as "open space" if detailed specifications are developed. The plan fails to mention neighborhood heat sinks, driveways, or garages, so far as I could see, nor much mention of solar power and energy efficiency for proposed buildings. In the face of the global climate crisis, this is unacceptable for planning for the increased storms and extreme weather we will face shortly that will adversely affect homes.

For the money this report has cost, the consultants failed to provide sufficient details for an effective housing production plan. Without explaining exactly how people of color and seniors with modest incomes will be able to reside here, and without information related to the pandemic's

effects, data based on the 2020 Census projections, and global warming, the plan remains very incomplete. Wait until the 2020 data are available later this spring or summer and revise the plan at that time. ARB members, please do not vote to accept this plan as is. Town officials, please express your concerns about the missing information and urge the ARB to develop a better, more-comprehensive and useful housing plan.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Rose Udics
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