



**Virginians Organized for
Interfaith
Community Engagement**
4444 Arlington Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22204

July 31, 2022

Katie Cristol, Arlington County Board Chair
Christian Dorsey, Board Vice Chair
Libby Garvey, Matt DeFerranti, Takis Karantonis, Board Members
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, #300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Members of the Arlington County Board:

As members of Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VOICE), we urge you to move forward with zoning changes to support the objectives of the Missing Middle Housing Study Draft Framework. During the 14 years VOICE has been organizing in Arlington, we have seen the pace of change accelerate, shrinking housing opportunities for a growing number of Arlington residents. There is today a severe housing shortage. As reflected in Census data on increasing median household income coupled with minorities' declining share of the population, we face losing the diversity, richness, and connection that Arlington has valued for so long. Continuing to effectively wall off 78 percent of the County for development only of single-family homes is neither sustainable nor just.

Since the VOICE founding action in 2008, housing affordability challenges have been the single most often-cited concern by the now thousands of Arlington residents we have talked with. Those challenges are much steeper for renters, lower-income families, and families of color, but the barriers that exist nonetheless affect broad swaths of people – County and APS employees, other workforce families, seniors who want to age in Arlington, and our children who can't afford even rental units in the community where they grew up, among others. We know many to be good neighbors and assets to the community.

Arlington's zoning laws go back to the 30's with other racist policies including redlining, block-busting, and predatory lending practices; all designed to exclude African Americans and other minority groups, creating far-reaching impacts. The legacy has been segregated neighborhoods and schools. These policies and practices undercut African American families' abilities to build up generational wealth. Today the median white household has ten times the net worth of the median African American household.

This carefully crafted Missing Middle Housing proposal to allow a gradual increase in housing density by right throughout the County's areas currently zoned exclusively for single-family housing is a critical step toward helping the vulnerable communities where we organize. It is not the only necessary step, however.

Recommendation: We recognize that the Missing Middle Housing changes, while likely to help alleviate strong upward pressure on housing costs, will not alone address the deep affordability challenges we have heard about from Arlington residents for many years. As you consider these changes, we urge you to couple them with the aggressive pursuit of measures that would incentivize and support first-generation homeownership and easier access to homeownership by all those historically disadvantaged in the housing search by lack of generational wealth, race or other factors. These could potentially include incentivizing use of community land trusts, changing the Affordable Housing Investment Fund program to incentivize supply for lower-income homeownership, and direct support to eligible first-time homeowners, among other possibilities.

The recommendations in the Missing Middle Study will increase housing types and supply, alleviate pressure on costs, support equity by boosting housing opportunities in a market long dominated by exclusion, incentivize greater housing density to foster environmental sustainability and encourage a diversity of residents that will promote economic vitality. We urge you to approve a change that is sufficiently bold to accomplish these much-desired objectives.

Sincerely,

Rev. Ashley Goff, Sally Diaz-Wells, Pat Findikoglu
For VOICE Arlington