

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
C/o Department of Environmental Services 2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705 Arlington, VA
22201

July 5, 2022

Honorable Katie Cristol, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Missing Middle Recommendations

Dear Chair Cristol,

The Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission (C2E2) has reviewed the Phase 2 Analysis and Draft Framework of the Missing Middle Housing Study (MMHS) and, in principle, endorses its recommendations. Allowing for more diverse housing types in areas currently zoned for single-family homes corrects for the exclusionary effect that zoning has had in the past. Moreover, missing middle housing and more density in general helps to reverse the environmental impact of decades of urban sprawl development. Increased density with more households occupying the same square footage reduces per capita energy consumption and miles traveled to get to work and meet every day needs.

C2E2, however, urges the County Board to ensure that Missing Middle Houses exceed Virginia building code standards and be built to zero carbon or net zero energy standards – i.e., highly energy efficient, all electric, and where feasible, powered by rooftop solar – by pursuing any feasible legal pathway to achieve this outcome using zoning or other existing authority. For parity's sake, we recommend that the County explore how the same or similar standards can be required for new single-family home construction over a certain size. Such a move would strongly signal the County's commitment both to greater diversity in housing types and transformation of our built environment to meet Arlington's carbon neutrality goal.

C2E2 members are particularly concerned that the current development trend of replacing modest single-family homes with larger homes, whether single-family or missing middle types, will further exacerbate tree canopy loss, stormwater runoff, and flooding, requiring sizable County expenditures to build the necessary stormwater infrastructure to handle the increased demand. We recommend that the County assess the environmental impacts of allowing this development trend to continue at the current pace, and other reasonable scenarios. Use of scenario modeling can then be used to reassess and adjust lot coverage allowance to limit the impacts and protect existing tree canopy coverage and mitigate future stress on our stormwater infrastructure.

Finally, C2E2 notes that several of the issues raised in the debate over Missing Middle Housing, while outside the scope of the study, merit continued priority by the County.

- The Missing Middle Study is not intended to address affordable housing in the County and indeed most of the housing types recommended, while less expensive than most new single family homes, are expected to be out of range for many who have traditionally called Arlington their home. C2E2 strongly supports continued County efforts to find creative solutions to expanding affordable housing to retain a diverse community.
- Greater density in existing single-family neighborhoods is likely to lead to increased traffic and parking challenges. The solution is to step up County efforts to expand access to public transit and other multi-modal options so that all those living and working in Arlington can easily and conveniently meet their transportation needs without reliance on personal vehicles. Continued acceleration of these transportation options is critical to achieving Arlington's carbon neutrality goal.

C2E2 appreciates the complexity of addressing the need for equitable access to housing for all residents in Arlington County. We are extremely supportive of any initiative that aims to increase diversity, improve access to housing for traditionally marginalized groups and lower the cost of housing. Part of the inherent complexity is ensuring that new housing development standards fit with the environmental aspirations the County has laid out in the CEP and contribute to building a resilient, sustainable community. We welcome the opportunity to provide comments and insights on behalf of the community on how to address this need and look forward to aiding in the successful creation of a Missing Middle Housing program.

Sincerely,



Joan McIntyre

Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission