



We build strength, stability, self-reliance, *and* shelter.

July 7, 2022

Dear County Board and Housing and Planning Staff,

Habitat for Humanity of Washington, D.C. & Northern Virginia strongly supports the Missing Middle Housing (MMH) Study Phase 2 Draft Framework. The urban architect Daniel Parolek coined MMH, and as he puts it, this housing option is “Thinking Big and Building Small.” It is a time-proven, incremental way to provide more housing choices, which Arlington desperately needs.

With much of Arlington already built out, we need to open up new neighborhoods to welcome new neighbors who cannot afford the \$1.5 - \$2,000,000 homes, but who could afford the housing types envisioned in this study. The status quo is clearly unsustainable and further perpetuates historic and systemic racial and economic inequality. Additional housing, however modest in scale, relieves some of the pressure that Arlington’s growing population and economy have engendered. MMH is not the answer to the affordability crisis, but it is one answer, that the County could and should implement.

That these small-scale, multi-family units could be developed County-wide, by right, is crucial, and must be preserved in further Phases. County-wide distribution is laudable, sensible and equitable and reverses decades of exclusionary zoning. Moreover, by right is the only way that these units would likely ever be developed. Builders going into this need confidence in knowing they can get approvals without layers of restrictive, unclear, arbitrary or unpredictable requirements.

Further comments and suggestions:

- 1) We support the staff’s recommendation to reduce on-site parking for MMH for the reasons they cite. Cars don’t need homes. People do.
- 2) Staff should allow for even further MMH types of units, and not specifying any particular typologies, as long as they are architecturally compatible with the environs.
- 3) Allow for subdivision of lots, for fee simple ownership, which would then obviate condominium regimes’ complexities and costs.
- 4) This proposal creates opportunity for permanent affordability platforms of land trusts and/or shared equity models with income restrictions upon resale.

5) MMH offers the opportunity of newer housing stock with less environmental impact, energy efficiency gains, and lower effective property taxes.

6) We encourage staff to consider a modest increase (5-10 ft.) in building height to allow for stacked townhomes in appropriate neighborhoods. We also encourage staff to consider some flexibility on lot sizes. Flexibility in lot coverage allows for larger multiplex which may help mitigate the current proposal's likely unintended consequence of smaller number of units being constructed for market-rate sale.

7) We encourage staff to consider policies that make sure that a large portion of this uptick in density is directed at moderate-income buyers in some way, otherwise market-rate forces will continue to favor the highest bidder. Staff should consider incentivizing affordable homeownership construction of these units by perhaps opening up use of AHIF or other sources to support at-scale MMH for first-time homeownership.

"Households" even by definition are changing. Retirees wishing to live where they are, but not burdened by a large house and large property taxes; younger and older family members sharing in multi-generational living, by choice or economic necessity; live-in caring for a disabled loved one on the ground floor. They need housing choice and flexibility that are precluded by an archaic zoning paradigm.

Arlington County has a terrific opportunity here to (1) directly address systemic and historic economic and racial discrimination for more affordable and equitable housing distribution throughout the County, and (2) add attractive and energy-efficient new housing stock, and (3) moderately and sustainably ease the affordability crisis in the County.

Some single family detached homeowners will decry supposed loss of "neighborhood character" with MMH. Some will not participate in or take advantage of this opportunity. But others will, and may well find that the new neighborhood character will be deeper, richer, more inclusive, and actually more interesting.

Sincerely,



Jon Smoot

Co-President and CEO

Habitat for Humanity of Washington, D.C. & Northern Virginia