



Honorable Libby Garvey, Chair  
Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201

September 1, 2020

RE: Zoning Ordinances and Preservation of Arlington's Tree Canopy

Dear Chair Garvey:

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) is beginning to explore how current zoning ordinances impact the tree canopy in Arlington County and whether some modifications in those ordinances might be an effective means of reducing losses. At our July 23 meeting, UFC received an informative presentation on planning in Arlington County. UFC is interested in the extent to which zoning ordinances can and should be viewed as a mechanism to execute, reinforce and formalize county policies about tree canopy and natural resources while also addressing other traditional zoning purposes.

Arlington's 2017 Tree Canopy Study indicated that loss of trees on residential properties was a major force in the changing tree canopy profile in Arlington. Extensive county planting programs have supplemented the canopy potential on public lands for the past decade. However, the rate of tree removal from private development, particularly in some residential parts of Arlington, amount to losses of more than 1/5 of their acreage, up to 23%, since 2008 in some neighborhoods, and 10 of the Civic Association areas had losses greater than 10%. This is not a sustainable rate of tree loss regardless of the public planting due to the proportion of land that is privately owned.

The Urban Forestry Commission's 2020 workplan included an element on this topic: "Undertake efforts to lessen the impacts of by-right development on trees and instead make it an engine for saving mature trees and preservation of the tree canopy." We are still in the exploratory stage, but plan to gather information about development practices and tree impact, as well as the role trees can play in mitigating Arlington's storm water challenges. In addition, we intend to explore further the value of trees, individually as a property asset and as a shared community benefit, and the role that conservation of trees can play

in promoting important Arlington strategic priorities, such as equity and biophilia.

At this time, we are requesting that UFC be provided any data gathered as part of the Missing Middle Housing Study, or currently held by any department, pertaining to the residential tree loss as well as environmental impact generally, as a result of development projects in neighborhoods. As noted in our letter of March 9, 2020, we are concerned that relevant data about a range of county priorities be incorporated into the study at an early stage, so that specific impacts as well as opportunities for a viable Missing Middle policy can be recognized and further refined prior to formulation of specific policy options. The research compendium for this study, nearly complete and available to the public, has useful background information on the housing situation. However, we are concerned that substantial, neighborhood-level data on the impact on tree canopy is missing from the study design. In addition, recent changes in policy on Accessory Dwelling Units and infill development will undoubtedly have a negative impact on tree canopy, and that experience is also relevant. We believe that a successful MMHS study process requires review of data beyond that on the housing situation itself.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,



Phil Klingelhofer Chair, Urban Forestry Commission

Cc: Members, Arlington County Board  
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager  
Claude Williamson, Director, Department of Community Planning,  
Housing and Development  
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation