

Dear Fellow Town Meeting Members,

I would like to thank the proponents of Article 38 for starting a conversation about the types of housing we would like to see in Arlington.

In the public discussion over Article 38 we have heard many expressions of worry about our community's future. I too am worried about the direction that Arlington is going in. When I was on the School Committee, I spent a lot of time analyzing data and saw that we are losing both economic and generational diversity—especially those under 35 and over 65. It is because I am worried about these trends that I support Article 38.

Likely you have heard stories about how a small and relatively affordable house down the street from someone was bought by a builder, torn down, and replaced by two large expensive houses. But new construction is always going to be more expensive than an older building, just as new cars are more expensive than older cars. And, as is the case for cars, restricting the supply of new houses puts a lot of price pressure on the older models (because of supply constraints on new cars used car prices have increased by 30% this year). In the perfect world we would have built a bunch of new houses 40-50 years ago that would be more affordable today. Instead, suburban communities like ours passed exclusionary zoning rules in the 1970s that restricted housing supply. Allowing two family homes by right would begin to unravel some of these restrictive rules. Keeping these rules in place, on the other hand, will make the housing affordability crisis even worse for future generations.

The most powerful argument in favor of Article 38 is to remember the alternative. For cases where a house is being torn down--that is cases where:

- the house has been sold,
- the house has been sold to a builder,
- the house is very small and/or in bad shape so that it makes sense to tear it down,

the only legal option a builder currently has is to build a single-family home. And because builders try to make a profit (just like other local business owners) the home they will likely build will be very large. Article 38, in contrast, would relegalize more modest housing choices for the 72% of residentially zoned land where the only legally conforming option is a single-family house.

On average 27 houses are torn down in Arlington each year. Some of those houses are already in a two-family zone. Some of those houses are torn down by a homeowner for their own purposes. And in some cases, it will make economic sense to build a very large single-family home instead of a two-family home. In short, this is a conservative proposal. There just won't be that many new two-family houses built each year.

Because the proposal is conservative it doesn't make sense to respond to demands by opponents to produce studies on e.g., the effect on our sewers or schools. The answer is that any change will be very gradual (similar to ADUs). The demand for studies is an extremely common and expensive delaying tactic. So common that the effect on affordability of these types of tactics has been well documented by academic research; for example, by two of Arlington's own (Katie Einstein and Max Palmer), along with non-Arlingtonian David Glick ([Neighborhood Defenders](#)).

A couple more points:

First, our schools have space for additional students. Just before the pandemic the McKibbin projections had our elementary school enrollment peaking in 2019, holding flat for a few years, and then going into a modest decline. As this meeting knows, one of the effects of the pandemic has been a decrease in public school enrollment, which means that there is even more space in Arlington's schools than originally anticipated (K-5 building enrollment was 2964 this fall, compared to the McKibbin projection of 2997 and 2019/2020 actuals of 3177). Even if we were to return to the expected trend, we would still have fewer students in our elementary schools than we had in 2019*. Additional housing in Arlington won't stress our schools. Full stop.

Second, it is true that this proposal is on the vanguard, but the vanguard is Arlington's comfort zone. Arlington has been out in front on so many issues—Arlington Community Electricity, the Net Zero Action Plan, ADUs by right, the chance to vote on Ranked Choice Voting, the Trust Act, Domestic Partnerships, the Civilian Police Advisory Commission, and much, much, more. What we do in Arlington has powerful effects beyond our borders because we are a community that other communities look to emulate.

It's going to take some time, and the work of many communities, to address our regional housing affordability crisis, but remember that it took us 50 years to get to where we are today. The lack of a quick fix does not excuse us from doing something.

In conclusion I would like to share two resources: an [academic paper](#) documenting the historical and present-day harms of single-family zoning, and a [short explainer video](#) from VOX.

Thank you. Please vote yes on Article 38 and yes on the Newton amendment.

* Note that I am focusing on the elementary school population because it is at the elementary level that additional students particularly stress our facilities. If there are additional students at the secondary level the classroom utilization rate needs to go up, which makes scheduling very difficult but doesn't necessarily require additional classrooms space.

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