

May 30, 2022

Dear Fellow Town Meeting Members,

We've seen many changes to local zoning over the last few years that have helped increase residential units, and help sustain our local neighborhoods. Almost all of these changes have been deliberate and incremental, which allows us to observe the effects, and incorporate lessons learned into future decisions.

I commend these efforts. I represent Precinct 7, which overwhelmingly has two-family homes. My wife and I also own a two-family home in another town, so I clearly have no general opposition to multi-family homes. But I am planning to vote against Article 38 for several reasons.

Article 38 is not incremental, rather it's a sweeping change to the zoning of the entire town. It allows for two-family houses in any single-family district, regardless of the nature or wishes of the neighborhood. Once we expand zoning and developers get momentum, it will be nearly impossible to reverse this decision if we realize that we chose unwisely.

This calls for restraint, possibly seeking supportive neighborhoods, and experimenting gradually with small districts to evaluate whether zoning changes are having the desired effects. Following evidence-based practices like this not only ensures better long-term results, it also helps strengthen public support for reshaping our neighborhoods.

Secondly, the haste behind Article 38 is unclear. It's true that housing demand is strong in our region, but that by itself doesn't burden the town to impose its values on neighborhoods that have their own values.

It's also not clear whether this proposal is actually connected to the Housing Choice Initiative's requirement for multi-family zoning in MBTA towns, as Arlington already has numerous multi-family districts, especially in areas served today by public transportation. Yet the Housing Choice Initiative does provide a curious opportunity to impose a sweeping, permanent change to Arlington's neighborhoods without the deliberative protections once afforded to property owners.

Lastly, the magnitude of this decision warrants much more deliberation and resident input than has been afforded to the issue. In contrast, the high school construction debate was widely publicized, deliberated for more than a year, and the subject of a referendum. Yet here we have a proposal to make a monumental and permanent change to the nature of the town in a matter of a couple months without any form of validation from residents.

Whether we choose to expand our population to meet demand for housing, whether we choose to change our neighborhoods to do this, these are decisions that are better left to these neighborhoods. Making a permanent, sweeping change on a town-wide basis as is proposed in Article 38 leaves little room for misjudging our policies or our constituents' desires.

I will not impose the values of my neighborhood on the entire Town of Arlington and its many diverse neighborhoods, and especially not with such haste. Join me in my call for deliberate and incremental housing changes that garner substantial support in our neighborhoods, and vote against Article 38.

Bill Borgia
Town Meeting Member
Precinct 7