

DENSE THAT MAKES SENSE

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RiverHouse Neighbors for Sensible Density

We represent more than 1,000 Arlington residents who are extremely concerned about the current Pentagon City Sector Plan (the plan) and the RiverHouse site specifically. The RiverHouse site is already the fourth largest apartment complex in the greater Washington D.C. area.¹ Because the plan has been developed without wide and diverse community representation, we launched the RiverHouse Neighbors for Sensible Density petition on December 9, 2021. By December 30, 2021, more than 1,000 of our neighbors signed it online or on paper voicing their strong opposition to the plan. This is more people than those who participated in the county’s public engagement effort (five public workshops in September 2020 – April 2021.) The overwhelming majority of the people we canvassed in December 2021 had not heard about the proposed plan.

This is an unprecedented moment in the history of our community – the arrival of Amazon HQ will reshape the county. We aim to inspire the Arlington County Board to seize this moment to innovate instead of relying on the “density for (limited) community benefits” paradigm. By partnering with our new neighbors (Amazon, BID) and exploring new ideas, we can lead the nation in creating a vibrant community while diversifying the housing stock and integrating affordable opportunities for ownership and renting, without reducing the quality of life. To achieve this, the plan has to first and foremost close several gaps in planning and more importantly, offer a vision that elevates 22202. The current planning document is a good start, but its gaps indicate a hurried and weak effort. We have pulled together specific and actionable feedback in this document in an effort to close these gaps so that existing residents and future neighbors have an Arlington they can be inspired by.

1. Exploring new redevelopment models to offer a vision that Arlington deserves

The plan’s proposal to triple population density in a short term without an articulated vision of whether this rapid growth is sustainable, with regard to critical infrastructure and access to essential services, in exchange for limited benefits is an invitation for a painful and expensive experience for the County and current and future residents alike. We can lead the nation in innovation by partnering to build a sustainable smart community with a low carbon footprint and high quality of life by employing future-facing technologies. Examples of these communities include [Geos in Arvada, CO](#), and [Utrecht, Netherlands](#). We challenge the Board to imagine what is possible at the RiverHouse site by exploring innovative partnerships and solutions to our critical housing and environmental challenges at this unprecedented moment in time.

2. Integrating relevant initiatives

The RiverHouse site is highly suitable to supporting the types of housing that will be studied in Phase 2 of the Missing Middle study. We urge the county to align consideration of density at the RiverHouse site with the

¹ <https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/subscriber-only/2019/05/17/largest-apartment-communities-in.html>

timing of subsequent phases of the study (anticipated to conclude 4th quarter 2022). This will align with the current transitional nature of the RiverHouse site and considerations of sensible density increase.

Based on the [Affordable Housing Master Plan 5 Year Report](#), we ask the county to consider the potential for the RiverHouse site to meet the county's need not only for affordable rent, but also affordable homeownership within the context of the type of housing identified in the Missing Middle study.

3. Planning for critical community infrastructure

We will achieve better results for the county by articulating how the plan fits in the bigger vision for the county/region development and into the existing infrastructure - transportation, water, energy, communications and fire protection services and police:

- The county should commission a massing study for the RiverHouse property to better understand the impact of transitioning from medium density to high density in what has always been a transitional space.
- The county must articulate the density/community benefits tradeoff implicit in the plan but not clearly stated.
- The plan should incorporate the development plans of Alexandria (Potomac Yard area of National Landing) and the regional approach via the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.
- The county should conduct a legitimate, comprehensive traffic study at the level of detail and maturity of VDOT plans. (More detail in Attachment 1.)
- Hazard mitigation plans must be incorporated with the County Emergency Management Staff
- Arlington Public School must provide a study of the need.

4. Properly valuing green spaces

The current green space at the RiverHouse is about 40%, in line with the targets established by Washington D.C. and leading environmental organizations. More trees mean lower energy costs, less air pollution and higher property values. We can achieve more density without destroying the valuable and dwindling green spaces. Construction can be done on unused lots, while green spaces are preserved. (More detail in Attachment 2.)

5. Properly valuing open spaces

Open spaces are critical for the well-being of a community, providing health benefits and spaces for civic engagement. Proposed reductions of open spaces in the plan are far greater than the proposed new spaces. (More detail in Attachment 3.)

6. Fully engaging with the Arlington community

Adequate, ample community engagement before 4.1 site applications is necessary. Higher level reviews than Site Plan Review Committee are also appropriate for the plan of the scale of the Pentagon City Sector Plan.

The long-range planning committee on the Pentagon City Sector Plan started on January 22, 2020, the date when the first patient with Coronavirus was identified in the U.S.² The plan continued through the pandemic, which shaped its outcomes by excluding the voices of most Arlington residents during a time of unprecedented upheaval. (More detail in Attachment 4.)

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/21/health/cdc-coronavirus.html>