



November 13, 2019

Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Dorsey,

As Arlington continues to grow, height and density are vital tools for achieving our community's growth and supporting public priorities. The ability for a project to achieve both bonus density and height ensures that our community can receive optimal benefit from new development. This is especially true in cases where a limit on bonus height would impede the full utilization of bonus density. Therefore, the Arlington Chamber of Commerce recommends that the County Board adopt the expanded amendment to the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance contained in "Attachment 1B" to the staff report, with the exception of its proposed amendments to §15.5.7.

The amendments to §15.5.9 make clear how the County Board may offer bonus height and density in exchange for projects that support public priorities. The proposal spells out opportunities to fulfill goals for low- and moderate-income housing, community facilities, and sustainable design. It also affords the County Board flexibility to permit additional height and density for site plans that meet other public priorities. The text added by the County Board to its advertisement on October 19, and contained in Attachment 1B, makes explicit that the Board may permit both additional height and density. Considering both height and density allows flexibility for cases where the height is necessary for any bonus density to be built or to fit a particular site better. The added language ensures that the Board may consider all proposals and determine the best outcomes for the community.

By contrast, the proposed amendments to §15.5.7 would inhibit the County Board from considering some potential proposals. Adding an exclusion for height and density to this section could preclude the County Board from considering a proposal that it deems to be suitable and which meets community needs, but whose bonus height or density would not fit under another section of the ordinance. Moreover, the existing text of §15.5.7 reads, "The County Board may, in appropriate cases, modify the uses permitted and use regulations in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the district..." The section already gives the County Board discretion to deny a proposal that is out of step with neighboring sites or planning guidance. The proposed amendment is not necessary to prevent such an outcome and could result in unintended consequences or even inhibit the community benefits these amendments seek to secure.

The Chamber supports the broad goal of facilitating the use of bonus height and density to achieve public benefits. Offering flexibility in the zoning ordinance allows the community processes to determine the best approach for achieving these benefits in any particular project. We encourage the County Board to adopt those amendments to the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance which are most conducive to achieving these benefits. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Kate Bates
President & CEO

CC: County Board Vice Chair Libby Garvey and Members Katie Cristol, Matt de Ferranti, and Erik Gutshall; County Manager Mark Schwartz; Claude Williamson, Director, and Jennifer Smith, Planning Division, Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development