



November 13, 2024

Chair Libby Garvey
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 700
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Garvey,

The Arlington Chamber of Commerce requests that the County Board adopt Item 36 on its agenda, the “County Board Policy on the Transformation of Commercial Office Buildings in Arlington,” and the related Zoning Ordinance amendments. Arlington faces a tremendous challenge in its office vacancy rate, and this policy and related zoning amendments will together be a powerful tool to meet this challenge.

Arlington is contending with a record high commercial vacancy rate, creating constraints on the County’s tax base. An Arlington Economic Development study stated that a typical office building with a 50% occupancy rate only generates 58% of the total local tax revenue of a 100% occupied building. Losing this revenue hinders Arlington County’s capacity to fully fund important public services such as education, parks, public safety, and human services. These services make our community thrive.

We applaud the County for considering a range of policy options to attract and retain tenants to commercial office space, including creating a streamlined path for commercial property owners to adapt aging or obsolete commercial office space to adjust to market conditions. The Chamber was an enthusiastic proponent of the first phase of the Commercial Market Resiliency Initiative (CMRI), which helped modernize the Zoning Ordinance to better attract and retain businesses of the 21st century. We appreciate the focus on process evaluation and improvement in the second phase of CMRI, which will remove barriers and serve as key tools to ensure that Arlington is tackling the issue of a high vacancy rate and helping maintain the funding of key services.

Allowing for property owners and businesses greater flexibility in changing the primary use of a commercial building permits them to adjust their buildings to conform to new market demands, encouraging occupancy. Currently, the uncertainty around both the cost of changing primary use and the time required for the process limits property owners’ ability to secure financing and complete these projects. The policy and zoning amendments would create a streamlined path for adaptive reuse of buildings, encouraging these projects in Arlington. The Arlington Chamber requests that the County Board amend the Policy so that it extends eligibility for projects to those initially approved under the Columbia Pike Form Based Code use permits and by right, to ensure the greatest positive impact in Arlington.

The Chamber looks forward to continued conversations on the other policies proposed in the second phase of CMRI, including revisions to major, minor, and administrative Site Plan amendments and flexibility in signage requirements. We also look forward to continued engagement with the County to ensure Arlington’s regulations and processes fit the modern

economic landscape, and we commend County Staff for their ongoing efforts on this important policy work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Bates". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Kate" and "Bates" being capitalized and prominent.

Kate Bates
President & CEO

CC: County Board Vice-Chair Takis Karantonis; County Board Members Maureen Coffey, Susan Cunningham, and Matt De Ferranti; Director Samia Byrd, Community Planning and Housing Development; Director Ryan Touhill, Arlington Economic Development; Marc McCauley, Arlington Economic Development; Jill Hunger, Community Planning and Housing Development; County Manager Mark Schwartz.