

July 25, 2025

Takis Karantonis, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Karantonis and Board Members:

Thank you for meeting with our group of now over 20 diverse civic associations to discuss our concerns about the scope and timing of staff's May 2025 suggestions for how to address lot coverage reform for new single-family homes. Given the acknowledged gravity of the problem, we've worked as you have suggested to come up with some specific proposals and an appropriately expedited schedule. We'd like to help make this a constructive discussion and look forward to your thoughts.

The premise for quick action is irrefutable:

- **Accelerated loss of "modest-sized, more affordable homes."** As noted in the Board's recent brief on appeal of the EHO case, "As . . . older homes are torn-down and replaced with much larger, more expensive homes," these teardowns "that maximize a lot's building footprint would outnumber the existing stock of modest-sized, more affordable homes." Thus, the Board pointed out, the average price for a single-family home in Arlington is now \$1.7 million.
 - Arlington's nearly 10,000 single-family homes assessed under \$1 million are ripe for such teardowns.
 - On average, these teardowns replace a 1,515 square foot home with one **over three times that size**.
- **Heightened risk of substantial mature tree canopy loss.** In the last three years, redevelopment on private land has destroyed at least 2,487 more trees than trees planted. These staff data understate the scope of the threat to our trees. Development removes mature trees, and replaces them with saplings that may or may not actually mature after 20 years.

The diversity of our 25 civic associations reflects much greater consensus on the need for lot coverage reform than existed in 2005, when coverage was last reviewed. Many more Arlingtonians now recognize the threats posed by the ensuing epidemic of teardowns, and the building footprints now are much larger. We agree with you that it is important that all stakeholders have input in determining what lot coverage reforms are appropriate. But given the irreparable damage already occurring week after week, and after over a decade of recognizing the problem, staff's proposal to further delay voting on reforms until the end of 2026 is unacceptable.

Moreover, there has already been extensive public engagement. The Forestry & Natural Resources Plan involved **1,000+ submissions**. Among the top themes: "Discourage development of large homes on

small lots,” “Increase or strengthen requirements for tree protection,” and “Place restrictions on single-family home sizes.” The Board agreed, in adopting the FNRP’s call for a study of lot coverage reform.

We are replowing old ground here. But we agree that further public engagement should begin this September. This should include a full range of options, not only the “low hanging fruit” (limits on impervious surface without regard to building footprints). The County should outline the policies served by the proposed reforms, while seeking comment on the tradeoff between these policies and the impact on existing homeowners if they are grandfathered as in the current zoning ordinance.

We propose:

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| July/August 2025 | -- Provide the public with data in a format that can be used to map lot coverage and impervious surfaces for R5, R6, R8, R10, and R20 single-family homes |
| September 2025 | -- Include on your new “low residential study” website <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The full range of options• Links to our prior filings and those of FNRC and ATAG -- E-mail interested members of the public |
| Oct/Nov 2025 | -- Hold open sessions with construction and real estate industry representatives
-- Hold a work session with County Board, staff, and CivFed representatives
-- Conduct in-person neighborhood workshops in north and south Arlington
-- Brief FNRC and other advisory commissions and get their input
-- Make staff available for civic association and environmental group meetings |
| December 2025 | -- Request to Advertise full scope of options for Zoning Ordinance amendments |
| Jan/Feb 2026 | -- Continue more refined public engagement process on all options |
| April 2026 | -- Vote on whether and how to amend Zoning Ordinance |

We provided a number of specific substantive proposals in our August 2023 and June 2024 papers, as well as questions to ascertain whether lot coverage reforms further the type of public interests necessary for land use policies under Virginia law.

To get the ball rolling, we suggest a focus on these issues:

1. How do different types of impervious surface affect stormwater, tree canopy, climate change, heat island effects, sustainability commitments, building size, tax assessments, housing affordability, and impact on neighbors? Should the reforms extend to all impervious surfaces?
2. If so, what limits should be placed?
 - a. This should review what other nearby suburbs do (not just fully urban, high-density areas).
 - b. Vienna’s 25% limit is a good place to start with its many single-family homes near urbanized Tysons Corner.
3. How many existing single-family homes in Arlington would exceed any new limit considered? Of what relevance is that? To what extent does this data reflect the failure for so long to address this well-recognized problem?

4. Should certain districts (e.g., R-5 or R-6) or types of lots (e.g., by size) have larger percentage limits than Vienna's 25%, and if so what should they be?
5. Should the limit be applied to the minimum size of the lot for a district (e.g., 6,000 square feet for all R-6 lots) or to the actual size of an oversized lot?
6. How could impervious surface limits alone capture the principal problem, which is building size?
7. Are there incentives that would be likely to reduce building size or preserve older housing stock?
8. How should setback rules be adjusted to promote tree preservation? Should they permit adjustment where needed to preserve mature trees?
9. Should Arlington adopt Vienna's way of calculating the 35-foot height limit?
 - o Vienna measures to the top of the building, not half the height of many roofs.
 - o Vienna averages height from the front two points, not all four points.

We look forward to discussing these proposals with you. Given the need to expedite staff's proposed schedule, we would appreciate (1) acknowledgement of receipt of this message and (2) hearing back from you by August 15.

Sincerely yours,

Alex Stevens, President
Alcova Heights Citizens Association

Sal D'Itri, President
Arlington Forest Citizens Association

Scott Sklar, President
Ashton Heights Civic Association

Kate Mattos, President
Bluemont Civic Association

Paul Elgin, President
Chain Bridge Forest Civic Association

Jim Todd, President
Cherrydale Citizens Association

Bill Richardson, President
Donaldson Run Civic Association

Laura Johnson, President
Glebeewood Civic Association

Brandon Hemel, President
Glencarlyn Civic Association

Sara Kirwin, President
Green Valley Civic Association

Wilma Jones, President
John M. Langston Citizens Association

Jean Henceroth, President
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Michael Kunkler, President
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Marc Koblentz, President
Maywood Community Association

Rana Jazayerli Bortot, President
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Howard Solodky, President
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Mona Steffen, Former President
Rivercrest Civic Association

Jon Ware, President
Tara-Leeway Heights Civic Association

Michael Bruce, President
Waycroft-Woodlawn Civic Association

Ruth Shearer, President
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Zach Newkirk, President
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