

ASF | ARLINGTONIANS FOR OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

AUGUST 24, 2020

ASF QUESTIONS FOR ARLINGTON COUNTY BOARD NOVEMBER 3, 2020 ELECTION CANDIDATE LIBBY GARVEY

Question 1 (two parts):

ASF KEY ISSUE: DEVELOPMENT

Cost-Benefit Analysis for New Development - Reflecting a key recommendation of the 2015 Community Facilities Study, our County Board in 2017 directed the Manager to study options for county performance of cost-benefit analyses for new site plan projects. Such analyses, done by many jurisdictions, quantify likely tax and revenue income generation per site plan, as well as potential incremental costs on nearby schools, parks, water/sewer and other community infrastructure. So far, the Arlington County Board appears to have done little or nothing to implement this recommendation. What would you do, if anything, to move forward on this directive?

Population Density - Our county board currently supports very high growth/density rates. (Estimated U.S. census growth from April 2010 to July 2019 was 14.0%. U.S. census density in 2010 was 8,309 people per square mile, the highest of any county in Virginia.) If you are elected, would you support growth/densification at the same, a greater, or lesser pace and why?

Answer(s) for Question #1: Cost-Benefit Analysis and Population Density

Arlington has been admired for its planning for some time. In part because of our sector plans and area plans that set out what population we expect the development within that plan to bring and includes the infrastructure (parks, water/sewer, fire stations etc.) to support that planned development. However, we always hear concerns about new projects that they will negatively impact our community. Therefore, we asked our staff to provide a way to measure how added projects might affect our community. While its not possible predict exactly how an individual project will affect Arlington, even when it meets the requirements of our planning, it is possible to ascertain how recently completed projects are affecting us. I expect the

methodology to do that kind of analysis should be ready this fall and that we can begin regular reporting on it every 6 months or so.

Arlington has done a pretty good job of keeping most of our population in 11% of our land area along the urban corridors. This has helped preserve our green spaces and neighborhoods and helps the planet. For example, people in extremely dense New York City have the smallest individual carbon footprint in the nation. Crystal City has less traffic now than it did about a decade ago, and it has grown in population. We simply cannot keep covering the earth with spreading development. We have to live more densely. Well planned density is essential to controlling global warming. If we were to decide to prevent development in our urban areas beyond what is allowed “by right” in Virginia, we would lose all our opportunities to support and encourage smart growth. Development would still happen, but not bring with it the benefits of good design, environmental engineering, added parks etc. that we are able to require now with our current processes. Therefore, I support denser growth when it improves our community.

Question 2 (one part):

ASF Key Issue: DEVELOPMENT Covid-19 and Missing Middle Housing

Impact of Covid-19 on Missing Middle Policy - With Covid-19 showing few signs of significant decline either nationally or in many states, both anecdotal evidence and recent statistics reveal that people may once again be moving out of central cities and first-tier suburbs to outer suburbs and even rural areas—looking for more room for living and more accessible and abundant green space. At the same time, many employers with an Arlington or Metro area presence are reconsidering the need to have workers concentrated onsite in dense employment centers, facilitating even greater telework and materially reducing the need for home-to-office commuting. Many experts believe that these changes will endure well after the pandemic subsides.

Should the County plan to measure and factor in these apparent trends for Arlington as it pursues greater densification of housing at a time this concept may be losing favor locally and regionally? If not, why not?

Answer

Arlington should, and is, watching closely how Covid is affecting our county and our region. At this time we are seeing continued interest in both living and working in Arlington. Home sales are currently a seller’s market where far fewer homes are available for sale than buyers who want them leading to bidding wars among buyers. Large developments, like Amazon’s HQ2 are continuing with no sign of pulling back. It is likely office buildings will be used differently and possible that some commercial space could become residential to help meet the housing need, but that is not what we are seeing at the moment. We are following developments closely. It appears that Arlington remains a very attractive place to live, work and play.

Question 3 (one part):

ASF KEY ISSUE: ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Trees - Residential and commercial development are putting major stress on Arlington's tree canopy, now hovering near 40%. What specific steps would you take to stabilize and expand Arlington's tree canopy

Answer

Loss of tree canopy is a major problem and mostly an issue with single family development, which we are not well able to regulate. The desirability of Arlington as a place to live means that small older homes on tree filled lots are being torn down for much larger homes on lots with few or no trees. Erik Gutshall, Delegate Patrick Hope and I convened a group of stakeholders about two years ago to look at this issue. We brought together builders, attorneys, the Arlington Tree Action Group, staff from Parks and Recreation to all sit together and work on how to solve this problem when we have little to no ability to legally require tree preservation. This led to legislation in Richmond to at least study allowing credits for saving large trees under Department of Environmental Quality regulations. I helped start a Regional Tree Canopy Subcommittee at the Council of Governments to work on the same issues. I intend to continue to advocate on both the state and regional level to help preserve trees. Locally, I support our effort to provide free trees to residents and to make sure that we care for new trees that we plant on County property. I also support ways to encourage builders to save trees whenever possible. Finally, I will continue to look at ways to change our local zoning ordinances that sometimes encourage the destruction of trees rather than their preservation.

Question 4 (two parts):

ASF KEY ISSUE: INFRASTRUCTURE

Stormwater Management - Severe flooding of July 2018 and July 2019 caused massive property and environmental damage; climate change will trigger more such events. What should we be doing to factor in the adverse consequences of climate change in Arlington's stormwater management policies and capital projects, as well in private sector developments?

Schools and Transportation Needs - Planning and growth must also account for infrastructure needs of growing populations, whether schools, water, wastewater, fire/police systems, or transportation systems. Pre-Covid-19, schools and traffic had become major stressors for residents, yet the county takes ad hoc approaches, with school reshufflings and traffic jams increasing without meaningful steps to increase public transport use. Do you believe these are problems and what changes would you endorse?

Answer

Stormwater Management A lot of study has been done by our stormwater management staff. It is clear that 70 years of home building that undergrounded the large majority of local streams into pipes that cannot contain them in a large storm is a major part of the problem we face. Much of our infrastructure was built to the standard of the time: the 10 year flood. Today, with climate change, we are seeing “10 year” floods regularly and much larger rain events frequently. We need to continue our work to understand the causes of severe flooding in individual neighborhoods and address those causes. Sometimes that means enlarging the existing pipes. Sometimes that means creating large cisterns to catch rain water runoff. Sometimes that means buying individual properties in order to allow water to flow better. We need to better inform home owners and home buyers of the steps they need to take to protect their homes.

Schools and Transportation Needs: We are just embarking on a new facility for our ART bus maintenance and storage. A safe, convenient, reliable and low-fare bus system is crucial to attracting bus riders. We began a pilot project with APS last year where students could ride our ART buses to school. The pandemic has interfered with that effort, but I believe it is important to restart as soon as possible. We need to optimize the busses we have. Before Covid, many ART buses and schools buses, at times, were running with few riders. For probably 25 years now, I have encouraged the school system to look at ways to place students in schools without constant boundary changes. The tradition of school boundaries determining school attendance is strong. However, I am hopeful the need for virtual learning during the pandemic will finally make clear how we could, and should, stop using geographic boundaries to determine school placement.

Question 5 (one part):

ASF Key Issue: DIVERSITY

Housing Affordability - The county is losing demographic and economic diversity as a consequence of economic and development trends of the past two decades. ASF believes that key zoning decisions of past boards, and plans for denser zoning known as Missing Middle Housing, will only exacerbate these trends. How would you propose to address this challenge during your term in office?

Answer

Housing affordability is an issue for every attractive city in the world. We are all struggling with the very basic economic law of supply and demand. Finding ways to allow more people to live within the footprint of current housing has always been a desire of mine. I was pleased when we allowed more flexibility for people to share their homes with flexibility in interior accessory dwelling units (ADU's). I also will watch with interest how our recently modified detached ADU ordinance is used. It is important we allow people flexibility to meet their housing needs. This is the goal of the much misunderstood Missing Middle Housing study. The study is an effort to

study and analyze how forms of housing other than single family and large multifamily dwellings might work in Arlington. It will look at all the possible forms and their impacts in Arlington. I look forward to the work that we will be doing over the next year and more to analyze and understand how we might enlarge the possibility of housing types for people here. We need to find a way to provide more housing opportunities for more people if we are to counteract the law of supply and demand. Making Arlington a *less* attractive place to live would discourage people from wanting to live here and make housing more affordable, but that is not a solution I will accept.