



NRCA, P.O. Box 3242, Alexandria, VA 22302

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April 17, 2020

Office of Housing  
City of Alexandria  
Attn: Kim Cadena  
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**Re: Revised Draft City FY 2021 Annual Action Plan (April 2020)**

The North Ridge Citizens' Association (NRCA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the above-referenced draft plan. We note, however, that the very short comment period (a few days) has not provided the public a genuine opportunity to review and comment on the plan, especially in light of the COVID-19 crisis. We request that in the future the City provide a reasonable amount of time for public comment on all City proposals. In the case of NRCA, we need time to meaningfully discuss these important issues among our board members. We would further note that the plan as submitted is quite incomplete – especially lacking in responses from the public.

Given the limited amount of time provided, NRCA will confine its comments on the plan to the following.

First, the plan includes on page 14 statements of great concern to NRCA:

The Office of Housing is participating in the *creation of a citywide Joint Facilities Master Plan* which *will* establish standards for what kinds of City properties are appropriate for the *colocation of affordable housing*. The Office of Housing is also working with the Alexandria City Public Schools to evaluate the possibility of *colocating housing on school sites* as the school system constructs new school buildings” (emphasis added).

As stated previously, NRCA strongly opposes colocation of *any* housing on school sites or sites used for recreation. These types of sites (such as George Mason Elementary School) are scarce in Alexandria and are already heavily used for multiple functions. Placing housing into such sites, particularly in an established single-family neighborhood with limited open space such as North Ridge, would eliminate or severely restrict the availability of open space for use by current Alexandria and neighborhood residents. It would also impose other deleterious effects such as increased vehicular traffic, parking demands, and congestion around school facilities.

Further, regarding affordable housing projects, the City to our knowledge has not calculated or disclosed the financial and other incentives and subsidies for such projects, and the costs imposed, directly and indirectly, on taxpayers, other property owners, and other renters in the City, which would be essential to such a calculation. The City has not provided a reasonable opportunity for public input on these important issues.

The plan also indicates an intention to “reform” the City’s zoning regulations to not only allow for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in single family neighborhoods, but to also fundamentally change zoning regulations in order to enable much more high-density housing. For example, the plan states on page 36:

The City is engaged in many different actions to reduce or eliminate regulatory barriers to affordable housing. It is *studying allowing Accessory Dwelling Units to be built in single-family neighborhoods, reviewing its zoning regulations to identify possible reforms* and encourage developers to build more affordable housing, and working with developers to determine how bonus *density* and voluntary housing contributions can be balanced with profitability (emphasis added).

NRCA has not, in the short time available to it, been able to reach a position on the City’s various proposals on affordable housing. However, efforts to increase density and the availability of affordable housing should logically be focused in areas near regular, frequent, and high-capacity public transit and only after real public involvement in such decisions. The current study on Accessory Dwelling Units has not been shared widely and deserves real engagement with the public before any changes in zoning policy are considered.

Any effort to make wholesale changes to single-family zoning threatens the unique character of many Alexandria neighborhoods, including North Ridge. Any large-scale proposal to fundamentally change zoning and potentially drastically change the nature and appeal of our City should be a subject of open discussion in the context of a Council election, not inserted into a plan beyond a credible opportunity for City voters to have their voices heard and followed.

These are matters fundamental to the character and experience of life in Alexandria and thus deserve full public airing and public input. Although the City Council is seeking legislative authority to act outside normal practices and procedures during the coronavirus emergency, it is incumbent on the City to raise its game on public engagement to meet this challenge. Matters as critical as affordable housing, colocation with city schools, and the zoning code must be given their full due and complete transparency, even if it means delayed decisions.

Sincerely,

*Chuck Kent*

Chuck Kent  
President, NRCA

cc: Mayor  
City Council Members  
City Manager