

May 3, 2024

Arlington County Board Democratic Primary Candidate Election

Question 4: Missing Middle Program and Lawsuit

As you know there is a lawsuit pending against the county on Missing Middle. Also, 31 permits were approved in the first 9 months since July 2023, exceeding the county's initial projections last March of just 19-21 per year ([page 10](#)). No building permits had been issued as of mid-March. CPHD indicates this is due to lot subdivision process, but the lawsuit may also be affecting builders' calculus.

What do you think of the program thus far, is it on track to meet whatever goals you supported, if you supported it?

Are there any additional changes you would seek if elected, whether or not the lawsuit succeeds? Because of delays in issuance of building permits, would you support extending the sunset to 5 years after the first building permit is issued?

James De Vita



I am vehemently opposed to the Missing Middle and I want to repeal it.

Julia Farnam



I did not and do not support this program. I do not support the rezoning efforts in Arlington County, in large part because the County has not articulated what they hope to achieve with this effort nor have they provided a long-term vision for Arlington. Originally the County stated EHO was enacted to achieve affordability (see for example the Missing Middle Information Session from September 14, 2022) and equity in housing, but affordability is no longer discussed in the communications related to EHO. I believe this is because it is known that this policy will not achieve affordability.

Within Arlington, there has been much discussion about rezoning to address policies that were instituted to bar non-whites from living in some neighborhoods. Removing the barriers to homeownership that existed in the early 1900s is not going to undo the injustice because the barriers today are not the same as they were then. Thus, despite the County's rezoning, the barriers to equity are still very much in existence, and rezoning has the potential to cause gentrification displacement, further exacerbating inequity. When I discuss making efforts to eliminate racism and to create equality, I am willing to put in the work to do that effectively, even knowing that getting it right is hard. In my opinion, the County has been a bit disingenuous in its efforts. They enact policies that on their face appear to implement change, but when you dig deeper, you see they do little to disrupt the underlying barriers that are causing the inequities, and thus they perpetuate racist policies.

I would seek to:

- Reduce the number of permits that could be approved each year.
- Reduce the number of units permitted under the EHO to no more than a triplex.
- Require the program be reassessed within five years to determine if it is meeting its goals.
- Incentivize keeping older homes.
- Prioritize more family-sized housing units.

If the lawsuit does not rule in favor of the county, I would vote against any initiative to enact a similar EHO program. I would also mandate that the county look at this issue holistically and accurately assess how a program such as EHO would impact schools, the power grid, roads, traffic, businesses, pipelines, public safety, etc. I would also engage the community in a transparent manner, publishing all comments received, and then openly adjudicating them to show the community how their comments and concerns were considered and addressed in the file policy.

Tenley Peterson



As a member of the Planning Commission in 2023, I was proud to cast my vote in support of Expanded Housing Options. I did so while also supporting the proposed caps. Additionally, I did not agree with some of my commission colleagues who wanted to remove parking requirements near metro.

As a County Board member, I will continue to support Expanded Housing Options. As Arlington continues to grow, I will carry forward the vision outlined by previous County Boards to achieve transit-oriented development. Arlington is a national model for this type of development,

and I will continue to support it. I will prioritize getting more family-sized units in highrises along our public transit corridors.

Natalie Roy



The original goal of Missing Middle Housing, to increase affordable housing for essential workers including teachers, police, fire fighters and emergency personnel, was laudable.

However, the program was rebranded to EHO (Expanded Housing Options) because it had nothing to do with housing affordability or promoting diversity, largely because it is overturning Arlington's hard-fought national model of transit-oriented development (TOD).

I am opposed to the EHO program and have been from the beginning. It is a developer

driven densification program with no guardrails. It ostensibly relies on the charity of for-profit developers to build affordable housing, which does not pass the straight face test.

When the County Board launched a 2050 Arlington Vision initiative earlier this year, I called for a pause on EHO, while that "vision" was being developed. It makes no sense to develop a long-term strategic plan without concurrently figuring out what our true housing needs are and whether random densification is in the County's best interest. This visioning exercise should have been done before EHO was even a gleam in the County's eye.

I am supportive of extending the cap on EHO projects, IF the entire program continues to exist. I am hopeful that between the lawsuit and an annual review of the program, the County will realize that the current path is not sustainable, and that we need to reset and develop a community supported housing vision for Arlington.

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, EHO is undermining TOD and Arlington's longstanding environmental leadership, by promoting random densification everywhere, including in areas without easy access to transit. In addition to increasing use of cars, the developer-driven EHO process will likely violate lot-coverage objectives, destroy our precious tree canopy, and reduce the bike-ability of our streets by promoting car traffic.

In addition, the County did not do its due diligence and study the impact of this major zoning change on stormwater management, resource protection areas, infrastructure, schools or emergency services. Nor will the developer driven EHO make housing more affordable for low- or moderate-income families. Building more \$1.3+ million townhouses will not promote housing justice. We need long range, comprehensive planning that has community support, not scattershot densification that is taking Arlington in the wrong environmental direction.

And if we want to increase housing opportunities without destroying our hard-fought environmental victories, we should preserve TOD, insist on open space in large development projects, and not allow developers to buy their way out of lot coverage and community benefit requirements. We also need to explore establishing non-profit investment trusts & coops, that can buy tear downs and older multi-family buildings and upgrade them to code and sell these homes to middle and low-income residents.

J.D. Spain



As a community advocate and former President of the NAACP Arlington Branch from 2018- 2022, I'm proud to have advocated for and alongside critical stakeholders, the Expanded Housing Options (EHO) passed by the Arlington County Board in March 2023. With the end of exclusionary zoning and the development of a comprehensive fair housing plan, we have taken a significant step towards expanding housing opportunities in our residential neighborhoods.

Since no EHO projects have been built yet, it is too early to say whether the EHO ordinance is succeeding at achieving its goals of greater abundance and variety of housing. But there are reasons for optimism. Approved EHO developments are dispersed geographically throughout the county. The projects

are a diverse mix of housing types, from duplexes to sixplexes, with many creative building designs and floor plans.

Many of these projects have the potential to meet critical but unmet housing demands, such as by multiplying the number of family-sized, 3+ bedroom homes or adding 1-2 bedroom homes to neighborhoods that essentially need more options. As these projects get built and the EHO market matures, I am hopeful that torn-down houses will increasingly be replaced with EHO homes instead of big, expensive mansions.

I empathize with the frustration over the way the recent zoning issue was handled. It's clear that many people felt unheard by our elected leaders. This situation has highlighted for me the importance of listening to all voices, even those that don't align with my own views. I believe that by engaging in open, respectful conversation and acknowledging diverse opinions, we can arrive at better policy decisions. As a leader, I recognize that it's essential to address issues head-on and respectfully, even if that means acknowledging inconsistencies or confusion.