



COALITION FOR  
SMARTER GROWTH

*Celebrating 10 Years of Smart Growth!*

11/13/2008

Testimony before the Arlington County Board Regarding  
Item # 37 on the May 20, 2008 Hearing Agenda:

Support Request to Advertise Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendments:  
Creating legal accessory apartments and more housing choices

By Melissa Bondi, Housing Director  
Coalition for Smarter Growth

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I am testifying on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, (CSG), a non-profit organization promoting transportation investments, land use policies, and neighborhood designs that enhance existing communities and protect the environment of the Washington, D.C. region, including Arlington County. We work to make smart growth a success. A key part of this is ensuring that housing affordable to a variety of working families is integrated into walkable, transit-supportive communities.

We strongly support the proposed ordinance, which proposes to establish a legal permitting process for accessory apartments. We commend the County for recognizing the potential of accessory units as an important opportunity to address the County's tremendous housing shortfall – for households at all income levels. Accessory Dwelling unit permissions are recognized as a national best practice for mature, single-family housing neighborhoods like in Arlington.

These units can be seamlessly fit into existing neighborhoods, benefiting renters, homeowners, and the neighborhood. Often, homes in older neighborhoods are designed in a way that makes it easy to create a second unit. Any ordinance under consideration by the County should seek to allow as much as possible of Arlington's existing housing stock to be appropriate for legal accessory adaptations.

There are very compelling policy rationales for supporting accessory apartments in communities like Arlington – and have been approved in other local jurisdictions such as Montgomery County, MD, and the District of Columbia. Accessory apartments provide an opportunity for changing households to stay in their homes and adapt the space to their needs. Older homeowners can stay in a larger home that no longer needs to house the children of a family that have grown up

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and moved away. As retirees seek to stay in their homes on fixed incomes, renting out unneeded space can be an attractive option for earning extra income to help keep up with expenses.

Other potential benefits are companionship, home maintenance or other personal services in exchange for lower rent. The homeowner and the entire neighborhood can benefit by increased personal security generated from a broader variety of activity throughout the day and evening.

Also, new homebuyers can qualify for a larger mortgage loan based on the income from a legal accessory unit. A younger family may desire to purchase a larger home with an accessory unit so that the unit can be used or converted to meet its future needs. This family may maintain the apartment for an elderly parent or grown child, or may convert the space for a growing family as new children arrive.

Specific features in Arlington's proposal worth praising include the innovative approach to parking standards and the owner-occupancy standard, both of which will reduce incidents most often mentioned by many who express concern about this issue.

By allowing this use, even more safe, attractive and needed opportunities can be created to provide the many benefits resulting from increased diversity of housing choices in a community. Making the approval process easy to understand will also help the County address its housing crisis in a low-impact and cost-effective way.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.