



Coalition for Smarter Growth
DC • MD • VA

January 28, 2021

Fairfax County Planning Commission
12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 552
Fairfax, VA 2203
Sent via: plancom@fairfaxcounty.gov

RE: Testimony in Support of Accessory Living Unit Provision of zMOD

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG), the leading organization in the DC region advocating for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities. CSG appreciates Fairfax County's efforts to update its zoning ordinance. Our comments focus primarily on the proposed accessory living unit (ALU) provisions, which we fully support. CSG has become a leading expert on Accessory Dwelling Units through our work in DC and our just-released [DC ADU homeowners manual](#).

We do note, however, that we also support the liberalization of home-based businesses -- particularly in view of the advantages we have seen for home-based work during the pandemic. Home-based businesses would be a great benefit to stay-at-home parents, people with disabilities who have trouble traveling, and the Fairfax economy.

Finding good housing options in Fairfax County can be challenging. Prices are high and smaller homes can be hard to find. If this pandemic has shown us anything - a home is vital to our health and well-being. Now is the time for Fairfax County to prepare for the future and ensure people have affordable places to live in our county.

Accessory living units can offer less expensive housing options than renting or buying a single-family home because of their smaller size and provide housing opportunities in communities that might otherwise be too expensive. They are

great for an aging parent you are caring for, offer a home for your recent college graduate, or a young professional just starting their career. ADUs can also offer a stream of income for homeowners, including lower-income homeowners and retirees on fixed incomes.

While Fairfax County is proposing some positive changes to their ALU policy, which is a step in the right direction, they are modest and do not go far enough to truly make them a viable housing option in the county.

Looking at the [comparison chart](#) in the ALU fact sheet provided on the zMOD website, you can see that Fairfax County is lagging behind other local jurisdictions that are doing more to embrace accessory dwellings as a tool to provide more housing options.

CSG supports the county's proposal to remove the current age and disability requirement for all ALUs. No other local jurisdiction has this requirement. Removing the age and disability requirement is more equitable so people of varying ages can take advantage of these types of apartments. It provides greater flexibility to a homeowner to provide a home for an adult child and other family members or friends needing a moderately priced apartment.

Streamlining the process for interior ALUs located within the main home by allowing for administrative approval will make the process less burdensome and costly for homeowners. ALUs, like the principal home, must meet all required building and zoning codes and are subject to inspection. All other local jurisdictions in Northern Virginia have moved to allow ALUs by administrative approval. It's the right thing to do.

Maintaining the 2-acre requirement for detached units is unfortunate and maintains an inequitable requirement by only allowing them for those who can afford 2 plus acres. It also puts these detached units in car-dependent locations. Homeowners throughout the county should have the right to build a detached unit on their property.

In fact, Fairfax County should particularly encourage detached ALUs near transit stations and transit-rich corridors. This can be done by removing the 2-acre requirement for detached accessory dwellings and allowing ADUs on smaller

lots, like the quarter-acre parcels that are closer to activity centers and transit. In addition, removing the parking requirement when ADUs are within a mile of frequent transit helps to remove another regulatory and cost barrier and incentivizes housing in the right places.

Creating more housing opportunities near transit and jobs is essential to ensuring an inclusive and economically prosperous Fairfax County where people are able to live near their work, helping to reduce long commutes through the county, and contributing to a diverse and vibrant community.

While CSG supports the ALU's very limited provisions in zMOD, we encourage the County to take the necessary steps to further expand opportunities for accessory living units similar to other local jurisdictions as a way to make more homes available in our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sonya Breehey
Northern Virginia Advocacy Manager