



March 3, 2026

Matt de Ferranti, Chair  
Arlington County Board  
2100 Clarendon Boulevard  
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair de Ferranti and members of the Arlington County Board:

For many years, the Arlington County Civic Federation has worked with Arlington County to support a legislative agenda that would increase local authority and control. The Civic Federation continues to believe that local control is in the best interests of each local jurisdiction, especially in regard to community planning and zoning decision-making.

Unfortunately, what we are seeing during the 2026 Virginia General Assembly legislative session is a diminution of local authority when it comes to zoning regulations and community planning. In many ways, Arlington is unique in the Commonwealth, and we are concerned that the trend toward one-size-fits-all zoning will have many unintended consequences when applied here.

We are particularly concerned about these bills, some of which are heading toward final passage in this session:

- \*SB 388/HB 1279 on affordable housing and churches/non-profits
- HB 594 tasking the zoning administrator with decision-making on affordable housing
- SB 346/HB 655 on attainable workforce housing
- SB 454/HB 816 housing near jobs
- \*SB 354/HB 888 targeted parking reforms
- \*SB 531/HB 611 Requiring by-right ADUs in local zoning codes

The Arlington County Civic Federation would like to register three key concerns:

1. Removing authority from local government – or introducing a complex “power-sharing” arrangement that splits authority between State and local authorities for land use and zoning at the local levels. We have learned that most residents in Arlington were not aware of these bills, nor should they have been, since we know that zoning has long been only a local action. Changing this up without a well-publicized public process is moving the goalposts on constituents of both State and local jurisdictions.

2. The transfer of decision making with broad consequences – possibly even affecting existing Comprehensive Plans of local jurisdictions – from locally-elected officials to unelected administrative officials or (for bills that expand by-right zoning) the removal altogether of local review. This severely reduces public input and review of those who are directly affected, and if zoning is a “mixed-level” authority it makes engagement extremely difficult, if not impossible.
3. An apparent abandonment of the County Board’s own defense of its own powers and authorities, complicated further by public comments by at least two County Board members to endorse (in their personal capacities) some of these legislative actions.

Since the House of Delegates and State Senate bills listed above (and possibly other bills relating to zoning or affordable housing, of which we may be unaware) were not included in Arlington County’s 2026 legislative agenda, we would like to ask the County Board to state its position on ceding local authority and control over these elements of its zoning policies, land-use and community planning to state legislators and/or local unelected administrative officials.

Though the County Board has historically strongly defended its control over local zoning and land-use decision-making, two of its members have publicly expressed support for a reduction in such decision-making and local control and taken positions on bills (marked with asterisks (\*) in our list). They each noted their views were their own and not their official views; this makes it more critical that the Board give us its formal position on each bill and the maintenance of its zoning and land use authority. Please clarify the Board’s official position on these bills and all similar bills pending in the Virginia General Assembly that would effectively reduce the authority of the Arlington County Board – or any other local jurisdictions in case the new policy does not affect Arlington -- in local land-use and zoning matters.

Furthermore, we ask that you review these various pieces of legislation and provide the public with analysis of their impact on Arlington County, that you tell us what your data show and how you are communicating likely impacts with Arlington’s legislative delegation. We expect that such data would clarify the potential for meeting identified housing needs in our community.

Reducing or eliminating community involvement in local land-use and zoning decisions going forward would seem to run counter to the [County Board’s pledge to support “transparency” and “representation and strong civic engagement”](#) in Arlington County governance. Civic engagement is an inherent element of land use and community decision-making and the democratic process. It provides a forum for the public to exchange views with one another and for those views to be heard and considered by elected officials before decisions are made.

Perfectly illustrating this point, the Civic Federation is only learning piecemeal of these various bills, and we have not had time to fully research their status and implications. It is essential for you – and Arlington’s elected officials in Richmond – to work to ensure proper civic discussion and engagement, given concerns outlined above. We are aware that House of Delegates Bill 1279 (2026 legislative session) contains a reenactment clause that would allow for engagement until the next legislative session. We ask you to weigh in right away with:

- Arlington's legislative delegation,
- the conference committee that is reconciling HB1279 and SB 388,
- Senator Aird and Delegate Helmer who chair the respective Senate and House of Delegates committees on Local Government and Counties, Cities and Towns in Richmond, and
- Other conference committees working on the bills we have noted, as applicable

to endorse the reenactment clause for any of these bills that are still in play and that you convey the Arlington County Board's official position on the retention of local control over zoning and land use. We ask that you share your correspondence with the Civic Federation and that you issue a public statement with the Board's positions.

Finally, we also ask, with regard specifically to HB 1279 and SB 388, that you provide us with an inventory of all the tax-exempt religious organizations and 501(c)(3) non-profits in Arlington covered by the bills, designating their current land use, zoning, lot size, civic association, current development status, including historic designations if any, age of current structure, and stormwater fees. This data will allow our communities to have a more fulsome discussion of the real-world implications and consequences of this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

*NJ Giacobbe, Jr.*

Nicholas J. Giacobbe, Jr.  
President