

Arlington County Planning Commission
07.16.2024 Zoning Committee (ZOCO) Hybrid Meeting
Public Comments Received by 12:00pm on 07.16.2024

Recovery Residences

Public Comment #1(received 07.15.2024 @6:43pm)

- Dear Arlington County board,

I am writing to urge you to oppose any attempt to amend the zoning code to permit Recovery Residences housing up to 8 people without any other limitations on the number of houses per block, the number of bedrooms per person, the amount of parking per occupant, etc. The Recovery Residences in our neighborhood have caused disruption, crime, overcrowding, and vandalism to the neighboring properties. I also urge the Board to stop the County Attorney's Office from granting Oxford House and similar organizations any reasonable accommodation, and to be diligent in enforcing existing regulations that might alleviate some of these issues.

Public Comment #2 (received 07.16.2024 @11:08am)

- The proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment fails to address any of the complaints or concerns raised with the county regarding the Recovery Residences in the 1100 block of North Stuart Street. Instead, it legalizes these properties by right without reasonable restriction. My concerns include, but are not limited to:
 - 1) The proximity of the Recovery Residences to Washington-Liberty High School.
 - 2) Two recovery residences should not be located in such close proximity to each other.
 - 3) The infrastructure, including parking and traffic, is taxed by small homes being occupied by 8 non-related adults.

I understand that revisions to the Zoning Ordinance Amendment have been suggested by Tom Gargan which address these concerns.

Public Comment #3 (received 07.15.2024 @6:43pm)

- To: Arlington County Zoning Commission

The Zoning Committee should not adopt the zoning amendment to retroactively approve the two “Recovery Residences” that have been operating on 1114 and 1118 North Stuart Street for several years.

There are at least two major issues that support the denial of the amendment:

- (1) The landlord for these “Rehabilitation Residences” collects exorbitant rent, the dwellings are substandard, and these vulnerable residents receive no services or

treatment from Oxford House. In short, the County is allowing Oxford House to profit from, and exploit, these residents by overcrowding them in substandard housing with no treatment, oversight, or support.

- (2) The vulnerable condition of the residents and the high relapse rate among Oxford House residents (almost 20% relapse rate per Oxford House), poses an ongoing threat to the surrounding community and a burden on local law enforcement.

Additional details:

- (1) The two Oxford Houses currently operating on North Stuart St in Arlington appear to be substandard structures. These houses appear to have had no maintenance or repairs for many years. One can only wonder what conditions inside the houses must be like.

The residents of these houses, according to the Oxford House website, are those with “substance abuse disorders and individuals with co-occurring mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders.”

There are up to 16 individuals currently residing in the two adjacent houses.

These individuals are a vulnerable segment of the population, yet the Oxford House by its own admission provides

- No treatment
- No clinical or social services
- No licensing requirements
- No oversight
- No staff

Neither Oxford House nor the landlord provide any assistance to the residents (Oxford Houses are described on the Oxford House website as “self-run, self-supported recovery houses.”). Yet Oxford House is eligible for Federal and State taxpayer funding.

According to the Oxford House website, the owner of these properties collects almost \$5,000 per month in rent (\$153 per week per resident, with 8 residents in each of the two houses). The market rent for the area is \$3,300 per month, and the two Oxford House residences are by far the most dilapidated properties in the neighborhood.

The owner of these properties is therefore exploiting the residences for the owner’s own monetary gain, and the County should not allow them to continue to do so.

- (2) The high relapse rate for these houses and the total lack of treatment or support poses a significant threat to the neighborhood and a burden on law enforcement.

The number of serious incidents involving the residents of these houses is alarming. In March 2021, a search warrant was executed at one of these houses and police

recovered pipe bombs and a sawed-off shotgun. The police, emergency responders, and firefighters had to cordon off the area for several hours to ensure there were no additional explosive devices in the Oxford House. I was not allowed to enter my own residence – across the street – for several hours.

It is worth noting that the warrant to search the house was only obtained after one of the residents made death threats against customers at a bar in Clarendon. But for his arrest for making violent threats while drinking, we never would have been aware that the Oxford House he was residing at had several pipe bombs and a sawed-off shotgun.

There have been numerous additional incidents, including two dead bodies removed from the houses, numerous incidents of intoxicated residents trespassing and urinating on our property, and one of the Oxford House residents having a manic episode in our parking lot, leaving behind trash and empty liquor bottles.

Another resident discarded a bag with drugs next to our house. We called the police who recovered and removed the drugs.

In addition, the houses have up to 16 residents, and they all appear to have cars that they park in our private lot and blocking our driveway. I was recently blocked in and could not exit my own driveway because one of the residents had blocked our driveway. To be honest, I was too fearful of violence on the part of the resident that I did not attempt to interact with him or call the authorities. I fear retribution.

These houses are in a residential neighborhood and one block from Washington Liberty High School. The serious security threat to this community from these houses is unacceptable.

The County should not allow this situation to continue. There are already two of these Oxford Houses on one block, and my understanding is that Oxford House wants yet another house on our block. The County should not allow this and should deny the recommended zoning change.

Structural, Interior Alternations and Additions to Nonconforming Multifamily Dwellings and Townhouses

Public Comment #1 (received 07.11.2024 @12:45pm)

- I am in very strong support of the proposed zoning amendment affecting the townhomes in Fairlington communities. I think this is a most logical solution to the minor modifications allowed by the associations in this community. Please vote for this change.