

Missing Middle Housing Study Framework

This document outlines: 1) the rationale to initiate a community process to identify policy options and implementation recommendations to introduce new missing middle housing types to Arlington; 2) the purpose, desired outcomes and key considerations of this effort; and 3) next steps including a general study timeframe.

Rationale

Arlington is a desirable community and benefits from an evolving economy and growing population. However, as housing demands have increased, pressures on the regional and local housing market have intensified, causing shortfalls in housing supply, fewer options in housing types, and rising housing costs. These are regional issues that will require regional solutions as well as actions at the local level.

Informed by these challenging housing conditions, the County Board resolved to establish the Housing Arlington Initiative in March 2019. Working beyond traditional policies and programs, Housing Arlington will take a cross-cutting approach to think creatively about new solutions.

One of the areas in which Arlington can address housing challenges is within its regulatory and policy framework. Arlington's current land use policy and Zoning Ordinance limit opportunities to build "missing middle" housing types, such as duplexes and triplexes. Barriers to building these housing types impede additions to the County's overall supply and construction of new housing, for both home ownership and rental, at price points lower than what is currently available.

"Efforts need to focus on strategies and tools to provide other housing types and price points not readily available in the Arlington market, referred to as missing middle."

- Arlington County Board
Housing Arlington
Resolution, March 19, 2019

Examining opportunities to diversify Arlington's housing stock through introduction of "missing middle" housing has been called out since the Affordable Housing Master Plan, an element of the Comprehensive Plan, was adopted in 2015. The AHMP goals, objectives and policy directives provide specific direction to address missing middle housing.

- Encourage production and preservation of family-sized (e.g. 3+bedroom) moderately-priced ownership units (1.2.2).
- Explore flexibility in housing types and residential uses in single-family neighborhoods (1.2.3).

Additionally, in Fall 2019, Housing Arlington hosted a series of Community Conversations to shed light on housing issues in Arlington, focused specifically on the topics of economics, the environment, and equity. This series called on the need to introduce "missing middle" housing types, diversify the housing stock, study the economic feasibility of new housing types, and explore ideas that would incentivize production of more moderately-priced homes.

Purpose

To meet this challenge, the purpose of the Missing Middle Study is to examine how new housing types and forms could be introduced in Arlington that broaden the range and supply of housing.

Outcomes

Drawn from the 2015 AHMP, the 2018 Big Idea Roundtables, County Board direction for Housing Arlington and the Fall 2019 Housing Arlington Community Conversation Series, the desired outcomes of this effort include:

- a shared definition for the term “missing middle housing” for Arlington;
- a set of policy options to support preservation of existing Missing Middle housing stock and production of new Missing Middle housing types for County Board consideration;
- identification of additional considerations relating to the Comprehensive Plan and other County policies and practices to be further reviewed in support of the goals of this process; and
- the ability for new housing type alternatives to be built that meet Arlington’s definition of ‘missing middle housing’, offering greater affordability and design that is complementary and compatible with the scale and style of their intended neighborhoods;

Key Considerations

The outcomes of this effort will be informed by the following key considerations:

Overarching Guidance

- **robust community engagement**, with multiple methods of participation for all people living throughout Arlington, including in-person engagement, other methods to enable broad participation, and partnerships with community organizations with shared interest in missing middle housing;
- dedication to further the County’s vision to be a “diverse and inclusive” community and to advance the County’s vision of **equity** through its land use policies;

Understanding of Existing Conditions

- data analysis to **verify and quantify the need** for these housing types, including market trends pertaining to housing costs and housing supply;
- research on **historic policies and practices** and an **inventory of existing Missing Middle housing** to understand the County’s current development pattern and areas of undersupply;

Detailed Study of Potential New Housing Types and Impacts

- assessment of **the economic feasibility** of constructing new types of missing middle housing and the probable affordability level(s).
- analysis of **locational factors**, such as access to multi-modal transportation options; proximity to major arterials; proximity to jobs, shopping and recreational opportunities; and areas of environmental sensitivity;
- study of the **compatibility** of potential new housing types with adjacent uses and activities in terms of **height, massing, and architecture**;
- evaluation of **impacts and benefits to the environment and public realm**, including natural resources, storm water management, energy, parks and open space, and on-street parking;

- examination of how to **mitigate and/or lessen the potential impacts** on neighboring properties with attention to tree loss/replacement and storm water management.

Next Steps

In the first quarter of 2020 staff will seek input from the Housing Commission, Planning Commission, and other advisory bodies to develop a scope and timeline for the Missing Middle Study that encompasses the desired outcomes and key considerations set forth in this framework document.

Preliminarily, the Arlington Missing Middle Housing Study is envisioned to commence in the 2nd Quarter of 2020. Staff anticipates that this process will have a duration of 12-18 months, depending on the scope that is developed.