



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Missing Middle Housing?

“Missing middle” is a commonly-used term that refers to the range of housing types that fit between single-family detached homes and mid-to-high-rise apartment buildings. Examples include duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and more, such as small apartment buildings and cottage-style development. Used in this context, “middle” references the size and type of a home, relative to its location – in the middle – on a housing scale spectrum. The cost of these homes vary based on style, size, location, and market forces; therefore missing middle housing types do not correlate with a specific income bracket.

There are many benefits to this style of housing. Missing middle homes can:

- Bridge between low- and high-density areas
- Support walkable neighborhoods and locate enough residents nearby needed to support neighborhood retail and transit options
- Appeal to a broader range of residents and meet the needs of a more diverse and inclusive cross-section of our community
- Support the long-term economic sustainability of a community by provide diverse housing choices needed to attract and retain businesses and employers

Is Missing Middle housing “missing” in Arlington?

Missing middle forms exist in Arlington neighborhoods. For context, Arlington has 116,000 housing units. Of these 116,000 units, 27,712 units or 24% are single-family detached homes. Arlington also has a sizeable inventory of low-rise multifamily housing units (23% or 26,921 units), which includes both garden apartments and standalone multi-family buildings, and this is one type of Missing Middle housing. However, this housing stock generally only provides for up to two-bedroom units. Stacked duplexes, side-by-side duplexes and townhouses, which typically offer more design potential to provide family-sized units, as well as other features, such as greater compatibility with other low-density housing types, more accessible open space, make up only 6%, or 6,945 units, of Arlington housing.

In addition, even though these two categories make up 30% of our total inventory, this is only approximately 34,000 units of an inventory of 116,000 total housing units. Our total inventory is an

insufficient quantity to support current housing demand, as evidenced by the County's high cost for housing.

Today's zoning and land use policies restrict these "middle" housing types from being built in most areas of the County. In fact, 75% of land zoned residential in Arlington is exclusively for single-family, detached homes.

As part of the pre-planning phase, Missing Middle Housing Study staff have researched various elements of missing middle housing, including typologies, where they exist in the County, real estate market forces, a history of zoning and land use policies, and more. A compendium of this research, consisting of five bulletins, will be published from June through August 2020. [Explore the Missing Middle Housing Study Research Compendium.](#)

Why is Arlington conducting a Missing Middle Housing Study? What is the problem?

As described in the answer above, Arlington is experiencing a housing shortage and a lack of housing choice. Due to the strong regional job market, demand for housing exceeds supply. The Metro and Planning Corridors provide medium and high-density multi-family housing, while other neighborhoods provide single-family homes, townhouses, a limited quantity of two- and three-family dwellings, and smaller apartment communities. However, in neighborhoods with single-family homes, due to this phenomenon of demand exceeding supply, land values are now so high that only high-income households or developers who can tear down and rebuild to the maximum allowable size under the Zoning Ordinance can afford to buy existing properties.

In other words, the existing supply of housing in Arlington does not provide enough housing options to support the diversity of households needed for a vibrant, inclusive, and economically sustainable community, and the situation is getting worse. Arlington should maintain its diversity not only because it is part of the County's vision, but also in relation to being viewed as an attractive place for employers to locate.

Through Housing Arlington, the County is working on many fronts to address housing affordability issues and increase the supply and diversity of housing options. The Missing Middle Housing Study (MMHS) is looking specifically at the issues of housing supply and housing choice. There are barriers in the County's Zoning Ordinance on the types of housing options that can be built, that, if removed, may lead to a more diverse range of households and increase supply. The MMHS is seeking to identify which "missing" housing types the community supports and then study how and where to enable their construction in Arlington.

Isn't affordability the County's biggest problem when it comes to housing? Why look at missing middle housing if this type of housing can't promise to address the County's affordability issues? Why isn't the County focusing specifically on addressing housing affordability first?

Through Housing Arlington, the County is working on many fronts to address housing affordability issues and increase the supply and diversity of housing options. Efforts include:

- Housing Conservation District/RA (Multi-Family) Zoning District Study - identifying new zoning tools that incentivize redevelopment and preserve some level of affordability.
- Institutional Partnerships – cultivating new affordable housing opportunities working with houses of worship, other non-profit land holders and public entities.
- Condominium Initiative – providing information and training to with condo and homeowner associations to ensure that these developments, which are a source of affordable homeownership in many cases, remain strong and viable.

The Missing Middle Housing Study is looking specifically at the issues of housing supply and housing choice. New housing choices, smaller than what is currently being produced through single-family tear downs and redevelopment, should be more affordable than what can be built currently under the County's current limited menu of options. In addition, Phase 1 of the Missing Middle Housing Study will provide the community with the opportunity to suggest affordability as one priority consideration as new housing choices are studied for possible introduction, or re-introduction, as permitted uses in Arlington.

What is the connection between Arlington's Missing Middle Housing Study and racial equity?

Arlington's land use framework is the result of decisions of the past that have produced development patterns that limit housing variety and supply; which impact housing affordability today. These decisions also reinforced racial and class-based segregation and inequities. Often, these exclusionary practices supported the segregation of white households from communities of color; notably Arlington's African American communities. These patterns persist still today. Looking to the future, Arlington could choose to do nothing to address the limitations on production of new diverse housing types; however, the structural barriers and institutional racism embedded in the County's land use policy would remain.

Furthermore, teardowns and redevelopment of single-family detached houses would continue, and land values would continue to increase. In this scenario, Arlington's vision to be a diverse and inclusive community would become impossible to attain. Across all institutions, much work must be done to create a more equitable and inclusive community, while also addressing rising housing costs. Conducting the Missing Middle Housing Study is one of many deliberate choices the County could make to correct the mistakes of the past and pave a new path for Arlington's future.

Are other jurisdictions looking at Missing Middle housing?

Many communities are now facing new issues related to rising housing costs, so cities and counties around the country are taking action. Related to missing middle housing, recently Minneapolis, MN, Grand Rapids, MI and Portland, OR have enacted zoning changes to allow more middle housing. Other cities are studying missing middle housing, even locally, including Montgomery County, MD and Washington, DC.

Why should we consider adding more density to our single-family neighborhoods if significant affordability will not be achieved and there could be other consequences that we do not want to experience, like land value escalation, more traffic, and pressure on our schools?

Arlington's neighborhoods are already changing, and our population is already growing in our lower density neighborhoods. Due to regional growth, land values have already increased well beyond levels that can support construction of single-family homes priced at levels that the majority of the area's population can afford. The result is that small, single-family homes are being expanded or replaced with very large single-family homes, and the County is already experiencing the impacts of that change, in terms of increased school enrollment from new families moving in to our neighborhoods, more households with more vehicles, loss of trees, and loss of pervious surfaces. And as indicated already, the new housing is extremely expensive - only affordable to a small percentage of our region's population.

Housing demand is a regional problem that requires regional solutions. Each local jurisdiction must play a part. Arlington could choose to continue to witness the loss of small, more affordable housing options in the County's lower density neighborhoods. However, through the Missing Middle Housing Study process, the County chooses, instead, to have a conversation in our community about how we can possibly re-introduce options to purchase smaller, less expensive homes in our lower density neighborhoods. This will also be an opportunity to address the exclusionary nature of the County's land use policy that reinforced the racial and class-based segregation and inequities that still persist today.

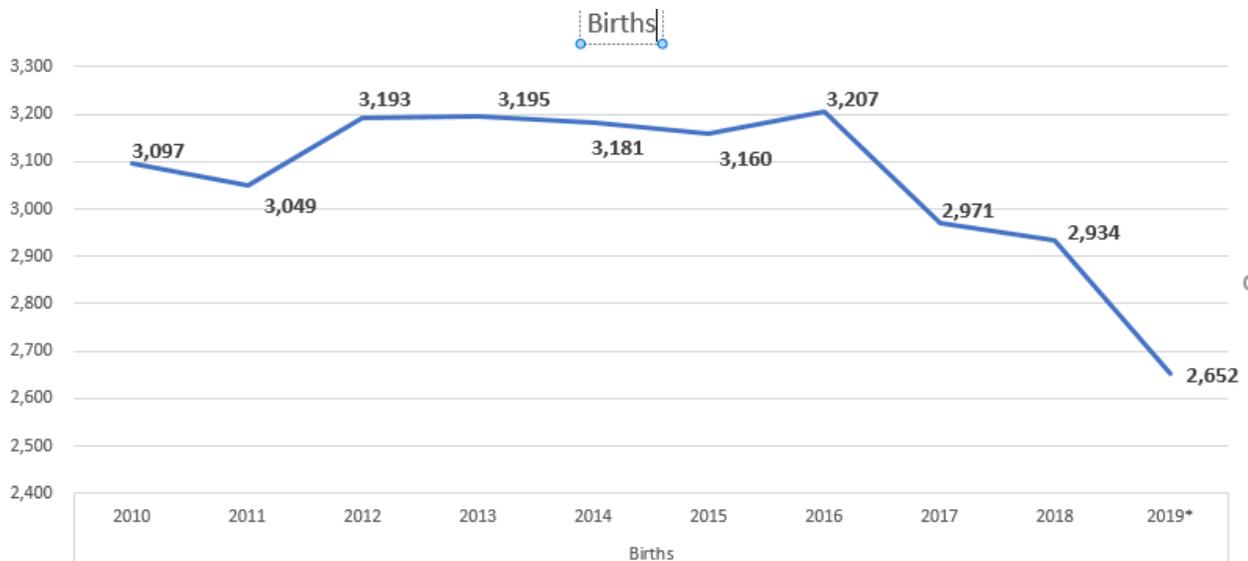
Will the study consider how to mitigate for potential unintended consequences, such as potential for increases in land values resulting from increases in allowable density?

In planning for growth, the County may still experience impacts, but the community can use this opportunity to talk about how these impacts should be managed. And the community can also talk about the benefits that wouldn't otherwise be realized, such as increased bus ridership which could help support our transit system, opportunities for aging in place within the community that do not exist today, and opportunities to foster more diversity in our housing types and in our population.

Strategies to manage change and achieve the study's main purpose, to introduce new housing types and increase supply, will be examined.

How will Arlington be able to provide schools for these additional families?

As Arlington continues to grow – in whatever housing forms that are allowed now and into the future – the County and APS will need to continue work together to address school needs. As part of this, the County and APS will need to monitor birth rates, which have trended down in recent years.



Will this study change my single-family neighborhood? I want my neighborhood to stay the way it is, and I'm concerned about my property value.

As a starting point, all residential areas of the County will be considered. As the process unfolds, and community feedback, good planning principles and other factors are applied, recommendations will be developed for what housing types should be allowed and then where new housing types are appropriate and should be allowed. Ultimately, the study will produce recommendations for County Board consideration. Towards the end of the 2-year process, staff will develop a set of recommendations, including potential zoning and policy changes, for the County Board's consideration. The County Board could, at that point or before, decide to take no action or to take limited action, based on the staff analysis and community input.

However, as mentioned above, it is important to recognize that Arlington's neighborhoods are already changing. Due to fact that Arlington's housing stock is aging, and there is strong regional housing demand and limitations in Arlington's Zoning Ordinance on what can be built, small single-family homes are being torn down and replaced by much larger single-family homes. The construction of these homes is already changing the Arlington's neighborhoods, both in terms of how the neighborhoods look and who can afford to live in Arlington. If the County does nothing to allow other housing types, it will become more and more difficult for ALL those who already live in Arlington, whom due to a change in life circumstances (i.e. aging/accessibility needs, growing family, job loss) need to find an alternative housing solution.

In terms of property values, there are many factors influencing property values, including overall regional housing demand, recent sales prices of comparable properties, and neighborhood amenities (i.e. Arlington's high-quality schools, parks, and retail/shopping/nightlife). While economic and financial impacts will be studied through this process, there is no evidence to indicate that adding new housing types would be a definitive factor significantly impacting property values as in the way that other known variables impact property values.

Furthermore, change can be a good thing. Enabling new housing choices and increasing housing supply would allow for a greater variety of design and form in Arlington's neighborhoods. The study will look at ways to address tree canopy loss and stormwater management. And most importantly, change will support the County's vision for a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important.