

ASF ANSWERS TO HOUSING ARLINGTON MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING QUESTIONNAIRE, DEC 31, 2020

Missing Middle Housing Survey Q and A

Arlington's Housing Shortfall

1. What are the consequences of Arlington's housing shortfall? (check all that apply)

[✓] Other: This implies we have a shortfall; this is incorrect. The county shows an apartment rental vacancy rate of 8.5%, <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieMdBjOTgxYzMtMTZiMC00Yic1LTgwNiltOTFjOVM1ZTJkNWM4IiwidCI6IjgwMzU0ODAA0LTFmZGYtNDI4ZS05ZjVmLTUwOTFIOTk0Y2Y1NCIsImMiOiJF9j>; this figure predates Covid which has pushed vacancy rates higher. The 8.5% rate is well above the level indicating a tight housing market. In addition, Arlington has added more housing units as a percentage of total units than DC, Fairfax, or Alexandria, from 2000-2018. This means that Arlington -- which represents 1.5% of the DMV's geographic area -- contributed 15% of all housing that was produced in the city center and inner suburbs in that timeframe (DC, ArlCo, PGCo, FfxCo, MoCo, City of Alex, FC City and City of Ffx). <https://ggwash.org/view/70211/zoning-for-incremental-growth-how-is-our-region-doing>. These examples show Arlington punches well above its weight in housing production for at least two decades and that the county is crying wolf on "shortfalls."

2. What housing options are missing in Arlington's neighborhoods? (check all that apply)

[✓] Nothing is missing.

[NOTE: There is no window in the survey to add this added info, but we provide it FYI : Arlington continues to have housing at a range of price points. No, we don't have single-family homes at very low price points, but there are other options.

Visit www.realtor.com input Arlington County and a maximum home price of \$300K.

There are 137 condos, and most are well under

\$300K: https://www.realtor.com/realestateandhomes-search/Arlington_VA/price-na-300000. They would be fine as starter homes and as senior housing, both noted as gaps by missing middle advocates.

With Metro corridor infill, Arlington consciously chose to cater to apartment dwellers while leaving "green areas" elsewhere. Finally, there is no guarantee of a specific type of housing in any jurisdiction, this "typology" language from the county is a smokescreen for the fact that builders can earn more from a 3-bedroom duplex on less dense land than they can for a steel-concrete hi-rise 3-bedroom unit. END NOTE.]

3. What has been most impactful to you or someone you know about rising housing prices?

[✓] Other: This is a leading question and responses should be rejected. It obscures the ultimate outcome of upzoning, namely, further pressure on land prices. It does nothing to make housing more affordable, except for families who can afford a \$900,000 home but not a \$2.2 million home. The county needs to review different tools if it is serious about affordability, AND MEASURES SHORT OF ZONING CHANGES WOULD ADDRESS THIS PROBLEM MORE EFFECTIVELY. In fact, preventing teardowns would immediately offer a supply of homes at or below \$900,000 -- they are called OLDER HOMES, and they exactly match the price point of duplexes for which the county is advocating!

New Missing Middle units will not be "affordable" even for households earning the median area income. New duplexes at 2023/2027 N. Dinwiddie Street in High View Park sold for \$1,229,086 and \$1,212,500 in Dec/Jan last year.

<https://propertysearch.arlingtonva.us/Home/Sales?Irsn=69971> and <https://propertysearch.arlingtonva.us/Home/Sales?Irsn=69972>. Missing Middle Railroad Cottages in Falls Church have sold for approximately \$750,000 each. These are not "affordable" in any sense of the word. We can provide additional examples if needed.

4. How will (or has) the trend toward oversized single-family detached houses impact (or impacted) your neighborhood?

[✓] Other: This is a leading question with no clear link to Arlington's current housing needs. It obscures the fact that current zoning is pushing owners and speculators to tear down homes and garden apartments that qualify as "naturally-occurring" affordable housing (NOAH). Indeed, there is great irony that Missing Middle advocates favor dispatching existing homes which are on the market for \$700,000 to landfills and replacing them with two (each) million-dollar duplexes. How does that improve affordability? https://3d81d522-ce99-431c-a359-61f1ce06c557.filesusr.com/ugd/a48bae_9836b6e2b93b4bfa9e5da254e8844e75.pdf

The question also obscures the fact that Arlington has the tools to reduce the footprint of single-family, detached houses if it wished. The flooding crisis in 2019 and global climate change, as well as the legislation to preserve trees to address climate change signed by Virginia Governor Northam in April 2020

(<https://legiscan.com/VA/text/HB504/2020>), offer opportunities to limit impervious surfaces and take other measures to limit lot coverage and land disturbance. But the county has no interest in limiting development.

5. If you selected negative impact, how so?

[✓] Other: This question mirrors the "leading question" format of its predecessor. As noted, cramming a larger number of attached dwellings onto single-family lots — most of which are small to begin with — won't improve any negative impacts over current conditions with respect to land disturbance, increases in impervious surfaces, loss of mature trees, or even affordability. Upzoning, by packing more homes per acre on our land, will add to: tree canopy loss, paving that causes flooding and pollution, land values that will ratchet up living costs across the board, gentrification and LOSS of

demographic diversity. Upzoning that will accelerate population growth also will exaggerate a budget deficit that the county projected (well before Covid) of approximately \$54 million by 2024, <https://budget.arlingtonva.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/18/2018/02/FY19P-Managers-Message-Multi-Year-Forecast.pdf>. Adding more residents that widens that deficit and displaces lower-earning households is contrary to community values.

6. Given the change that is occurring, would it be appropriate to explore alternatives?

No.

7. Over the past decade, most of the housing produced in Arlington has been one- and two-bedroom mid- and high-rise multifamily housing. The single-family detached housing produced over the same period has been on the larger side, with most houses having four or more bedrooms. What housing needs are unmet by the current housing production trends?

Other: This question misplaces cause and effect. The county can ameliorate the "problem" of very large homes. Every day, smaller, older homes are being razed. Change the rules that encourage these teardowns, and bingo, we will have many more 2- and 3-bedroom single family homes and they will have real yards for kids! In addition, people can raise families in condos; they have the right to live in DC, MD or other parts of Virginia if they don't like the currently available options in Arlington. Condos and apartments are more environmentally friendly, and demolishing old single-family stock is not environmentally friendly. And if Arlington engineers away all yards for duplexes or more on small R-5 and R-6 lots, many families with children will move because they have no yards. Additionally, the county has failed to expand schools and parks to keep pace with population growth already approved. It is even considering giving up parks to build schools! ASF would turn the question around and ask "what schooling needs are unmet now due to recent housing development?"

8. How does the disproportionate lack of housing affordability for Black or African American households illustrate the challenges faced by Arlington (and the nation as a whole)?

This question lacks important context and history and appears aimed at linking Missing Middle to solving racial inequality. This is all the more unfortunate as Arlington raises alarms about old racist practices while it pursues new racist policies. McMansion zoning (2005), Columbia Pike's form-based code (2007), rejection of tools such as public housing authorities (2009) and land trusts that can moderate land costs, and overreliance on builders' housing policy advice for 30 years have pushed up costs of land so that new market units start around \$650,000, well above the means of **Arlington's own** single, minority, immigrant, and fixed-income residents.

The discriminatory effects of Arlington County government's own land use policies over the past 30 years are demonstrable: Arna Valley redevelopment pushed out 3,000 mostly Hispanic (Salvadoran) immigrants in the 1990s. Redevelopment initially opened the door to Vietnamese immigrant commercial ventures in Clarendon in the 70's, but higher rents pushed most out again by the 90's

<https://www.arlnow.com/2016/08/11/little-saigon-fading-away-in-clarendon/>. Then dozens of high-rises and expensive townhouses went up while we lost a net 14,000 market-rate affordable units (MARKs) from 2000-2018. Census data shows the impact: our combined Black and Hispanic population shrank 7% from 2000 to 2010 and the non-Hispanic white population grew by 16%. County policies are still causing displacement of Black, Hispanic, and lower income white families -- and new policies are being promoted -- even now. The Form-based Code produced a real estate "opportunity" in Foxcroft Heights, where 9 modest rental units were advertised for \$11 million in September 2019 as a means for "for vast and integrated gentrification ... [and] an exceptional opportunity to revitalize ... a part of Arlington ... that has remained virtually forgotten...." <https://www.arlnow.com/2019/09/24/residential-block-in-foxcroft-heights-for-sale-for-11-million/>. As recently as October 2020 the county manager was poised to recommend expanding eligibility for builder-provided affordable ownership units to people earning \$120,000 a year, precluding ownership (and wealth creation) options for those at much lower income levels. Far from helping minority families remain in Arlington or move to Arlington, Missing Middle upzoning is more likely motivated by raising tax revenue with no regard for the impacts on the land, overenrolled schools, an overtaxed stormwater system, housing inflation, and gentrification. And no regard for the added per capita deficit spending needed for a much larger population.

9. How should Arlington respond?

Question is unclear. Is the county trying to attract new residents at the expense of current residents? Then continue pursuing Missing Middle Housing! Is the question "how do we trick current residents into believing that adding new and already wealthy residents will bolster our tax revenue?" then continue pursuing Missing Middle in the same manner, even knowing that it will produce large deficits once real planning

commences. If the question is "how can we really tackle the problem of housing affordability" then acknowledge that Arlington cannot solve the region's or its own housing affordability problem simply by cramming more housing units into 26 square miles with 2.2 sq. mi. of public land on which to provide all public infrastructure and services. If Arlington had wanted to retain affordable housing, it could have established a housing authority and purchased garden-style apartment complexes and other affordable MARKs to preserve them in the mid-1970s–mid-1980s before land values skyrocketed along with Metro-fueled development. But the county chose not to invest those windfall profits from significant commercial office upzoning (some 15 million square gross square feet of commercial office space was built from 1980-89)

<https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Arlington-County-Profile-2020.pdf>

by acquiring and preserving existing affordable housing units or by making significant purchases of land for future public uses—including public parks, schools, libraries, fire stations, stormwater management, etc. That bell cannot be un-rung. Under current Virginia law, there is a significant risk that the bell of McMansion zoning also cannot be un-rung. This legal issue needs to be definitively resolved before any Missing Middle up-zoning is considered; we note that the legal ability to downzone was a key attractor for residents who agreed to Missing Middle up-zoning in other U.S. jurisdictions that legally permitted such downzoning."

To avoid compounding that failure with another, ASF believes that the county should respond to today's housing challenges by **prioritizing current residents** rather than attempting to cram more people into the sardine can. ASF does not oppose growth, but we recognize that the county is even now approving it at a very rapid pace, with no fiscal, environmental, or equity impact studies, and we insist that such impacts be revealed before new zoning is approved that would enable even more growth. We are moving toward a tipping point from which there is no recovery. We recommend focusing now on preventing displacement and evictions, and on exploring tax relief or vouchers or land trusts that can lower barriers to renting and home ownership. We recommend shifting resources from building additional, grossly-expensive CAF units and reallocating those AHIF funds to provide more meaningful housing grants to supplement rents both in CAFs and MARKs for low-income residents. We recommend rebuilding the commercial office and retail sectors, which can offset the deficit spending we must incur to accommodate an influx equivalent to current populations of Charlottesville and Culpeper that is foreseen with CURRENT ZONING.

10. What housing types are missing or in short supply?

[✓] Other: Arlington already has plenty of housing "options." Its own data show that high-rise/mid-rise housing represents just under 1/2 of all housing, with low-rise apts/condos, townhouses and duplexes (single-family attached) and single-family (detached) representing the other half of the housing

stock: https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/07/MMHS_ResearchCompendium_Bulletin3_final.pdf.

The county's focus on 3-bedroom units in single-family neighborhoods is reflecting

unimaginative inputs from builders who are motivated by making the most profit now with stick-built 4 story multifamily units, which yield larger profits than steel-concrete hi-rises that could equally deliver 3-bedroom homes. If the county were really concerned about addressing this problem, it would explore new technologies -- such as C-LAM construction, creative affordable units with architectural charm that can be partly pre-fabricated. Our board must get out in front of the builders instead of following them down density lane where builders make profits but the county has to raise taxes ultimately to cover needs of all these new people.

11. What are the characteristics of your neighborhood that you most value? (select all that apply)

[✓ all] Architecture; Diversity; Personal connections with neighbors; Proximity to destinations such as retail, restaurants, services, and parks; Proximity to transit; Tree canopy; Walkability; Other

[✓] Other: ASF members live in all types of neighborhoods, but we all treasure access to nature and wildlife that enlivens our semi-urban and suburban lifestyles. We enjoy the balance of vibrant bustling towers in our Metro corridors and the trees and greenspace which are concentrated now in our parks and old neighborhoods. We value yet miss the demographic diversity that has resulted from intense development since the 1990's. We hope to work with the county to preserve the remaining natural resources and increase them where possible, and to retrieve the diversity of our population rather than promote diversity of housing types.

12. What are the most attractive features of this housing type? Single-Family Detached

Yards, green space, visible horizons, impervious surface that mediates flooding, sunlight, large trees, wildlife/insects/birds/plants, communal spirit in the neighborhoods, privacy, peace and quiet, less traffic.

13. Are there opportunities to modify regulations for this home type?

Increase lot coverage restrictions, reduce permitted land disturbance, strengthen tree preservation requirements — all of this could be accomplished through Virginia State Code § 62.1-44.15:33 (<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title62.1/chapter3.1/section62.1-44.15:33/>), which authorizes localities with “excessive localized flooding within the watershed” to apply for a waiver that allows them to enact stronger stormwater management ordinances than the State Water Control Board’s “minimum regulations.” This is just one of several alternatives that could help us reduce stormwater runoff, better mitigate flood impacts countywide, preserve green space and existing mature tree canopy, etc. It would also likely provide a side benefit of making it much less appealing to tear down existing, older, more affordable single-family homes. If not, consider tax incentives to remodel existing homes versus tearing them down for new ones. Impose taxes on homes that

are not owner occupied to discourage speculative investments. Consider imposing landfill taxes as other jurisdictions have done. There are multiple opportunities to help preserve some of the most affordable housing stock that remains in Arlington.

14. What are the most attractive features of this missing middle home type? Stacked Duplex

I cannot think of any examples currently in Arlington; these types are more common in very urban areas and particularly Chicago, where lots were initially drawn to accommodate them.

15. Would/do you support exploring modifications to regulations to support this missing middle housing type?

ASF does NOT support exploring modification of existing regulations to support this "missing" middle housing type with the exception of EXISTING stacked duplexes. Existing regulations are sufficient to permit this kind of unit. Lots currently zoned as R-5 or R-6 already can qualify (under certain circumstances) for duplex or semi-detached redevelopment via a special exception use permit. Lots zoned R-8, R-10 and R-20 are frequently large enough to meet the criteria for the split-lot exception, pipestem redevelopment or other subdivision that would permit duplex redevelopment. See §3.2.4.C. Exceptions on pp. 3-8 and 3-9 of the Zoning Ordinance <https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2019/10/ACZO.pdf>. On top of these zoning categories, many "single-family" homes are built on two lots, making it a simple matter to plop a duplex on the double lot. A good example is 2023 and 2027 N. Dinwiddie Street. See the old RPC data here: 2014 (2 lots and the house assessed for a total of \$586,600 in 2018): <https://propertysearch.arlingtonva.us/Home/Assessments?Irsn=12770> and <https://propertysearch.arlingtonva.us/Home/Assessments?Irsn=12771>. The house accounted for just \$76,400 of the total assessed value. Pretty darned affordable for the "missing middle." Sadly, that house is history, and we have two ostentatious \$1.2 million duplex units in its place.

16. What are the most attractive features of this missing middle home type? Side-by-side Duplex

The existing ones in the county, built long ago, are still very functional. You should adopt measures to preserve them.

17. Would/do you support exploring modifications to regulations to support this missing middle housing type?

ASF does NOT support exploring modification of existing regulations to support this "missing" middle housing type. Existing regulations are sufficient to permit this kind of unit. Lots currently zoned as R-5 or R-6 already can qualify (under certain circumstances) for duplex or semi-detached redevelopment via a special exception use

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18. What are the most attractive features of this missing middle home type? Townhouse

The existing ones in the county, built in past years, are still very functional. You should adopt measures to preserve them.

19. Would/do you support exploring modifications to regulations to support this missing middle housing type?

ASF does NOT support exploring modification of existing regulations to support this "missing" middle housing type. Existing regulations are sufficient to permit these kinds of units to be built, and they are already being built countywide in R-C zoning districts (Townes of Ballston is a good example), in R-10T zoning districts, in R15-30T zoning districts and in R2-7 zoning districts as well as on site-plan sites (townhouses built on the Peck-Staples site in the 800–900 block of N. Wakefield Street) and in other zoning districts that are rezoned to permit townhouses.

20. What are the most attractive features of this missing middle home type? Small Multiplex

The existing ones in the county, built in years past, are still very functional. You should adopt measures to preserve them.

21. Would/do you support exploring modifications to regulations to support this missing middle housing type?

No, ASF does NOT support exploring modification of existing regulations to support new construction of this "missing" middle housing type. Existing regulations are sufficient to permit these kinds of units to be built, and they are already being built countywide in multiple zoning districts that already permit this kind of housing: including C-O, C-O-Crystal City, C-O-Rosslyn, C-O-1.0, C-O-1.5, C-O-2.5, C-O-A, RA4.8, RA-A-3.2, R-C

and likely in all other existing apartment dwelling districts, etc. They do not need to be "inserted" in less dense areas.

Arlington's Land Use and Zoning History

The zoning and land use decisions of the 1940s-1960s to restrict missing middle housing in most of the County reinforced racial segregation practices of that era, such as the restrictions on FHA mortgages for African Americans to purchase a single-family home. Lending restrictions were banned in the 1960s, yet the Zoning and General Land Use Plan separation of housing types remain today. Modern consequences include continued limitations on missing middle housing and a growing understanding of the original segregationist, exclusionary intent of separating residential uses, separation that persists to the present today.

22. How should Arlington respond? (select all that apply)

[✓] Other: Respond to what? The restrictions of the 1930's were not on "missing middle housing." They were on lower-cost housing units, which were thought likely to attract minorities, African Americans and Jews at that time, whose residence was also prohibited by many restrictive covenants. Those practices and redlining were deplorable. But there are two fatal flaws with this question. First, it assumes that there are no people of color who can afford expensive homes today, which is wrong. Second, if we accept -- as ASF does -- that households representing racial or ethnic minorities or those on fixed income are disproportionately experiencing housing insecurity, the county should be marshalling resources to keep these residents in Arlington and to help them before they help a population of greater means with Missing Middle zoning, namely people who can afford a very expensive new duplex. We should be revising regulations that spur demolition of "naturally-occurring affordable housing" (NOAH) of all types -- from garden apartments (Greenbrier Apartments, Buckingham, etc.), low-rise apartments, existing duplexes, rowhouses (Foxcroft Heights), to single-family homes (in Colombia Heights, Williamsburg and Lyon Park).

We should also consider that homeownership rates for African-American households are lower nationally than they were in 1968 when the federal Fair Housing Act was enacted and that African American homeownership rates in Virginia have continued to fall over the past 20 years (from 51.1% in 2000 to 47.7% in 2018) <https://virginiarealtors.org/2020/02/06/a-spotlight-on-african-american-homeownership-rates-in-virginia/>. ASF suspects these trends are reflected as well in Arlington, indicating other factors at play and a strong probability that Missing Middle zoning will not correct them.

23. What are the greatest opportunities to consider when studying the addition of missing middle housing types? (select all that apply)

[✓] None of the above.

[✓] Other: This is yet another leading question. What if we don't believe that Missing Middle Housing represents an "opportunity" to anyone but builders and speculators, and that by "studying" the addition of MM housing types, we are giving up opportunities to study other approaches to housing that might be more effective and sustainable for Arlington financially, environmentally, and socially? Staff and county board members, including county board chair Garvey at Maywood Civic Association, have stated that the "missing middle" process is NOT about housing affordability. They have also refused to engage on ASF's claims that new MM stock would be affordable in only very few areas of the county.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy8gimgAdzo><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy8gimgAdzo>. It is therefore misleading for affordability to be offered as an option for this question. Furthermore, staff has shown in the MM "research" compendium that Arlington County already has a very balanced and full range of housing options for all ages and family types. Research Bulletin #3 https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/07/MMHS_ResearchCompendium_Bulletin3_final.pdf in fact indicates that in neighborhoods outside of the Metro corridor, "nearly 50% of the housing stock is single-family detached housing, 30% is low-rise multifamily, and 13% is mid- and high-rise multifamily."

24. What are the greatest concerns to consider when studying the addition of missing middle housing types?

[✓] Compatibility with adjacent land uses

[✓] Displacement of existing residents

[✓] Impacts on school enrollment

[✓] Impacts on on-street parking needs and traffic

[✓] Impacts on environmental issues including tree canopy and permeable land preservation, stormwater management

[✓] Loss of neighborhood character

[✓] Other: Increased risk of flooding. Worsening of affordability problems, as land values and taxes continue to skyrocket as a direct result of upzoning. Reneging on the bargain that the county struck with its single-family neighborhoods when Metrorail was added. Financial insolvency from deficit spending to provide services to new residents without corresponding revenue growth in the commercial sectors to offset all that deficit residential spending. Displacement of ever greater numbers of current residents, as land values make affordable housing support less effective and newcomers squeeze budgets for those at the lower end of the spectrum.

25. What are the highest priority actions/efforts/investments to undertake as we deal with growth in Arlington?

[✓] Stormwater improvements

[✓] Schools capacity

[✓] Improve/expand open natural spaces

[✓] Transportation infrastructure

[✓] Public facilities

[✓] Other

Additional comments:

The county must concentrate on meeting its obligations to existing residents — obligations that were not being met fully even prior to Covid-19 (which is raising far more troubling concerns especially for those at lower income levels). Obligations the county must meet NOW include addressing school capacity, other public facility planning (a function that the county manager has recently relinquished), retention of pervious surface and greenspace to meet flood risks, providing park and recreation capacity for a population that we are still absorbing under CURRENT ZONING. Arlington is obligated by state law to seat every resident child that asks to be seated in Arlington Public Schools. As stewards of our future, the county MUST also begin reducing impervious surfaces and protecting mature trees to help ease alarming stormwater runoff and flooding problems. It could take such steps, and make up its parkland deficit for already-approved population growth, by acquiring undeveloped land and leaving it largely unimproved in accordance with residents' preferences: <https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/31/2016/01/Arlington-County-Parks-Rec-Survey-Findings-Report-May-9-2016.pdf>. In short, Arlington must begin to live within its means rather than continuing to push a self-defeating and unsustainable endless residential growth model.

Additional question:

How do you prefer to remain engaged with this study?

we are a community partner but we prefer to be an engaged partner that can suggest other options besides missing middle, working constructively with the county