

The Missing Middle Housing Issue
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Arlington County has been pursuing "Missing Middle" (MM) housing solutions for the past few years. Most recently, in May 2019, it approved by-right construction of accessory dwelling units (ADU's) on 44% of single-family lots. In December 2019, the county board announced it was exploring a new "Missing Middle" tool -- one likely to introduce by-right zoning (also called up-zoning) for duplexes, triples, and quadplexes on lots zoned solely for single-family houses (SFH's). [Arlingtonians for Our Sustainable Future](#) (ASF) believes the MM theory is unproven and wants the county to produce credible data showing the need and utility of this drastic new land-use tool.

The Growth Argument. The county's argument that Arlington must "do its bit" to absorb [regional population growth predicted by the Metropolitan Council of Governments](#) (MCOG) is misleading. This study projects that from 2015 to 2045, Arlington's population will surge by 41% as it absorbs 5.2% of the region's population growth.¹ MCOG ignores the fact that Arlington has grown faster in the period leading up to 2015 than almost any other jurisdiction.² We need a pause in such unquestioned growth. A recent projection shows that with each additional resident, costs increase by a net \$850.³ How will the county pay for such a major new influx? And if the county can sign on to 2045 growth models, why can't it conduct planning and likely costs over that same timeline? As a start, our board should share its 3-5-year internal operating budget, to help show where we are headed.

¹ MCOG, "Round 9.1 Growth Trends To 2045," October 2018, Table 6, p. 13.

² Between 2000 and 2018, Arlington, at 28%, has built more housing units as a percentage of existing stock than Alexandria (18.7%), the District (16.3%) and Fairfax County (15.6%). Arlington Statistics from U.S. Census 2000 <https://www.infoplease.com/us/comprehensive-census-data-state/housing-statistics-133> (2000 figure) and U.S. Census 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/arlingtoncountyvirginia/PST045219>. Other cities' data also from U.S. Census.

³ Stephen S. Fuller and Jeannette Chapman "The Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Locating Amazon's HQ2 in Arlington County, Virginia," November 8, 2018, p. 11, https://fullerinstitute.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SFI_-Economic_-Fiscal_Impacts_of_Amazon-HQ2_110818.pdf.

The Affordability Argument. County officials initially indicated that MM up-zoning would produce mid-range "affordable" housing, hinting new units would accommodate those earning Arlington's average median income of \$115,000. By mid-February 2020, however, they modified that approach, with board members telling civic associations that MM up-zoning would *likely* promote affordability as each UNIT of a duplex or triplex would be cheaper than a new SFH. ASF believes the more likely outcome will be higher land prices which may drive out homeowners as taxes rise accordingly.

A lot with a "teardown" in some areas that sells now for \$800,000-900,000 could easily appreciate to over \$1.2 million, as developers will have to sell new homes at high prices to cover the inflated land costs. As one example, new duplexes at N. Dinwiddie St. sold for \$1.1 million each. Arlington has job/economic growth model similar to Northern California's, where [Dr. Michael Storper at UCLA](#) demonstrates that in-migration due to high salaries drives ever-higher land values. Up-zoning will exacerbate this trend.

The county's initial stated need for a new "market" solution to affordability was ironic. It has long promoted land-use plans that harmed the very diversity and affordability it touted as key goals of MM. From 2000 to 2018, [Arlington lost a net 14,000 market-rate affordable units \(MARKS\)](#). Most of us have seen developers steadily replace older residential stock with luxury condos/apartments/McMansions. In fact, Arlington has built 2,900 housing units on average each year from 2000-2019⁴, yet we have seen prices rise, not fall.

Types. The county also argues for new "types" of housing to provide homes that are walkable to transit/shopping for young families and empty nesters. Yet the county has increased the stock of transit-walkable housing with infill in Rosslyn and Ballston; more units are on tap for Crystal City/Clarendon/Courthouse. Trading our single-family neighborhoods for "multi-plex" clusters packed with more people will remove tree canopy, increase stormwater runoff, deplete biodiversity, add to school and transportation congestion, and pose a net drain on the county's budget, now further strained by Covid-19. Now is not the time, and Arlington is not the place, for Missing Middle.

⁴ 2000 Census Data: <https://www.infoplease.com/us/comprehensive-census-data-state/housing-statistics-133>;

2019 Census Data: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/arlingtoncountyvirginia/PST045219>

Average Rent Data: <https://www.deptofnumbers.com/rent/virginia/arlington-county/>