



Answers to Key Questions

What does “Missing Middle” mean?

“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, small multi-family buildings, and smaller single-family homes.

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.

Is this type of housing “missing” in Arlington?

Missing middle forms exist in Arlington neighborhoods; however, today’s zoning and land use policies restrict them 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.

Over time, regulatory barriers were added to the County’s Zoning Ordinance and General Land Use Plan to limit construction of these home types which has reinforced racial and class-based segregation and resulting inequities that still persist today.

Arlington has 116,000 housing units.

- 27,712 units or 24% are single-family detached homes
- 23% or 26,921 units, are low-rise multifamily housing, which includes both non-elevator garden apartments and standalone multi-family buildings of 3+ units. 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 make up only 6%, or 6,945 units. These housing types 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.

Low-rise multi-family housing makes up 30% of Arlington’s total inventory, yet this is only approximately 34,000 units of an inventory of 116,000 total housing units. Arlington’s total inventory is an insufficient quantity to support current housing demand, as evidenced by the County’s high cost for housing.

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.

Is the County hoping that adding more missing middle housing will create more rental opportunities, home ownership housing, or both?



The County's Affordable Housing Master Plan calls for increasing supply of both rental and home ownership units, to help address Arlington's significant housing demand. Adding more missing middle housing could create more rental and home ownership opportunities, both of which would be welcome strategies to increase Arlington's overall supply and reduce pressure on housing supply thus lowering housing prices overall. All residential uses can be either occupied by owners or renters. In fact, renters occupy 14% of single family detached houses, 23% of townhouses, and 33% of condominiums.

What are the benefits to missing middle housing?

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

Will this study address the housing needs of older residents?

Yes, this study will consider housing types that offer accessible features. Missing Middle housing types are appealing to residents seeking to downsize.

How will the study reach those who typically do not participate in County planning processes, such as renters and non-English speakers?

The MMHS team will connect with hard-to-reach audiences in the following ways:

- printed (hard copy) presentation boards throughout the community with study information and feedback opportunities
- translation of study materials into Spanish
- the MMHS Community Partner network

Why study missing middle housing types if they're not guaranteed "affordable"?

The term "affordable housing" refers to housing for which households earning at or below 60 to 80 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI) pay no more than 30 percent of their income. The County is working on many fronts to support the County's "affordable" housing goals, including but not limited to: the affordable housing provisions in the Arlington County Zoning Ordinance; Affordable Housing Investment Fund; Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds; Federal Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) funds; Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing (TOAH) fund; geographically specific planning processes with "affordable" housing goals; and Housing Arlington initiatives such as the Multifamily Reinvestment Study, and Institutional Partnerships.

The Missing Middle Housing Study is looking at the housing gap between the targeted "affordable" housing income range and million-dollar homes, a rapidly widening gap in the Arlington community, and

how to fill that gap within the existing fabric of the Arlington community. To that end, the study is looking specifically at how new, **neighborhood-scale** options could be introduced in areas which are now completely inaccessible to many, many households, at price tags that are more attainable to more households. This should enable more options for people to live in Arlington, including those who already live and work here and need a new housing solution for themselves or loved ones.

If new housing types are enabled, the study could also recommend additional, future efforts to focus on increasing the affordability of the new housing choices.

Land in Arlington is so expensive. How will it be possible to realize production of less expensive homes, particularly if the need is for 3-bedroom units that would cost more than the existing inventory of 2 bedroom units? Will the County prohibit construction of McMansions?

New housing types should be less expensive than the new single detached homes being built under current Zoning provisions, if they are designed efficiently, targeting perhaps 3 bedrooms rather than 4+ bedrooms, and occupying less land per unit.

The study will seek to determine design parameters for those considerations and other County goals (i.e. tree canopy conservation, effective stormwater management) and how to make the production of these housing types just as attractive, if not more attractive, than an extremely large single-detached home.

Why not preserve the existing smaller homes that we already have and limit the size of new single detached homes?

There are social, economic, and environmental benefits of smaller homes because they can be a more manageable and less expensive alternative to larger modern-day homes. Preserving smaller older homes also can maximize the use of existing materials and infrastructure, reduce waste, and preserve the historic character of neighborhoods. In addition, older and historic neighborhoods offer a diverse housing stock at varying prices, sizes, and conditions, and often are located in close proximity to transit and jobs.

Housing preservation can be cheaper and faster than constructing new housing. However, the condition of older housing is regularly cited as a concern. Historic properties that need significant repairs generally are the result of neglect and vacancy, exacerbated by a lack of means to properly maintain them. As a result, housing stock that was constructed pre-1960, already providing relatively affordable housing, is at risk of disappearing, replaced by new single detached homes.

The Arlington County Zoning Ordinance controls the maximum size, height, and lot coverage of single-detached homes, but cannot prevent developers from maximizing what they can build by-right, such as the “McMansions”. Arlington cannot limit the size of these new single detached homes due to legal restrictions on government regulations that constitute a “taking” that limits the uses of private property.

However, Arlington has several programs to support preservation of existing smaller historic homes and historic multi-family buildings. Property owners who rehabilitate historic properties may be eligible for



state (25%) and/or federal (20%) historic rehabilitation tax credits during the year a project is completed. Examples of eligible expenses include the following: electrical, plumbing and mechanical upgrades; architectural and engineering fees; permit fees; and construction costs for such items as roofing, painting, and refinishing floors.

Arlington's local historic districts provide certain protections for property owners, such as design review assistance, and owners are required to obtain special approval through the Certificate of Appropriateness (CoA) process for any exterior changes, new construction or demolition. This helps to maintain the architectural and historic integrity of individual buildings and larger neighborhood districts.

Owners of historic properties may also consider preservation easements, which are protective legal agreements attached to the deed of a property that are binding to current and future owners. Property owners enter into these agreements voluntarily with a qualified non-profit organization or Arlington County government for a tax benefit in exchange for protecting a historic property in perpetuity.

In addition, there are provisions in the Zoning Ordinance that permit structural interior renovations and exterior additions for single detached and two-family homes that are nonconforming to current Zoning Ordinance standards, which help to extend the life of older homes.

Why not look at other solutions to address housing affordability, such as rent control and higher pay for County employees?

Arlington does not have the state enabling authority to place controls on rent.

Considering higher pay for County employees could help employees afford more expensive housing but would have budgetary implications to consider. And it would not address the housing affordability issues for many other workers that support Arlington but do not work for Arlington County.

Why is Arlington, a small County of only 26 square miles, bearing the burden of addressing the region's housing affordability issues?

Housing affordability is a regional problem that requires regional solutions and all local governments are working to do their share to address the problem.

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.

Will this study change my single-family neighborhood? I want my neighborhood to stay the way it is.

As a starting point for this study, all residential areas of the County will be considered.



As 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.

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, it is important to acknowledge 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, housing costs will continue to rise and it will become more and more difficult for ALL those who already live in Arlington.

Also as a result of this neighborhood change, Arlington has also experienced increased school enrollment, more households with more vehicles, loss of trees, and loss of pervious surfaces.

Through this study, the County is choosing to have a conversation in our community about how we can mitigate these changes, in how Arlington can possibly re-introduce options to purchase smaller, less expensive homes.

Also, 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, support regional goals to reduce sprawl by allowing more people to live in Arlington. 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.

How will my property value be affected?

Many factors influence 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). Economic and financial impacts will be studied through this process.

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.

I'm concerned that adding new housing types will lead to even more impervious surfaces and tree loss. How will Arlington address these concerns?

As a result of neighborhood change already occurring, Arlington is experiencing impacts including increased school enrollment, more households with more vehicles, loss of trees, and loss of pervious surfaces.

In looking at Missing Middle housing types, the study will seek to determine the building footprint and lot coverage requirements for that housing type. It is possible that some Missing Middle housing types could be built within the same footprint currently permitted for single detached homes in which case adding new housing types will not necessarily lead to any more impervious surfaces or tree loss than currently experienced through the teardown and rebuild phenomenon, yet the County will be able to realize an increase in housing supply to help support the County's housing needs.

If new housing types are identified that require additional land area or have lower tree canopy requirements, then evaluation of whether stormwater infrastructure will be adequate and how environmental impacts will be mitigated will be included in the planning for these new housing types.

Through this study, the County is choosing to have a conversation in our community about how we can mitigate these changes, in how the County can possibly re-introduce options to purchase smaller, less expensive homes.

The Missing Middle Housing Study team looks forward to coordinating with other ongoing efforts such as the Natural Resources Management and Urban Forest Master Plans, leveraging our membership as a Biophilic City, and Flood Resilient Arlington to identify other possible solutions to address neighborhood change in the study of introducing or expanding flexibility for Missing Middle housing types.

Doesn't development in the more urban areas have a far greater stormwater impact, covering more surface area than development in lower-density residential areas?

Replacement of single detached homes with larger footprints adds the majority of impervious surfaces of all regulated development activity in Arlington. In contrast, along Arlington's urban corridors, redevelopment activity tends to add vertical density without adding significant new impervious surfaces. Managing stormwater on single detached lots is also more challenging, as more impervious surfaces and loss of trees and other vegetation create more runoff on relatively small lots, with limited remaining space on the lot to manage stormwater; compacted and poor-quality soils, with shorter flow paths to neighboring properties and/or the public right-of-way which also increase runoff from the lot; lack of inter-lot tertiary drainage infrastructure to convey increased runoff from the redeveloped lot through multiple parcels to the public storm drain system, and cumulative impacts to downhill properties, stormwater system capacity, and streams.

So what exactly will be evaluated when the study considers opportunities for Missing Middle housing types?

The following questions will be answered in studying Missing Middle housing types:

- Bedroom count and opportunities for 3-bedroom units

- The financial feasibility of building these housing types relative to products that can already be built
- Price ranges
- Impacts on land values
- Opportunities for most efficient design
- Lot size requirements
- Parking requirements
- Impacts on and opportunities for tree canopy conservation and stormwater management
- Energy consumption
- Compatibility with other uses
- Transportation network needs
- Accessibility
- Criteria for where these housing types should be located
- Student generation
- Equity – who benefits, who is burdened, who is left out, and how do we know?

How does this study connect to racial equity?

Racial equity means closing race-based outcome gaps so race does not predict one's success while improving outcomes for everyone. Racial equity requires moving beyond services to focus on policies, institutions and structures.

Advancing towards racial equity will require looking at existing institutions - in this case the County's land use policy and regulatory framework - and asking 5 key equity questions: "Who benefits? Who is burdened? Who is missing? How do we know? What did/do we do?"

In looking at our current land use policy and regulatory framework, the answers to these questions are as follows:

Arlington's existing land use policies are the result of decisions of the past made to reinforce 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 land use policies produced development patterns today that separate residential uses, limit housing variety, and limit housing supply.

The separation of residential housing types means that only households that can afford to purchase or rent a single detached home will live in areas designated for single detached homes. As a result, White households, whom as a demographic group earn more money and have more wealth than any other demographic group, including Black households due to the generational effects of historic discrimination and racism - in our present day in Arlington - have a greater opportunity to live in areas designated for single detached homes than other demographic groups, including Black households. This means that White households as a group have greater opportunity to live in 75% of Arlington's residential land area than other demographic groups, including Black households. This inequity is confirmed by looking at the demographic composition of Arlington. The parts of Arlington where only single detached homes are permitted have majority White household residency.



In looking to the future, the MMHS is an opportunity to consider how Arlington’s land use policy and regulations could be different - so that one’s race does not predict one’s ability to live in one part of the County versus another. Such recommendations will not compensate for past discrimination nor represent the only solution needed to achieve racial equity. Rather, the MMHS supports the important work of racial equity occurring across all County institutions, policies, and programs. This is work to realize a community where race does not predict one’s success but rather all populations have access to whatever community conditions and opportunities are personally needed to reach their full potential and to experience optimal well-being. Such changes will improve outcomes for everyone and make Arlington a better place for everyone to live.

Will Missing Middle housing be targeted for the least diverse parts of the County, to support interest in greater diversity?

Diversity, inclusion, and equity are three important considerations for the Missing Middle Housing Study.

The Missing Middle Housing Study will look at the entire County to determine appropriate locations for new housing types. Locational criteria for different housing types studied in this process will consider factors such as compatibility of these housing types with other housing types and land uses and the most appropriate street types and transit requirements for each housing type.

The locational criteria will be reviewed to ensure that the outcomes of a potential new distribution of opportunities for Missing Middle housing not only support the County’s vision of being a diverse and inclusive community but also support equity - all populations having access to the community conditions and opportunities needed to reach their full potential and to experience optimal well-being.

How will the recommendations of this study guard against gentrification of Arlington’s African American neighborhoods?

Gentrification is already a force in Arlington’s African American neighborhoods due to effects of rising land values on real estate assessments, property taxes, and demand for housing in these neighborhoods by other demographic groups.

Enabling MM housing in Arlington could produce more options that enable families to remain, such as new housing options to support multi-generational families, opportunities to realize rental income, and smaller housing options less expensive than what is currently being produced in Arlington neighborhoods.

However, it is most important that the County reaches out to leaders in the African American communities to hear their voices and perspectives on this important question and ensure that recommendations of this study and other County initiatives are responsive to the needs of these communities.

How will the County realize the study recommendations?

Study recommendations could be realized through a combination of different actions, including:

- Zoning Ordinance and GLUP amendments that could:



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- identify new locations for Missing Middle housing,
- make it easier to build Missing Middle housing where it is already permitted,
- and/or modify dimensional requirements and unit size to make Missing Middle housing more accessible to a broader market
- coordination with and implementation of other County studies and initiatives (i.e. Natural Resources Management and Urban Forestry Update)
- Capital investments
- Other future studies