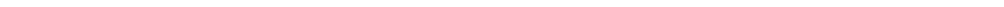




HOUSING  
PARTNERSHIP  
NETWORK

# Policy Notes

**Arlington County Adopts  
Missing Middle Housing Proposal**



# Overview of Missing Middle Housing in Arlington County, Virginia

The Arlington County Board in Virginia identified a sufficient lack of housing supply and choice in the county and as a result launched Housing Arlington in 2019. Housing Arlington is an “umbrella program that takes a cross-disciplinary, proactive approach to reach an equitable, stable, adaptive community.”<sup>i</sup> The Housing Arlington program examines six areas: land use tools, financial tools, institutional partnerships, county employee housing, homeownership study, and an affordable housing masterplan review.

One element of Housing Arlington is the Missing Middle Housing Study that began in 2020. As of 2020 about 3/4 of residential land in Arlington County is zoned for single-family detached homes. Arlington County found that missing middle housing could even out the density between different areas as well as promote greater diversity among residents. A small portion of Arlington County’s housing stock is already considered to be missing middle housing, however many of the units are not meant for families and are not spread throughout the county. This study intends to inform how additional missing middle housing can alleviate the gaps in housing choice, affordability, and supply in the county. The study’s outcomes include:

- “A shared understanding of the problem
- Options for County Board consideration
- Policy/regulation changes to enable new housing types
- Identification of issues for further study”<sup>ii</sup>

## HPN Members Operating in Arlington County

HPN Members Operating in Arlington County as of March 2023:



# Status of Implementation

Arlington County divided the Missing Middle Housing Study into three phases:

- Phase 1 (Oct. 2020 – Fall 2021): Community Engagement
- Phase 2 (Fall 2021 – Summer 2022): Policy Recommendations
- Phase 3 (Fall 2022 – Spring 2023): Implementation and Board Approval

The purpose of Phase 1 was to identify concerns and opportunities with missing middle housing and resulted in a final report.<sup>iii</sup> The final report discusses Phase 1, provides an explanation of the community engagement, and outlines Phases 2 and 3. The community engagement started with a virtual kick-off event and was followed by many more virtual listening sessions, research explanations, and two feedback opportunities.

Since Phase 1 took place in 2020 and 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the community engagement was virtual.

Phase 2 of the study focused on the specific types of missing middle housing that were identified in Phase 1 and the potential impacts on aspects such as financial feasibility, design, location analysis, and community impact. The outcome of Phase 2 is a set of policy recommendations and a draft framework that the County Board considered in July 2022. The county produced a one-page overview of the Phase 2 draft framework.<sup>iv</sup>

Phase 1 and Phase 2 took approximately two years to complete. Most of that time was dedicated to intentional community engagement around the initiative, including three information sessions and 20 community conversations. Phase 3, the implementation phase, focused on how the County Board can go about making the changes recommended in the draft framework. In October 2022 a draft zoning ordinance and other proposed changes were officially released. The county held public hearings in March 2023 on proposed Zoning Ordinance<sup>v</sup> and General Land Use Plan<sup>vi</sup> amendments. On March 22, 2023 the Arlington County Board voted unanimously to approve allowing missing middle to be built in single-family zoned areas, marking the end of Phase 3.

## How it Works in Arlington County

The approved framework for missing middle housing in Arlington County allows for by-right construction of 2-6 unit buildings, or 2-4 unit buildings on smaller lots, in zoning districts that currently only allow for single-family home development.<sup>vii</sup> Any new development must adhere to the same standards as single-family home development such as building height and setbacks to avoid the excessive permitting that can come with nontraditional housing structures. Additionally, the plan limits parking requirements to conserve trees, help manage stormwater, and support lower costs by not requiring parking lots to be built for each set of units.<sup>viii</sup> For the first five years there is a temporary cap on permits for 58 missing middle housing proposals built per year.<sup>ix</sup>

The county predicts that these changes would result in the conversion of 20 lots per year from single family housing to smaller-multiunit residences. The county is proposing the units to be owned and rented, providing greater flexibility of options for families at varying price points. Arlington County is encouraging these units to be affordable to families making \$108k per year,<sup>x</sup> which is equal to 80% area median income (AMI) for a family of 3.<sup>xi</sup> Some of the missing middle housing will be eligible for the Moderate Income Purchase Assistance Program (MIPAP) offered by Arlington County which is a "deferred-payment, no-interest loan of up to 25% of the home purchase price" for first-time homebuyers in Arlington. MIPAP can be used for down payment or closing costs.<sup>xii</sup>

# On the Ground Perspective:

## Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing

### *The Role of Coalitions*

HPN member Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH) in Arlington, VA actively followed the county's Missing Middle Housing Study. APAH is part of a coalition for Missing Middle Housing in Arlington, called Missing Middle Arlington, that seeks to advance greater housing choice and natural affordability through diversity of housing stock.<sup>xiii</sup>

The coalition includes:

- APAH
- NAACP
- Sierra Club
- YIMBYs of Northern Virginia
- Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance (NVAHA)
- AHC Inc.
- Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VOICE)
- Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions
- Habitat for Humanity
- League of Women Voters
- Arlington Young Democrats
- Clarendon Presbyterian Church
- Arlington Chamber of Commerce
- Alliance for Housing Solutions



### **Arlington County Demographic and Housing Data**

(Most recent as of 2023)

**Population (2020):** 232,965 <sup>xvi</sup>

#### **Racial Composition:**

- White = 74%
- Black = 10%
- Asian = 11%

**Population in Poverty:** 6.2% <sup>xvii</sup>

**Median Household Income:** \$122,604

**Share of Households that Rent:** ~60%

**Renter cost-burdened Households:**  
39% <sup>xviii</sup>

**Share of Households Owned:** ~38%

**Owned Cost-burdened Households:** 19%



Alliance for Housing Solutions, a nonprofit organization working to increase the supply of affordable housing in Arlington County and Northern Virginia, started the effort which eventually expanded into the current network of organizations.

Brian Goggin, Policy and Program Manager at APAH, shared that each organization in the coalition brings a different strength. According to Mr. Goggin, the YIMBYs of Northern Virginia and Alliance for Housing Solutions, VOICE, NAACP and Sierra Club combined their organizing skills and knowledge to raise the issues in the community and the county government. Mr. Goggin emphasized the importance of on-the-ground organizing and local coalition-building in order for change to occur.

The Missing Middle Arlington coalition provides a strong counterbalance to the NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) movement. Mr. Goggin shared that NIMBY groups opposed the missing middle proposal for reasons such as loss of tree canopy and loss of neighborhood character. Mr. Goggin also reflected that zoning is inherently political and creating housing affordability will require us to make changes to the built environment in established neighborhoods. Therefore, strong coalitions in support of zoning reform are necessary to counteract opposition groups.

### ***Supporting the Mission***

APAH became involved in the effort to grow missing middle housing in Arlington County as an extension of their mission. APAH's mission statement is "to develop, preserve, and own quality, affordable places to live; to promote stability and opportunity for our residents; and to advocate with the people and communities we serve." While APAH is not currently planning to develop missing middle housing, they became involved in the effort to increase housing diversity and affordability for everyone in their community.

APAH's President and CEO, Carmen Romero, sent a letter to the County Board in support of the Phase 2 draft framework highlighting that the proposal will "provide for more affordable housing suitable for young couples, retirees, and middle-income households, most of whom do not qualify for committed affordable housing."<sup>xiv</sup>

Mr. Goggin described how it is the responsibility of organizations to not only advocate for themselves and their own interests but also to advocate for broader community change. APAH embodies this approach in their support of Arlington County's missing middle housing proposal which would incrementally create greater affordability across the income spectrum over time. This could potentially benefit the low-income residents that APAH serves if those individuals and families see an increase in income in the future and choose to stay in the area. Mr. Goggin testified on behalf of APAH during Phase 3 public engagement.<sup>xv</sup> :

"Why do we support this measure? It's because our mission isn't just about subsidized, capital "A" affordable housing, but it's also about housing affordability, broadly speaking. And housing affordability, broadly speaking, means offering a broad range of housing options at all income levels. It's about providing abundant housing options all over the county...this proposal is a positive step in the right direction. It won't make all areas affordable to everyone, but it will make them more affordable than they currently are today. And to do that, we don't need any subsidy. We just have to make it legal to build more and different types of housing."

# Endnotes

[i] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Housing/Housing-Arlington>

[ii] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Housing/Housing-Arlington/Tools/Missing-Middle>

[iii] [https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/missing-middle/mmhs\\_phase-1-report-final-draft.pdf](https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/missing-middle/mmhs_phase-1-report-final-draft.pdf)

[iv] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/missing-middle/mmhs-phase-2-framework-one-pager-spanish-english.pdf>

[v] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/county-board/documents/mmhs/missing-middle-ordinance-advertisement-version.pdf>

[vi] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/missing-middle/mmhs-glup-amendment-draft-13jan2023.pdf>

[vii] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/About-Arlington/Newsroom/Articles/2023/County-Board-Adopts-Expanded-Housing-Options>

[viii] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/missing-middle/mmhs-phase-2-framework-one-pager-spanish-english.pdf>

[ix] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/About-Arlington/Newsroom/Articles/2023/County-Board-Adopts-Expanded-Housing-Options>

[x] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/missing-middle/mmhs-phase-2-framework-one-pager-spanish-english.pdf>

[xi] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Housing/Income-and-Rent-Limits>

[xii] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Housing/Get-Help/Home-Ownership/MIPAP>

[xiii] <https://www.missingmiddlearlington.net/missing-middle-supporters>

[xiv] <https://apah.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/APAH-Missing-Middle-Letter-of-Support-5.24.2022-1.pdf>

[xv] <https://apah.org/apah-testifies-in-favor-of-arlington-missing-middle-housing-study/>

[xvi] <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/arlingtoncountyvirginia>

[xvii] [https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/projects/documents/data-and-research/profile2022\\_1.pdf](https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/projects/documents/data-and-research/profile2022_1.pdf) - (For population in poverty, median household income, share of households that rent, and share of households that are owned)

[xviii] <https://www.arlingtonva.us/files/sharedassets/public/housing/documents/homeownership-study/homeownership-barriers-analysis-10.25.22.pdf> - (For renter households that are cost-burdened and owned households that are cost-burdened)



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