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housing & residential development

Introduction

Arlington is a maturely developed suburb of Boston. It has many distinct neighborhoods that offer a variety of housing, from single-family homes to mid-rise apartment buildings. Rapid population growth in the first half of the twentieth century led to development of housing across former farmland and over hilly terrain. Large lots were subdivided for the construction of single-family and multi-family homes along busy streetcar and railroad lines that extended out from Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville. The original streets were laid out in relatively dense grids off Massachusetts Avenue and Broadway. These have developed into well-established, compact neighborhoods, lush with trees, where many housing styles are interspersed with local business areas, parks, elementary schools, churches, and other amenities.

Though it has very little vacant, developable land, Arlington is poised for growth and inevitable changes to its housing stock. Intense demand for housing in the Boston Metro area has pushed up home prices and rents in once-affordable communities, including Arlington. This has triggered the conversion of nonresidential space to housing, and redevelopment of small-scale buildings and underutilized properties into higher-density multi-family units, and small vacant lots into new homes. Housing demand is also setting the stage for demographic and socioeconomic changes within Arlington, as property values increase, and the incomes of new residents rise as well.

In response to a range of housing needs for people of all ages, Arlington's Master Plan provides a framework for addressing key issues such as affordability, transit-oriented residential development, and aging in place.

Existing Conditions

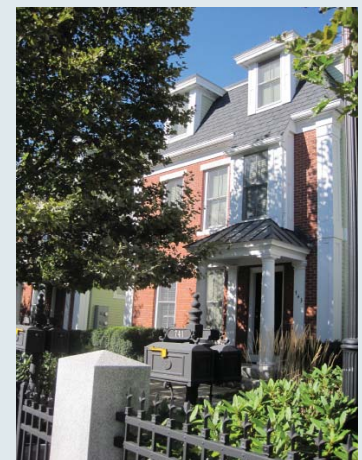
Physical Characteristics of Arlington's Housing

Arlington is unique among Boston's inner suburbs for its diverse housing stock. Although single-family homes remain the dominant housing type in some of the affluent nearby towns, they represented less than half of Arlington's 20,017 housing units in 2011 (Table 5.1). Two-family and small multi-family dwellings account for almost one-third of the units in Arlington, and mid-size apartment buildings, about one-fifth.

Many neighborhoods in Arlington developed gradually over more than one hundred years, and they have a variety of housing styles. While most housing units are in single-use structures, many historic mixed-use buildings can be found in Arlington, particularly around the business districts in East Arlington and Arlington Center. In general, points west and north of Arlington Center have fewer multi-family dwellings, although there are pockets of two- and three-family homes and even some larger multifamily buildings. Table 5.2 reports housing types in Arlington's census tracts, or areas the U.S. Census Bureau uses to track and report population and housing trends. (see Chapter 2).

master plan goals for housing & residential development

- Encourage mixed-use development that includes affordable housing, primarily in well-established commercial areas.
- Provide a variety of housing options for a range of incomes, ages, family sizes, and needs.
- Preserve the "streetcar suburb" character of Arlington's residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage sustainable construction and renovation of new and existing structures.



Arlington’s condominium inventory increased significantly in recent years. Data from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) show that Arlington gained 959 condominiums units between 2003 and 2014.¹ The Town Assessor reports that most of these units stem from two-family home conversions, an explanation generally consistent with data from the U.S. Census Bureau. During the same period, Arlington registered a minor increase in small multifamily structures, but single-family homes accounted for most of the Town’s new housing growth.

Age of Housing Stock

Arlington’s housing is relatively old. Local data show that the average age of housing units in Arlington is 81 years and the median year of construction is 1931. Similar conditions exist in other towns and small cities around Boston and Cambridge, while housing in outer parts of Middlesex County is newer (Table 5.3).

Although the housing in Arlington is fairly old, there are important neighborhood-level differences. For example, in the neighborhoods near Arlington’s northern border with Winchester, most housing units were built after World War II, as were most units in the East Arlington neighborhoods of Sunnyside and Kelwyn Manor. New construction in the past decade, whether by teardown/rebuild or infill development, has mostly occurred in Arlington Heights, Arlington Center, and in the neighborhoods bordering Belmont and Lexington. Housing age usually correlates with decisions to rebuild, but neighborhood desirability and preference for housing typology seem to play a larger role in where redevelopment occurs in Arlington.

Housing Size and Density

The American Community Survey (ACS) reports that Arlington’s housing units are slightly larger than those in other inner-suburbs and small cities. In Arlington, the median number of rooms per unit is 5.7. By contrast, most communities next to Boston have at least one less room per unit (except Milton), and the outer

Table 5.1: Number of Units in Structure, 2000 and 2011

Housing Type	2000	2011	Difference (2000-2011)	% Change (2000-2011)
Total housing units	19,011	20,017	1,006	5.0%
1-unit, detached	7,788	8,445	657	7.8%
1-unit, attached (townhouse)	524	1,140	616	54.0%
2 units	5,652	5,156	-496	-9.6%
3 or 4 units	974	1,268	294	23.2%
5 to 9 units	488	625	137	21.9%
10 to 19 units	1,158	973	-185	-19.0%
20 or more units	2,403	2,403	0	0.0%
Mobile home	15	7	-8	-114.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 SF-4 and ACS 2007-2011, DP4

suburbs tend to have at least one more room per unit. While the median number of rooms per unit can be a useful measure of overall housing size, it is not always a good indicator of the number of bedrooms. For example, almost one-fourth of all housing units in Middlesex County have four bedrooms; in Arlington, two- and three-bedroom units represent over two-thirds of all housing units, and four-bedroom units make up just 16.4 percent.

Not surprisingly, Arlington’s older, higher-density neighborhoods have smaller units while the less dense neighborhoods with newer, mostly single-family homes have larger units. Densities vary within Arlington, and neighborhood characteristics range from suburban to urban, offering a variety of housing sizes. The Turkey Hill and Morningside neighborhoods are the least densely developed and have the lowest population density (5,711 people per sq. mi.).² These neighborhoods also have the largest share of single family homes, the largest housing units, and the majority of Arlington’s newer homes. Arlington Center and the Menotomy Rocks and Jason Heights neighborhoods also have a sizeable share of Arlington’s larger homes. East Arlington’s neighborhoods tend to have the smallest and oldest units in Arlington, and the population density in these areas ranges from 11,000 to 13,000 people per sq. mi. In the Capitol Square area (Census Tract 3567.01), 70 percent of all housing units have two bedrooms or less. Over half the housing units around Brattle Square (Census Tract 3566.01) also have one or two bedrooms.³

¹ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Revenue (DOR), Division of Local Services (DLS), Municipal Data Bank.

² US Census 2010, DP-1.

³ ACS Five-Year Estimates, 2007-2011, DP-04.

Table 5.2. Number of Units in Structure by Census Tract (2011)

Housing Type	Town	Tract 3561	Tract 3563	Tract 3564	Tract 3565	Tract 3566.01	Tract 3566.02	Tract 3567.01	Tract 3567.02
Total housing units	20,017	1,455	2,452	2,971	2,909	2,182	1,720	3,192	3,136
1-unit, detached	8,445	219	501	2,229	1,815	1,102	934	341	1,304
1-unit, attached	1,140	147	379	59	94	51	48	163	199
2 units	5,156	899	744	352	486	228	455	1,441	551
3 or 4 units	1,268	137	423	78	72	88	92	277	101
5 to 9 units	625	34	102	0	88	90	53	107	151
10 to 19 units	973	19	164	26	121	326	19	186	112
20 or more units	2,403	0	139	220	233	297	119	677	718
Mobile home	7	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2007-2011, DP4

Table 5.3. Distribution of Housing by Year Built

	Construction Period						
Geography	2000-2011	1990-99	1980- 89	1970- 79	1960- 69	1950- 59	Pre-1950
ARLINGTON	3.3%	1.4%	2.7%	6.4%	10.0%	12.4%	63.8%
Belmont	2.6%	0.9%	1.5%	5.1%	4.6%	12.3%	73.1%
Cambridge	7.0%	4.7%	7.3%	8.7%	6.2%	4.4%	61.7%
Lexington	9.5%	6.0%	7.4%	8.9%	15.2%	22.5%	30.6%
Medford	4.8%	1.6%	7.8%	6.4%	5.3%	7.9%	66.1%
Somerville	3.1%	1.8%	4.3%	6.3%	4.4%	5.1%	75.0%
Winchester	3.8%	6.4%	7.9%	5.8%	12.5%	14.6%	49.0%
Middlesex County	6.5%	6.5%	9.6%	10.4%	11.1%	12.4%	43.4%
Massachusetts	6.7%	7.3%	10.8%	11.7%	10.4%	11.5%	41.5%

Source: ACS 2007-2011, 5 Year Estimates, DP-04, B2503 & Arlington Assessor's Data 2013.

Housing Development Trends

Building Permits

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Arlington permitted 657 housing units between 2002 and 2012 (Table 5.4), or 3 percent of all units in town as of 2013. Like most towns, Arlington experienced a drop in single-family and two-family home permits following the recession. Still, multi-family permits remained strong, largely due to the redevelopment of the former Symmes Hospital (Arlington 360), and the former Brigham's Ice Cream factory (Brigham Square Apartments).⁴

Symmes Hospital Redevelopment. The Town of Arlington purchased the 100-year old Symmes Hospital property in 2001 after Advantage Health and the Lahey Clinic stopped operations there. The Town later sold the site to Arlington 360 LLC, and the property was developed jointly by Jefferson Apartment Group and

Upton & Partners. The project consists of 176 units: 146 apartments and thirty two- and three-story townhomes. Twenty-six of the apartments will be affordable to lower-income households and nine units will be affordable to households with incomes up to 120 percent of area median income (AMI). Occupancy of this project began in 2014.⁵

Brigham Square. In 2008, Wood Partners purchased the former Brigham's Ice Cream factory at 30-50 Mill Street after the property fell into foreclosure. The project involved demolition of the 85,000 sq. ft. industrial building and replacing it with 116 residential units (18 studio, 35 one-bedroom and 63 two-bedroom units), with 15 percent reserved for lower-income households.⁶ Occupancy began in 2013. Intercontinental

⁴ Town of Arlington, Inspectional Services, <http://arlserver.town.arlington.ma.us/buildingpermits/>.

⁵ Jefferson Apartment Group & Upton + Partners, <http://livearlington360.com/>.

⁶ Alta Brigham Square, <http://www.altabrighamsquare.com/brigham-square>.

Real Estate Corporation bought the property in December 2013.

Regional Trends

There is a considerable amount of new housing development in communities around Arlington. Approximately 1,300 units have been permitted near the Alewife MBTA Station in North Cambridge, and several projects have been proposed in Belmont as well.

The Residences at Alewife/ Vox on Two (North Cambridge).

Criterion Development Partners built 227 new housing units on a site along Route 2 that had been vacant for approximately twenty years. Upon completion, the project will include twenty-five studios, 131 one-bedroom units, and 71 two-bedroom units, with 34 units reserved for lower-income households.⁷

The Altmark (North Cambridge). Cabot, Cabot & Forbes is developing 428 units in two five-story buildings on a 4.5-acre site at 70 Fawcett Street.⁸ The project consists of 55 studio apartments, 217 one-bedroom units, and 157 two-bedroom units.⁹ The first phase has been completed with 260 units. Phase two will include the remaining 168 units. The developers expect to finish the project in 2015. This site was formerly occupied by two low-rise office buildings.

160-180 Cambridgepark Drive (North Cambridge). Construction of a 445,000 sq. ft. podium-style apartment building began on this site in December 2012. Upon completion (estimated for 2015), the project will

Table 5.4. Number of Residential Units Permitted (2002-2012)

Geography	Year					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
ARLINGTON	44	70	68	71	69	48
Belmont	4	11	15	48	42	3
Cambridge	45	22	81	996	54	611
Lexington	72	61	65	65	55	91
Medford	11	24	14	16	16	13
Winchester	99	91	98	23	32	31
Middlesex County	2,841	3,388	3,806	6,129	3,358	4,275
Geography	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
ARLINGTON	52	33	53	60	89	657
Belmont	15	2	15	43	27	225
Cambridge	36	11	38	34	392	2,320
Lexington	60	52	83	61	97	762
Medford	4	(n/a)	2	2	3	105
Winchester	24	15	18	50	49	530
Middlesex County	2,005	1,642	2,109	1,823	2,928	34,304

Source: Censtats 2013

offer 398 one- and two-bedroom units, with 46 affordable units for lower-income households.

165 Cambridgepark Drive (North Cambridge). This 2.76 acre site was formerly occupied by a warehouse building, an office building, and surface parking. The site is currently being redeveloped by Hines as a 280,000 sq. ft. apartment building. The building will contain 244 units, of which there will be 9 three-bedroom units, 74 two-bedroom units, 117 one-bedroom units, and 44 studios. Twenty-eight of the units will be designated as “affordable housing”. The site will be served by 230 parking spaces. Construction is expected to be complete in 2015.¹⁰

Residences at Acorn Park, Belmont Uplands (Belmont/Cambridge). O’Neill Properties Group will build 299 apartments on a 15.6-acre site in Belmont (about three acres of the site lie in Cambridge). The development will include four five-story buildings with 159 one-bedroom units, 116 two-bedroom units, and twenty-four three-bedroom units. Sixty apartments will be reserved for lower-income households.

⁷ Metropolitan Area Planning Council, Development Database, <http://dd.mapc.org/projects/detail/1550/>

⁸ Mark Levy, “Project will add 429 apartments at Alewife, developer says,” *Cambridge Day*, November 16, 2011, <http://www.cambridgeday.com/2011/11/16/project-will-add-429-apartments-at-alewife-developer-says/>

⁹ Cabot, Cabot & Forbes, <http://atmarkapts.com/>

¹⁰ DiMella Shaffer, Planning Board Special Permit 272 Plans, www.cambridgema.gov/~media/Files/CDD/sp272_plans.ashx

	Total housing units	Vacant housing units	Owner-occupied	Renter-occupied	Household size (owner)	Household size (renter)
ARLINGTON	20,017	1,010	59.6%	40.4%	2.48	1.86
Tract 3561	1,455	88	47.9%	52.1%	2.36	2.20
Tract 3563	2,452	73	34.0%	66.0%	2.30	2.03
Tract 3564	2,971	134	77.3%	22.7%	2.69	1.74
Tract 3565	2,909	95	73.5%	26.5%	2.65	1.53
Tract 3566.01	2,182	232	68.6%	31.4%	2.34	1.51
Tract 3566.02	1,720	13	76.4%	23.6%	2.53	1.67
Tract 3567.01	3,192	195	34.8%	65.2%	2.30	1.86
Tract 3567.02	3,136	180	64.9%	35.1%	2.31	1.97

Source: ACS 2007-2011, DP-04

Housing Market

Tenure and Occupancy

Arlington's homeownership rate (58 percent) is on par with that of Middlesex County and the state as a whole, but lower than in many of Boston's outer suburbs. Arlington and other inner-suburban communities tend to have more renters because they have a historic development pattern with a larger inventory of multi-family units. However, since 1980, the homeownership rate in Arlington has slowly increased, climbing by about 2.5 percent between 2000 and 2010. This trend is not consistent across all of Arlington, as neighborhoods with more multi-family housing tend to have more renters. For example, the Capitol Square area (Tract 3567.01) has the largest number of multi-family units and the second largest percentage of renter-occupied units (Table 5.5). Many new residents have arrived in Arlington since 2000. According to the ACS, over half of the people living in Arlington in 2010 moved into their present home after 2000. The highest residential turnover rates occurred in neighborhoods with more multi-family homes, including Brattle Square, College Streets, and Capitol Square. Morningside, Turkey Hill, and neighborhoods bordering Lexington, with mostly single-family homes, have the highest rate of long-term residents.

Housing Values

The ACS estimates Arlington's median 2011 owner-occupied housing value at \$496,000.¹¹ This includes both single-family homes and condominiums. More recently, the Warren Group reports the 2013 median single family home sold for \$550,000, a 10 percent increase over 2011. Arlington's housing val-

ues modestly exceed Somerville and Medford, but fall noticeably below those of Belmont, Lexington, and Winchester (Table 5.6). Looking at a more regional perspective, average housing values in Arlington are 21 percent higher than in Middlesex County, and 44 percent higher than in Massachusetts.¹²

Most cities and towns around Arlington experienced a significant rise in housing values from 2000 to 2010. A 40 percent increase in the median value was fairly common. However, Arlington experienced more dramatic growth in housing values than any community in the immediate area, except Somerville. In fact, Arlington's home values almost doubled.

Median housing values indicate the midpoint of all housing values in a given community. Further analysis of ACS data reveals that fewer than 10 percent of owner-occupied housing units in Arlington are valued at \$300,000 or less while 75 percent are valued at \$400,000 or more, and half of those at over \$500,000. Within Arlington, home values differ by neighborhood. Arlington Center has the highest median value of owner-occupied units (\$558,900), while the College Streets area has the lowest median home value (\$443,600).¹³ This difference reflects housing typology, age, size, and quality of housing stock, and specific neighborhood amenities, and urban design.

Housing Sales

Most communities in the region witnessed a decline in housing sale prices during the most recent recession period, but in Arlington they actually increased by 3.1

¹¹ American Community Survey 2007-2011, 5 Year Estimates, B25075.

¹² American Community Survey 2007-2011, 5 Year Estimates, B25075.

¹³ American Community Survey 2007-2011, 5 Year Estimates, DP-04.

percent between 2006 and 2012. Since 2000, sales prices have risen 31 percent (Table 5.7). However, while sales prices remained strong, the recession did trigger a drop in overall sales activity in the town. At the macro scale, the number of sales in Arlington has remained fairly consistent for the past 25 years. Between 1987 and 2012, there were an average of 609 per year. The proportion of single-family and condominium sales fluctuates, but in the same 25 years, an average of 317 single family homes and 184 condominiums sold each year in Arlington.¹⁴

Market Rents

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Arlington has 7,349 renter-occupied housing units. The median household size for renters is 1.86 people, with most renters living in one- or two- bedroom units. In 2011, Arlington’s median gross rent, \$1,318, represented a 29.1 percent increase over 2000 (Table 5.8). This increase is similar or lower than most adjacent communities, and below both county and state rates of change.

According to a market rent survey in 2013, in the two years since the latest census figures, Arlington’s market rents rose even higher (Table 5.9). Area rental prices are also affected by the large number of non-family households that are composed of university students and young, single professionals. These households – especially students – typically involved shared housing and often have rents on a per-bedroom basis. As a result, they effectively inflate the rents for larger units beyond the reach of most family households. In addition, most of the region’s new “luxury” apartment complexes generally provide studio, one- and two-bedroom units, and rarely offer three-bedroom units.

Table 5.6. Change in Median Value of Owner-Occupied Units 2000-2010

Geography	2000	2011	% Change
ARLINGTON	283,800	496,000	74.8%
Belmont	450,000	632,400	40.5%
Cambridge	398,500	546,900	37.2%
Lexington	417,400	687,100	64.6%
Medford	226,800	392,600	73.1%
Somerville	214,100	447,000	108.8%
Winchester	421,800	690,600	63.7%
Middlesex County	247,900	410,100	65.4%
Massachusetts	185,700	343,500	85.0%

Source: ACS 2007-2011, B20575. US Census 2000, H076.

Table 5.7. Housing Sale Prices, Number of Sales, and Percent Change: 2000-2012

Geography	Median Sale Price			% Change 2000-2012
	2000	2006	2012	
ARLINGTON	\$320,000	\$450,000	\$464,500	45.2%
Belmont	\$435,500	\$637,000	\$622,200	42.9%
Cambridge	\$340,000	\$452,750	\$487,000	43.2%
Lexington	\$452,000	\$644,900	\$675,000	49.3%
Medford	\$250,000	\$389,000	\$349,900	40.0%
Somerville	\$315,000	\$392,500	\$424,000	34.6%
Winchester	\$399,000	\$634,500	\$655,700	64.3%
Middlesex County	\$260,000	\$390,000	\$372,930	43.4%
Geography	Number of Sales			% Change 2000-2006
	2000	2006	2012	
ARLINGTON	609	699	661	8.5%
Belmont	274	321	408	48.9%
Cambridge	1,098	1,372	1,311	19.4%
Lexington	436	475	591	35.6%
Medford	656	737	703	7.2%
Somerville	703	961	895	27.3%
Winchester	372	340	337	-9.4%
Middlesex County	22,908	21,624	19,880	-13.2%

Source: The Warren Group 2013, Town Stats

Foreclosures

The U.S. housing market has been in a boom-and-bust cycle for over a decade. Following several years of rising home values and record growth in conventional and subprime loans, the economy slumped in 2007 and many property owners went into default on their mortgages. Subprime loans were responsible for a disproportionate share of early foreclosures, but as the economy worsened, a vicious cycle of unemployment and falling housing values ensued. Many homeowners found themselves “underwater,” i.e., with mortgage loans that exceeded the market value of their homes. In Arlington, foreclosure activity peaked in 2010, with 47

¹⁴ The Warren Group 2013, Town Stats.

rental housing costs

Area rental prices are affected by the large number of non-family households composed of university students and young, single professionals. These households – especially students – typically involve shared housing and pay rents on a per-bedroom basis. As a result, they effectively inflate the rents for larger units beyond the reach of most family households.

Table 5.8. Median Gross Rents (2000-2011)

	2000	2011	% Change
ARLINGTON	\$934	\$1,318	29.1%
Belmont	\$1,141	\$1,616	29.4%
Cambridge	\$962	\$1,529	37.1%
Lexington	\$1,288	\$1,887	31.7%
Medford	\$819	\$1,328	38.3%
Somerville	\$874	\$1,355	35.5%
Winchester	\$1,031	\$1,366	24.5%
Middlesex County	\$835	\$1,243	32.8%
Massachusetts	\$684	\$1,037	34.0%

Source: ACS 2007-2011 DP-4, U.S. Census 2000 QT-H12

Table 5.9. Survey of Market Rents in Arlington and Surrounding Communities (2013)

Community	Development	Rent		Number of Bedrooms			
		Low	High	Studio	1 Br	2 Br	3+ Br
Arlington	Alta Brigham Square	\$2,000	\$3,265	X	X	X	
Arlington	Cedar Crest	\$1,400	\$1,876		X	X	
Arlington	Hamilton	\$1,195	\$1,750	X	X		
Arlington	Parkway Mystic Apts.	\$2,000	\$2,000			X	
Arlington	The Legacy	\$1,700	\$2,750		X	X	
Arlington	Individual Listings	\$1,025	\$5,000	X	X	X	X
Belmont	Individual Listings	\$1,155	\$5,500	X	X	X	X
Medford	Mystic Place	\$1,460	\$1,950		X	X	
Medford	Wellington Place	\$2,025	\$2,990		X	X	
Medford	Individual Listings	\$950	\$4,500	X	X	X	X
North Cambridge	The Altmark	\$2,020	\$3,224	X	X	X	
North Cambridge	Walden Park	\$1,975	\$2,445	X	X	X	
North Cambridge	Individual Listings	\$1,200	\$4,400	X	X	X	X
Somerville	Maxwell's Green	\$1,850	\$4,055	X	X	X	X
Somerville	Individual Listings	\$1,195	\$5,500	X	X	X	X

Source: Community Opportunities Group.

Table 5.10. Number of Residential Foreclosures

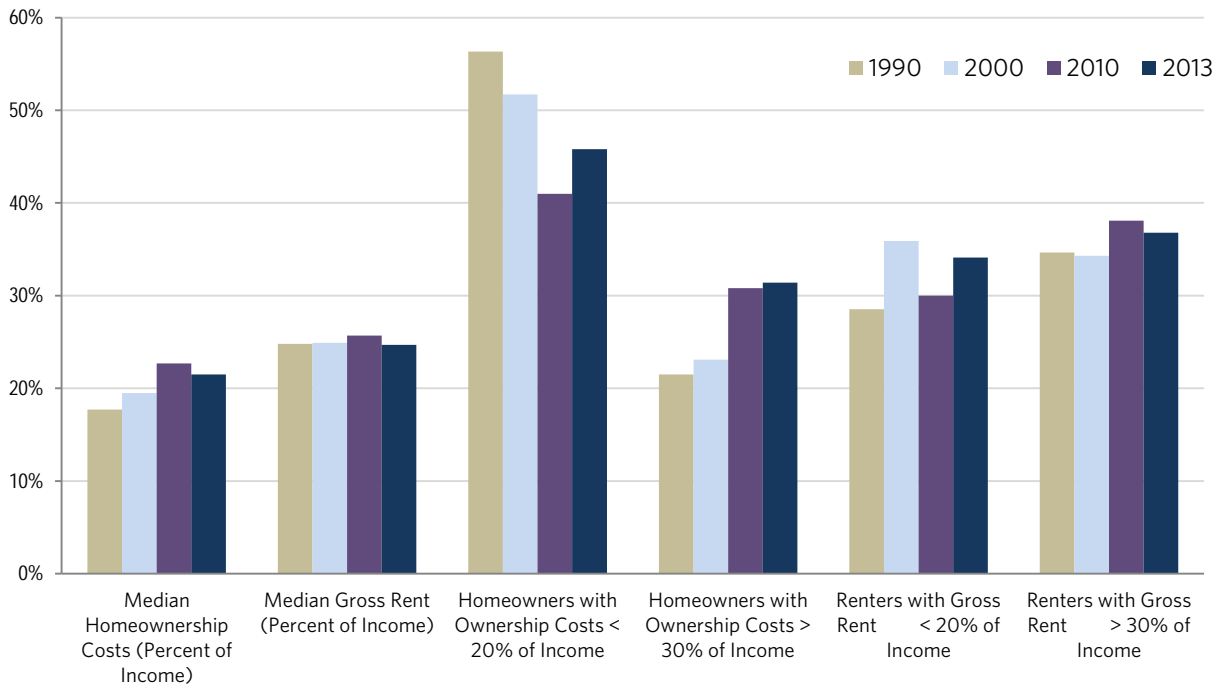
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
ARLINGTON	43	24	46	47	18	36
Belmont	23	19	19	20	12	12
Cambridge	84	57	94	59	27	26
Lexington	27	23	35	25	13	22
Medford	179	157	176	126	92	85
Somerville	160	123	155	119	58	56
Winchester	37	22	27	24	16	10
Middlesex County	4,618	3,633	4,470	3,657	1,896	2,537
Massachusetts	29,572	21,802	27,923	23,931	12,634	17,152

Source: The Warren Group, 2013

foreclosure activity

In Arlington, foreclosure activity peaked in 2010, with 47 foreclosure petitions filed by mortgage lenders (Table 5.10). For many Massachusetts cities and towns, including Arlington, foreclosures drastically declined in 2011, only to bounce up again in 2012.

Arlington Income & Housing Cost Trends, 1990 - 2013
 (Sources: 1990, 2000, American Community Survey, Arlington Planning Department)



foreclosure petitions filed by mortgage lenders (Table 5.10). For many Massachusetts cities and towns, including Arlington, foreclosures drastically declined in 2011, only to bounce up again in 2012.

Housing Affordability

Arlington has worked for many years to provide decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents who cannot afford to buy or rent market-rate units. “Affordable housing” means a monthly housing cost that does not exceed 30 percent of a lower-income household’s monthly gross income. For homeowners, “monthly housing cost” includes a mortgage payment, property taxes and house insurance, while for tenants it includes monthly rent and basic utilities. When lower-income households have to spend more than 30 percent of their monthly gross income on housing, they are considered housing cost burdened.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 32 percent of all households in Arlington spend more than 30 percent of their gross income on housing. However, not all of these households meet the definition of housing cost burden because many are middle- and upper-income homeowners and renters. Of Arlington’s 11,000 homeowners, approximately 1,270 (11 percent) have low or moderate incomes, and 81 percent of those are housing cost burdened. Moreover, half of Arlington’s

lower-income homeowners are severely cost burdened, i.e. households that spend over 50 percent of their income on housing costs. While the percentage of cost burdened low-income homeowners changed very little between 2000 and 2010, the percentage with severe housing cost burdens increased significantly, from about 30 percent to 49.8 percent. As for Arlington’s 7,445 renters, 3,250 (44 percent) have low or moderate incomes and almost 80 percent are housing cost burdened.

Affordability Mismatch

The picture of housing affordability is further complicated by affordability mismatch, a condition that exists when actually affordable units cannot meet a town’s affordable housing needs because people with higher incomes live in them. In Arlington, there are approximately 320 modest ownership units that would be affordable to low- or moderate-income homebuyers, but 82 percent are owned and occupied by households with middle or higher incomes.¹⁵ In addition, local assessor’s data indicate that in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, less than 1 percent of market-rate homes in Arlington were valued below \$280,000: a purchase price affordable to a family of four with earnings equal to

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) Data, Tables 8, 15A, and 15B.

the Metro Boston median income (\$94,400).¹⁶ Almost 60 percent (4,415) of the rental units in Arlington have monthly rents that qualify as affordable under HUD's rent limits, but only 58 percent of them (2,575 units) are occupied by low- or moderate-income tenants. Moreover, in many cases households with very low incomes live in apartments that are affordable to moderate-income renters. This means that a community's affordable housing units are not necessarily affordable to the owners or renters who live in them.

Chapter 40B

Chapter 40B is a state law that allows qualified developers to apply to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) for a single comprehensive permit for multi-family construction that includes affordable housing.¹⁷ When less than 10 percent of a community's housing is restricted for occupancy by lower-income households at prices they can afford, Chapter 40B all but requires the approval of comprehensive permit applications. In this calculation, the numerator includes affordable units eligible for the Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI), and the denominator is based on the total number of year-round housing units in the most recent decennial census (2010). Until the next federal census (2020), Arlington's 10 percent statutory minimum means an affordable housing target of 1,999 units.¹⁸ As of January 2014, Arlington has 1,121 affordable units, or 5.6 percent of its Census 2010 total. This is well short of the number of units that would allow

¹⁶ US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2013, Income Limits System.

¹⁷ A comprehensive permit is a type of unified permit: a single permit that replaces the approvals otherwise required from separate city or town permitting authorities and requires one single permit from the local Zoning Board of Appeals. Under Chapter 40B, the Zoning Board of Appeals may approve, conditionally approve, or deny a comprehensive permit, but in communities that do not meet the 10 percent minimum, developers may appeal to the state Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). Although comprehensive permits may still be granted after a town achieves the 10 percent minimum, the HAC no longer has authority to overturn a local board's decision.

¹⁸ As of Census 2010, Arlington has a total of 20,017 housing units and 19,881 year-round units.

Table 5.11. Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory

Community	Census 2010 Year-Round Units	Total Development Units	SHI Units*	SHI %
ARLINGTON	19,881	1,323	1,121	5.6%
Belmont	10,117	388	388	3.8%
Cambridge	46,690	7,181	7,091	15.2%
Lexington	11,946	1,515	1,334	11.2%
Medford	23,968	1,680	1,642	6.9%
Somerville	33,632	3,228	3,216	9.6%
Winchester	7,920	199	152	1.9%
Massachusetts	2,692,186	276,010	247,059	9.2%

Source: Mass. Department of Housing and Community Development.

the ZBA to reject an unwanted comprehensive permit application.

Communities can also satisfy Chapter 40B requirements if at least 1.5 percent of their land area is developed for affordable housing. Arlington is closer to reaching this threshold than it is to attaining the 10 percent statutory minimum of affordable housing units. According to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the agency that administers Chapter 40B, only two towns have met the 1.5 percent land area threshold. Because the land area calculation is less exact than calculating units, denial of a permit under that provision requires a hearing before the State Housing Appeals Committee (HAC) - the state body that has power to overturn a local board's comprehensive permit decision.

Table 5.11 shows that two of Arlington's neighbors, Cambridge and Lexington, exceed the 10 percent SHI minimum, and that Somerville is very close (9.6 percent). Most of Arlington's SHI units were created without Chapter 40B comprehensive permits. In fact, Arlington has only seen one comprehensive permit development that included four affordable units. All of Arlington's affordable housing has long-term deed restrictions that keep the units affordable in perpetuity or for either 30 or 50 years. Forty-one of Arlington's units have affordable housing restrictions that will expire in the 2030s unless the owners renew with a housing subsidy program or the Town uses its own funds to purchase restrictions.

Inclusionary Zoning

In 2001, Arlington adopted an inclusionary zoning bylaw: a requirement that in any development of six or more units, 15 percent must be made affordable to low- and moderate-income households. The units

are sold or rented through a lottery conducted by the Town or the developer. Units are reserved for first-time homebuyers or renters who meet income eligibility requirements and, in the case of for-sale units, have successfully completed a homebuyer education program. Since its inception, the inclusionary zoning bylaw has created fifty-three units of affordable housing: eleven for-sale units and forty-two rental units.¹⁹ Examples of projects that recently triggered the inclusionary zoning bylaw include Brigham Square and the Symmes Hospital /Arlington 360 redevelopment projects.

Housing Corporation of Arlington

The Housing Corporation of Arlington (HCA) was formed in 1986 to provide affordable housing for Arlington residents affected by rising housing costs. In its early years, HCA offered down payment assistance to first-time homebuyers with moderate incomes. In 2001 HCA began purchasing and rehabilitating properties and offering them as affordable rental units. The Town of Arlington has allocated federal grant funds to support the HCA's acquisition-rehabilitation efforts. Today, the HCA owns and manages ninety affordable rental units in multiple locations.²⁰ Thirty of these units are two-family homes and sixty are in larger rental properties. In addition, the HCA operates a Homelessness Prevention Program that provides rent or security deposit subsidies to income-eligible, qualified households living in Arlington.

Federal Housing Grants

Arlington uses two federal grant sources to support the creation and preservation of affordable housing. As an "entitlement" grantee, Arlington receives Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development every year. The Town uses a portion of its CDBG funding to subsidize acquisition and development of affordable housing. Another portion is used to capitalize a home improvement loan program for homeowners and residents of one- to four-unit buildings, and to support development of affordable rental units. In addition, Arlington belongs to a consortium of eight cities and towns that participate in the federal HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME). The North Suburban HOME Consortium, based in Malden, makes HOME

funds available to member communities for housing rehabilitation, lead paint abatement, and rental development, and also administers a down payment assistance and homebuyer education program. Arlington has used HOME funds to support rental development and a first-time homebuyer assistance program. Since the HCA qualifies as a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) under federal HOME regulations, it has direct access to a portion of the Consortium's HOME dollars and has used those funds to acquire and rehabilitate affordable rental units in Arlington.

Arlington Housing Authority

The Arlington Housing Authority (AHA) owns and operates 175 units of affordable family housing and over 500 units of elderly housing. AHA also oversees and administers state and federal rental subsidy programs and offers a limited amount of special needs housing.²¹

Family Housing. AHA offers 175 two- and three-bedroom units at Menotomy Manor in East Arlington. Veterans, current Arlington residents, and families with no other form of assistance receive preference for available units. Menotomy Manor is currently being modernized with improvements to building envelopes including new insulation and new siding.

Elderly and Disabled Housing. AHA owns and manages four public housing developments for the elderly and people with disabilities. Priority goes to Arlington residents, victims of natural disasters, people displaced by government programs, and the homeless. The developments include Winslow Towers (1971), 132 one-bedroom units; Chestnut Manor (1965), 100 one-bedroom units; Cusack Terrace (1983), sixty-seven one-bedroom units, with five wheelchair accessible units; and Drake Village Complex (1961), 216 units, with seven wheelchair accessible units. Millbrook Square is another property that provides housing options for low income, elderly, and disabled residents. It is privately owned and managed by Corcoran Jennison Management, LLC.

Tenant Assistance. AHA administers the HUD Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program and the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP). Both programs provide a "gap" subsidy that makes it possible for income-eligible households to rent market-rate units. The tenants pay 30 percent (or more) of their monthly gross income toward rent and the AHA makes up the difference.

¹⁹ Laure Wiener (Director of Housing, Town of Arlington, MA), email message to Community Opportunities Group, Inc., September 11, 2013.

²⁰ Housing Corporation of Arlington, 2013. <http://www.housing-corporation.org/>.

²¹ Arlington Housing Authority, 2013. <http://arlingtonhousing.org/>.

Special Needs Housing. AHA sponsors a residential home for thirteen developmentally disabled adults. There are approximately 113 housing units in Arlington designated for people with special needs, most administered by AHA.

Single Room Occupancy Housing. Arlington has two projects that house low-income single person households, with shared kitchen and baths. These properties are owned and operated by Caritas Communities, contain 37 units, and are an important part of the affordable housing inventory.

Group Homes

Arlington's SHI includes 81 units in group homes for adults with severe disabilities.²² They include fifty-five units overseen by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and twenty-six units administered by the Department of Mental Health (DMH). Arlington also has private group homes and mental health treatment facilities, such as those administered by the AHA, but only units under a DDS or DMH contract "count" toward the 10 percent SHI calculation as per Chapter 40B.

Housing Quality

At first glance, Arlington does not appear to have many units with housing quality problems such as substandard construction, energy inefficiency, incomplete cooking or plumbing facilities, or over-occupied living conditions. However, data from the U.S. Census Bureau and local health department indicate that such units do exist. According to a special report that HUD produces from census records, about 5 percent of Arlington's lower-income renters (160) have housing problems other than excessive housing costs. Sanitary code deficiencies and crowded units appear to comprise most of the housing quality problems in Arlington's rental stock.²³

Facilities for the Elderly

In addition to the elderly housing provided by the AHA, Corcoran Jennison owns 176 elderly subsidized independent living units at Millbrook Square on Mill Street. Sunrise Senior Living in Arlington provides market rate assisted living, independent living, memory care, short term stays, companion living, and hospice care for elderly and disabled adults. A sixty-unit assisted living

residence called Brightview has recently opened at the former Symmes Hospital site. The Council on Aging reports that wait lists for affordable properties serving the elderly and disabled have increased significantly as of late.

Issues and Opportunities

Communities influence the make-up of their population through the choices they make to control housing growth. In Arlington, many residents say the town's historic housing affordability has been essential for keeping it an economically diverse place. When asked why they decided to purchase or rent in Arlington, residents new and old often say they found decent housing they could afford in a region that has become increasingly expensive. However, long-term residents often note that as the quality of Arlington's housing has improved over time, the town has also lost some of its affordability. The good news for Arlington homeowners is that the value of their homes has increased significantly. The bad news—at least to some residents—is that Arlington's rising home values make it more difficult to preserve the social mix that many people characterize as one of its strengths.

The concerns and disagreements about housing in Arlington are similar to those heard elsewhere in the Boston Metro area. However, addressing these issues in Arlington involves the challenge of improving and/or supplying housing in a built-out, urban area. Arlington does have development opportunities, but successfully pursuing them will require agreement about basic policy issues that seem to be in dispute.

Multifamily Conversions. Under Arlington's Zoning Bylaw (ZBL), special permits can be granted for residential use in the business districts. As land once occupied by car dealerships and other businesses became available for new development, housing proposals were approved, effectively reducing the amount of land devoted to nonresidential activity—and the amount of property generating commercial tax revenue. This process continues to raise concern among those residents who fear the loss of commercial properties will increase the tax burden on residential properties. They want to curb conversions and maintain the commercial tax base.

Vacant Land. Arlington has very little vacant land left for new housing construction or for any other need, e.g., public facilities and recreation areas. Two large

²² Department of Housing and Community Development, Subsidized Housing Report (Arlington), August 27, 2013.

²³ HUD, CHAS Data; Arlington Health Department.

sites that are developable include “Poet’s Corner” at Dow Avenue and Route 2 and a large property adjacent to Thorndike Field near Alewife Station. The Dow Avenue/Route 2 site is zoned single-family residential like most of the surrounding neighborhood. However, this 6.4 acre property may have the potential for higher density or nonresidential development given its proximity to the highway. Some residents support prioritizing the land for open space and recreation needs. The other site, near Alewife, is zoned with a Planned Unit Development (PUD). However, the property lies almost entirely in a 1-percent flood zone, and many believe the land should remain unbuilt or largely undeveloped for environmental reasons.

Small Vacant Lots. The small vacant lots located within established residential neighborhoods came up repeatedly in focus groups and public meetings. By and large, neighbors do not want to see these lots developed. Some are legally buildable lots, and others become buildable with partial or total demolition. Some thought should be given to controlling the size and scope of development in existing residential neighborhoods.

Mixed-Use Development. In the development of this master plan, residents have expressed the desire for the Town to promote mixed-use development in the business districts. They cite advantages such as bringing more people within walking distance of stores and restaurants, incentivizing redevelopment and increasing business district property values, creating affordable housing opportunities, and reducing dependence on single-occupancy vehicle trips to meet basic household needs. To make mixed-use projects realistic, however, Arlington would have to allow a maximum height greater than thirty-five feet in order to have attractive, marketable buildings over three stories with ground-floor business uses. Some opponents to height increases, however, say Arlington is already over-built and too dense. Off-street parking policies will also need to be reformed to be in line with more urban commercial planning practices. The economic strain of underground parking on small sites will discourage investors, and there is likely less need for excessive parking in a more walkable, transit accessible environment.

Affordable Housing Development. Arlington has effectively used its inclusionary zoning and federal housing funds to create a fair amount of affordable housing. If Arlington reaches the 1.5% general land area mini-

um under Chapter 40B, it would not have to grant comprehensive permits in the future as long as it does not lose any of the affordable units on qualifying land. In 2014 Arlington seems close to achieving the 1.5% land area threshold. However, the state will not make an official determination about Arlington’s land area status unless the Town receives a comprehensive permit application and denies it. This puts the Town in a difficult position because it would have to take the legal risks that come with denying a comprehensive permit in order to demonstrate that it actually complies with the statute. The Town can instead identify sites that would be likely 40B candidates and prepare for this outcome.

Elderly Housing. Changing demographics will result in a growing number of Arlington residents over the age of 65 in coming years. The Town may not be able to accommodate all of its older residents on fixed incomes in the coming years.

Teardowns and “Mansionization”. High residential real estate values has led to demolition of smaller scale houses and their replacement with large houses out of scale with the existing neighborhood. Changes to setback requirements and floor area ratios might be considered to control the size and scale of replacement housing.

Recommendations

1. **Plan for Affordable Housing.** Create an Affordable Housing Plan (Housing Production Plan) and submit to State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for approval.

The Town of Arlington’s last Housing Needs and Strategy plan was prepared in 2004. The Town should review it for current applicability, especially in light of the increase in young families moving to town. A housing production plan should take into consideration the needs of all demographics, including families, elderly, households with special needs, and households with low and moderate incomes.

2. **Use Local Resources for Affordable Housing.** Allocate Town resources to meet local needs and the State’s requirement for affordable housing under Chapter 40B while protecting neighborhood character. Resources include but are not limited to Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), federal

HOME funds, inclusionary zoning, local non-profit housing developers, and Town-owned land.

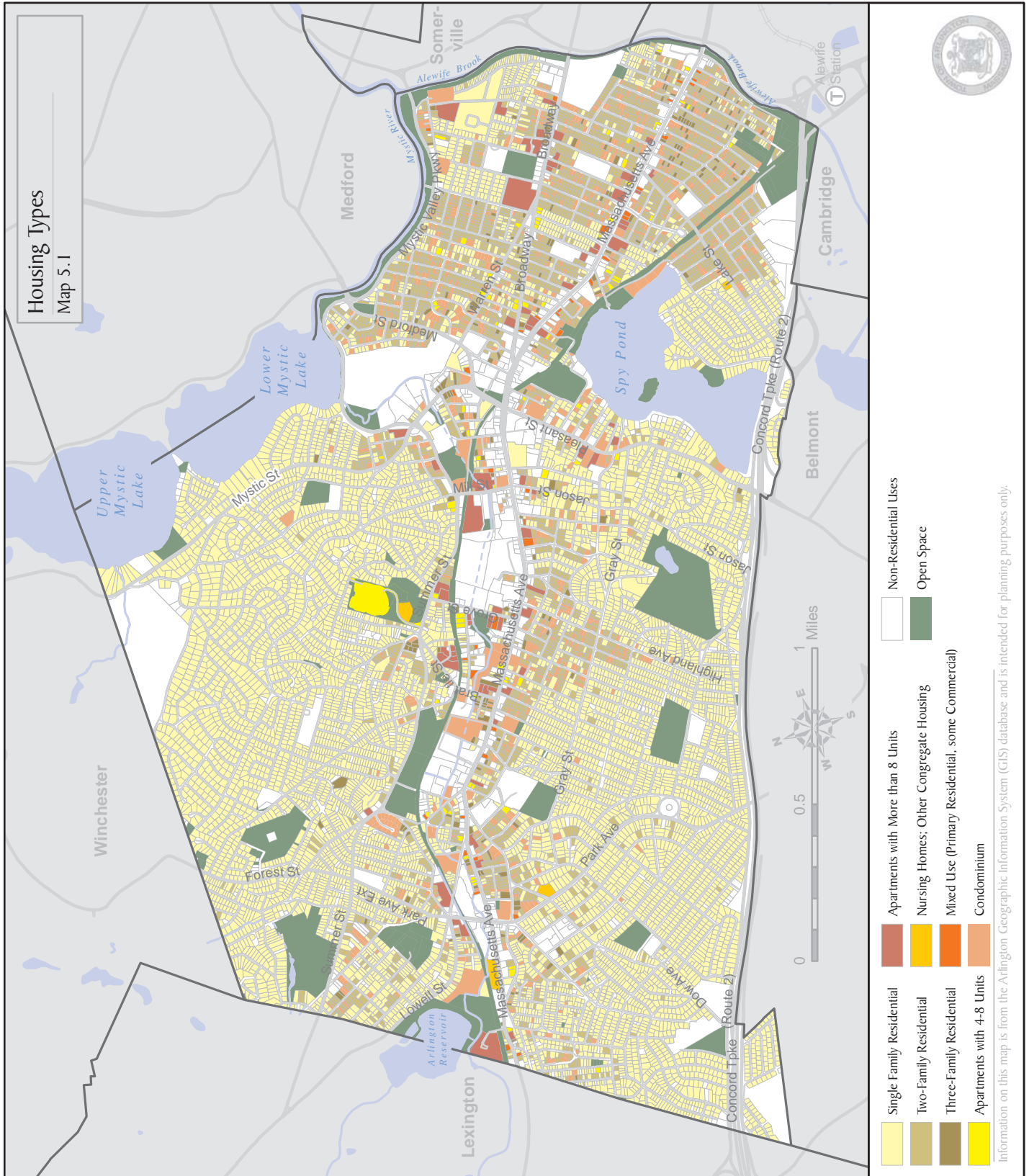
3. **Improve Housing Quality.** Address the quality and condition of aging housing stock, including offering financial assistance programs for homeowners and landlords.

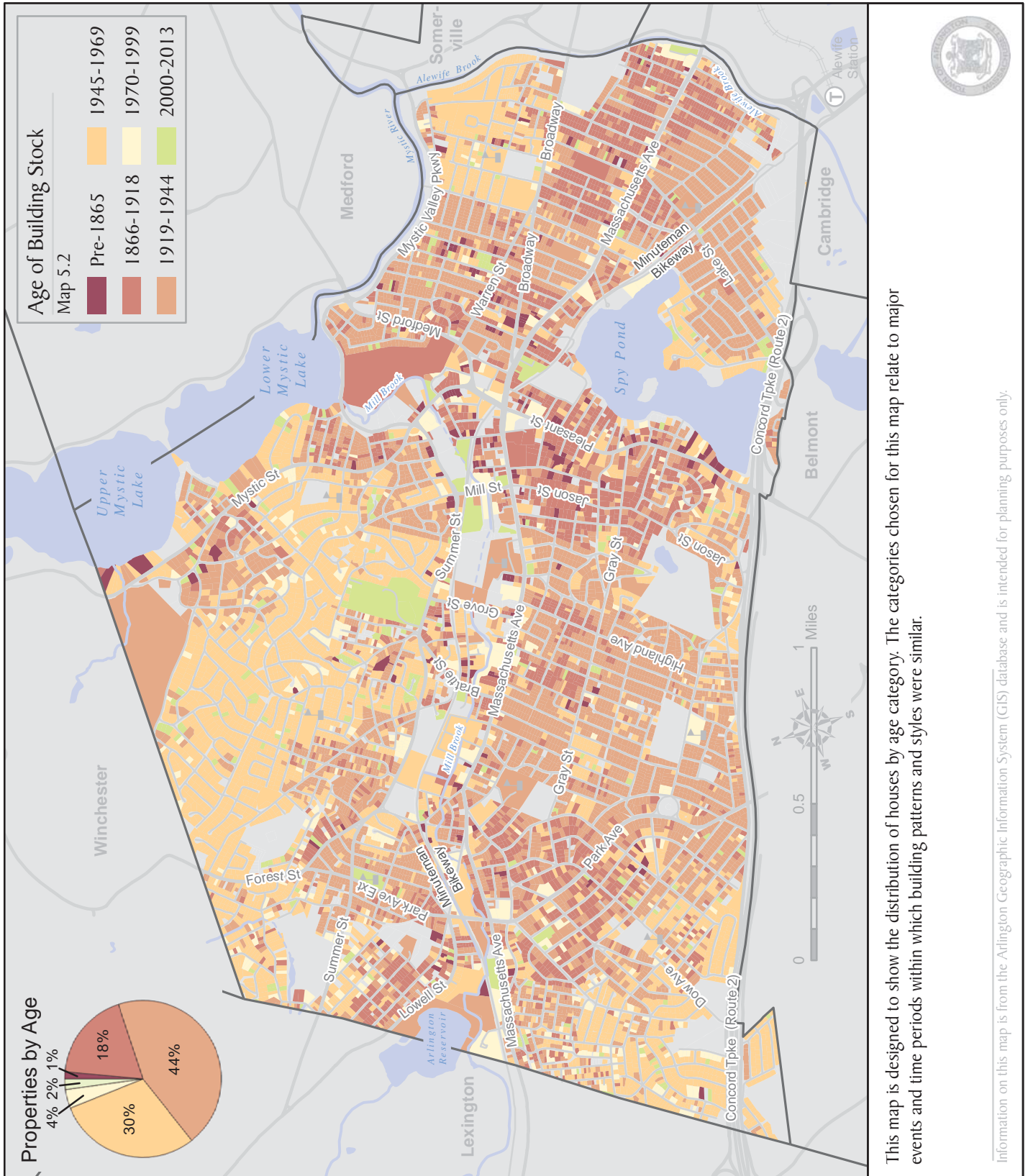
Improvements to the structure and aesthetics of one house on a block often spurs further investment on adjacent properties. Arlington should continue to provide housing rehabilitation assistance with its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocation in order to help moderate-income homeowners address substandard housing conditions. Currently the Town provides low-interest loans to correct code violations, remove lead paint, and weatherize to improve energy efficiency.

4. **Reconsider Parking Requirements.** Modify parking requirements to encourage multi-family housing and mixed use development in commercial areas.

The cost of parking is often the greatest hindrance to the economic feasibility of dense, urban developments. Minimum parking requirements should be modified for new mixed-use developments on Massachusetts Avenue and Broadway. These locations are well-served by public transit, and are close enough to commercial amenities and civic services so that the need for car use will be reduced.

5. **Study and plan for increasing the supply of smaller, over-55 active senior market-rate housing and for affordable/subsidized housing** to meet Arlington's population trends.





This map is designed to show the distribution of houses by age category. The categories chosen for this map relate to major events and time periods within which building patterns and styles were similar.

