

Arlington Housing Plan



HOUSING PLAN COMMUNITY FORUM

June 9, 2021
6:30-8:00pm



TOWN OF ARLINGTON

Planning & Community Development Department

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Housing Plan Implementation Committee

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AGENDA

Introductions

- Town Staff
- HPIC
- Consultant Team
- Participant Poll

Project Background

- Project Timeline
- Components of Plan
- Initial Observations

Discussion Groups

- Needs
- Challenges
- Opportunities

Regroup & Next Steps

- Online Questionnaire
- Fair Housing Community Conversation



TONIGHT'S PROCESS

Please keep your microphone on mute unless permitted by the meeting hosts and facilitators. We appreciate your cooperation!

You will have time during the breakout period to discuss a series of questions. We hope to offer "live" conversation, but if the groups are very large, you'll be able to comment in each breakout session's chat box.

Use the chat function to ask questions. (No debate, please.) We will do our best to keep an eye on the chat box and respond either during the meeting or in writing after the meeting. Your questions will be saved.

If you have more you want to say about the breakout session questions, we will provide a link to a "Google form" with the same questions so you can respond after the meeting. All comments received tonight or in the Google form will be considered.



PARTICIPANT POLL

Tell us about yourself!

Polling 1: Polling Questions

1. What is your favorite color?

Red

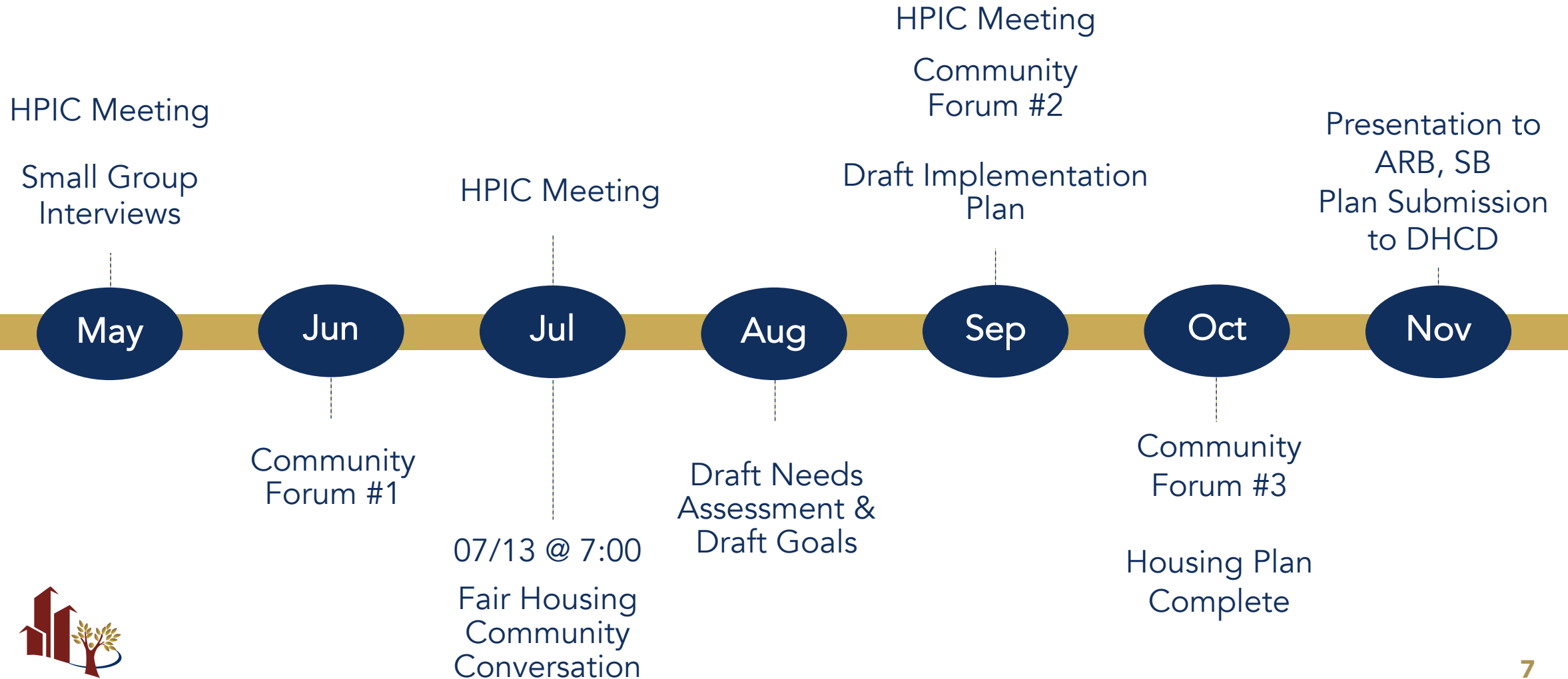
Green

Blue

You should see the Poll appear on your screen, like the sample above.



ANTICIPATED PROJECT TIMELINE



PLAN COMPONENTS

The Town has asked us to prepare a housing plan that:

Qualifies for approval by the Mass. Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD)

Is realistic in Arlington's market area

Helps to address needs for affordable housing

Is equitable across all income levels

Discourages concentrations of affordable housing in any one area



PLAN COMPONENTS

Housing Needs Assessment

- Demographics
- Housing stock
- Development constraints & plans to mitigate
- Infrastructure capacity

Housing Goals

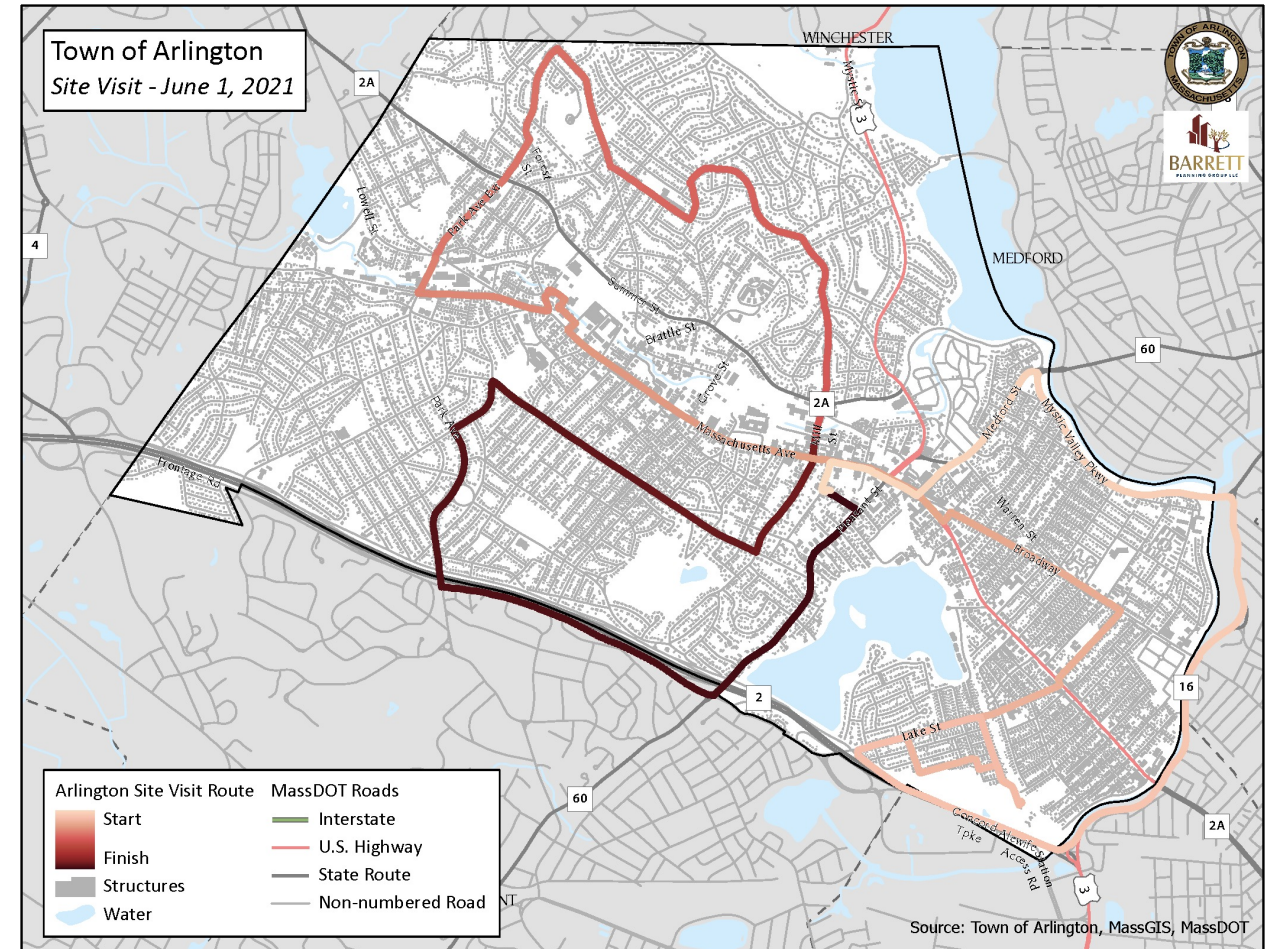
- Mix of housing types
- Housing production goals

Implementation Strategies

- Proposed zoning or policy changes
- Site identification for housing
- Desired characteristics of development
- Regional partnerships

WORK TO DATE

- Community Engagement Plan
- Met with HPIC
- Group Interviews: May 24-26
- Housing Plan Kick-Off Questionnaire
- Town Tour: June 1
- Preliminary Research
 - Demographic & Housing Data
 - Market Trends
 - Review of Existing Plans



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

ARLINGTON HOUSING PLAN



WE ASKED, “WHY ARLINGTON?”

Common or Notable Responses

- Proximity to Cambridge, Boston, Somerville
- Access to transit & bike path
- Walkability
- Schools
- Relative affordability compared to neighboring communities
- Most people said they would like to stay in Arlington
- Urban/suburban hybrid

“You get more bang for your buck compared to neighboring communities.”

“There is a balance of being close to Boston and Cambridge but also far enough to enjoy open space.”



WE ASKED, "WHAT HAS CHANGED OVER TIME?"

ARLINGTON HOUSING PLAN

Common or Notable Responses

- Arlington has become much less economically diverse
- Decreased sense of community
- Renovations & teardowns common as property values increase
- Increase in homelessness



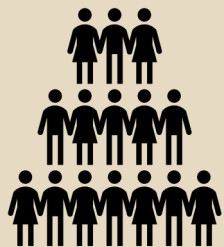
WE ASKED, "WHAT HAS CHANGED OVER TIME?"



"We're talking about three towns globbed into one."



"Every year you need a larger income to live here or need to be more willing to spend more of your income."



"The Town has become more economically similar. There used to be wider spread of income ranges, but this is slowly disappearing over 30 years."



WE ASKED ABOUT HOUSING NEEDS ...

Common or Notable Responses

- Housing affordable at 80% AMI (“We are not doing our share.”) and *deeply* affordable housing
- Homeownership for seniors to downsize
- Starter homes
- Condos or apartments for families
- “Missing stuff in the middle,” 6-plexes, smaller multi-family would be helpful.
- Smaller units within existing buildings
- Congregate housing
- Cooperative, cohousing, other models

“There is a bitterness that comes from living in Arlington all these years and being unable to afford to stay.”

There is a large unmet need for seniors. It is a constant theme.”

“Innovative housing options need to be explored.”

“More housing could be inserted as infill if zoning would allow smaller units within structure. ”



CONTINUED CONVERSATIONS

“We have over-constrained ourselves and we might do a little more by taking down barriers. It would be better to have performance standards, clear permitting, and fewer special permit requirements.”

“People go to hearings and say, ‘Why don’t developers make more affordable units?’ It’s a math problem that just doesn’t work.”

“We need to put those myths in the context of what you gain. You don’t end up with a tax negative, you don’t crowd schools, but you DO get business patrons and more diversity.”



CONTINUED CONVERSATIONS

"We can't expand the town's borders, so we must change the zoning."

"There is lot of misinformation about housing - that there is enough safety net for Arlington residents, but that isn't the truth."

"How many people's opinions are informed by actual resident stories?"

"People need a general history lesson in history of zoning in Arlington and around the country."



CHALLENGES: WE HEARD ...PRIMARILY REDEVELOPMENT



Development, particularly, housing, occurs through:

- Infill
- Teardowns
- Redevelopment of existing properties

Every change is visible throughout neighborhoods ... every teardown has neighbors



CHALLENGES: WE HEARD ... ENVIRONMENTAL ASSETS



Environmental assets and challenges

- 15% of Town area falls in 100- or 500-year flood zones.
- 11% of Town area is water or permanently protected open space.
- Arlington has some contaminated sites with activity & use limitations (AULs)*

*CORRECTED from 06/09/2021 presentation



CHALLENGES: WE HEARD ... INFRASTRUCTURE



Roads & Transportation: The Connect Arlington long-range plan will be done soon. Arlington continually works on roadway improvements. Strong bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Extensive MBTA bus service but should be expanded to help ease traffic.



Schools: Enrollment was predicted to peak in 2020. The Town continues to monitor it.



CHALLENGES: WE HEARD ... COST OF CONSTRUCTION/REGIONAL PRESSURES

Construction costs increased significantly over the past decade and skyrocketed over the past year.

Local, state, and federal housing subsidies matter more than ever.

But, subsidies are scarce.

Greater Boston job growth far exceeds housing growth, putting tremendous pressure on existing housing stock.



CHALLENGES: COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL ZONING

ARLINGTON HOUSING PLAN

We heard ...

- **Commercial:** Great potential for residential units in mixed-use additions above existing commercial buildings. But, zoning challenges exist: (parking, open space, setbacks, permitting process, etc.).
- **Industrial:** Recent efforts allow limited artist housing or live/work spaces in industrial zones. For both commercial and industrial zoning, the Town must balance the need for more housing/housing diversity with a need to maintain areas for commercial and industrial development to diversify the tax base (and rely less on residential property taxes).



CHALLENGES: RESIDENTIAL ZONING & DEVELOPMENT

We heard ...

Zoning is complex

Limited land zoned for mixed housing

Special permits

Building height

Minimum lot area per unit

Parking requirements



CHALLENGES: WE HEARD ... RESIDENTIAL ZONING & DEVELOPMENT

- **Open Space Requirements:** Existing open space requirements are designed for suburban style development on larger lots and can hinder infill and mixed-use development even though a majority of development opportunities exist along major commercial corridors.
- **Adjacency to Lower-Density Residential:** Zoning very sensibly provides height restrictions for development adjacent to lower-density zones. However, many of the areas of Town identified for housing diversity (along commercial corridors and other “smart growth” areas) abut lower-density properties, constraining development and redevelopment.



CHALLENGES: WE HEARD ... RESIDENTIAL ZONING & DEVELOPMENT

- **Environmental Design Review Special Permit:** The ARB plays an important role in planning, managing, and regulating development in Arlington, but the special permit process can add time, cost, and uncertainty.
- **Inclusionary Zoning (IZ):** Since 2001, requires 15% of units in certain developments to be affordable. While IZ helps integrate affordable housing, the Town's IZ could be adjusted to be more effective. Over the past 20 years, the bylaw has produced 62 affordable units (including three under construction).



BREAKOUT SESSIONS

ARLINGTON HOUSING PLAN



BREAKOUT SESSIONS

- Attendees will be assigned at random to breakout groups. We have several facilitators: Alexis, Nate, Jeff, Krista, Lena, and Fiona.
- Groups have a 2-minute warning to wrap up before we move attendees to the next breakout session.
- New random group assignments for each of the three sessions:
 - Housing Needs
 - Housing Challenges
 - Opportunities for Agreement
- Reconvened at the end for brief “next steps” from consulting team



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: NEEDS

1. We've heard suggestions for innovative housing solutions including live/work spaces for artists and entrepreneurs and congregate housing (e.g., with shared kitchen spaces). Are these opportunities worth exploring? What concerns do you have? (Artisan live-work is now permitted in the industrial district.)
2. To what extent is the community comfortable trading off commercial and industrial uses for residential uses (e.g. strictly residential buildings in commercial zones)? Is mixed-use commercial/residential a viable alternative?
3. We've heard many concerns about the housing needs of older adults. Can you help us understand more about the genesis of these needs? Are they significantly different than the needs of other types of households? How?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: CHALLENGES

1. Almost all new development in Arlington requires a tradeoff. Where, physically, can Arlington best support new housing development or redevelopment?
2. How should the Town prioritize the use of its Housing Trust Fund and the housing-related portion of its CPA funds? (e.g., direct support to AHA and non-profit developers? Financing for new construction? Purchase of existing buildings to be deed restricted as affordable housing?)
3. The current HPP acknowledges a lot of these challenges and includes a fairly comprehensive list of strategies to start tackling them. However, very few of these strategies have been implemented in the past 5 years. Help us understand what the challenges to implementation have been.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSENSUS

1. What steps would help to bring community together around provision of affordable housing? What could most people agree on?
2. How can the Town balance concerns about housing needs and natural resources protection?
3. How can the Town balance concerns about housing need and preserving Arlington's built environment?

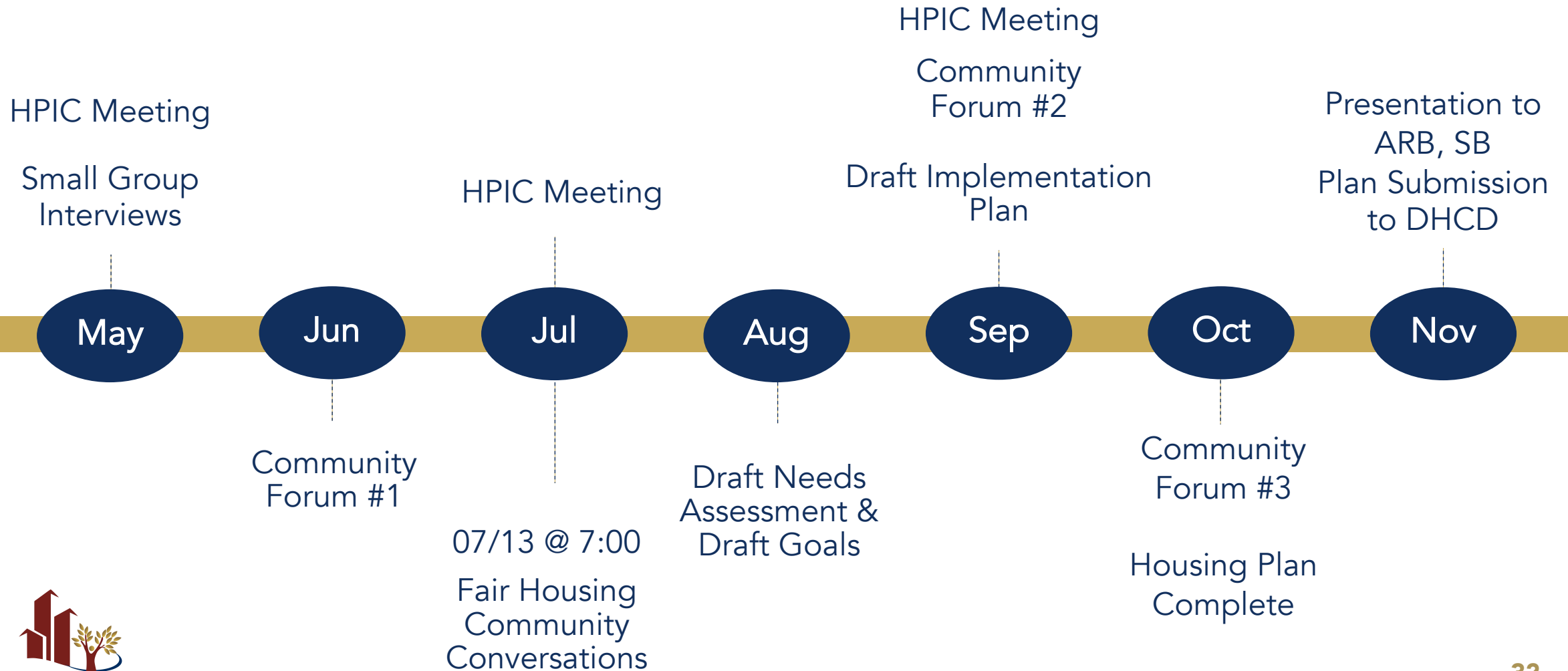


NEXT STEPS!

ARLINGTON HOUSING PLAN



ANTICIPATED PROJECT TIMELINE



THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!

ARLINGTON HOUSING PLAN

