

Summary of Results: Arlington Public Forum

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The Arlington Housing Production Plan: Public Visioning Forum was the first in a series of two public forums designed to engage residents in focused discussion about housing needs and opportunities in Arlington. The purpose of this first forum was to give participants context and information that would enable them to discuss and formulate ideas for housing goals.

Unbounded by feasibility constraints, participants were free to envision an ideal Arlington. Common themes of an ideal Arlington include:

- Communal living: Use Arlington's stock of large single family homes for cohousing, create new cohousing developments, and connect people in need of housing to those who are overhoused (particularly seniors)
- Mixed-use developments and neighborhoods: Change zoning to allow apartments over businesses, encourage housing development around business districts, and create small houses and developments on infill parcels

Workshop

The Public Forum took place on Tuesday, February 2, 2016 at the Arlington Senior Center from 7-9:15pm. Thirty-five (35) people attended; Advisory Committee members, representatives of local housing entities, and a Board of Selectman participated alongside fellow Arlingtonians.

The main objectives of the forum were the following:

1. Community input

This was a two-fold objective: the first objective was to get participants thinking about their own housing needs throughout their lives, where they have lived and how those homes served them at different times. The second was to generate discussion and goals about housing in Arlington and how the 2016 Housing Production Plan can best serve the changing needs of the community, with particular emphasis on increasing affordable housing options.

2. Information

This objective was to inform participants of the Town's intention to develop a Housing Production Plan (HPP) and explain how the HPP can influence the production and preservation of affordable housing in Arlington. In addition, to use income, housing price, and rental data to inform participants about how affordability and availability of housing is changing in Arlington. Lastly, the polling questions and presentation demonstrated the gaps in affordability in Arlington.

Methods

To achieve workshop objectives, JM Goldson facilitated interactive exercises that engaged workshop participants and fostered focused discussion. The workshop consisted of two group exercises, as well as group polling and small group discussions. Brief summaries of the results of each exercise are provided below with detailed summaries attached. In addition, Ms. Milchman of MAPC presented a snapshot of housing in Arlington including demographic, housing affordability, and availability data in Arlington.

Group Polling

Group polling enables workshop organizers to get a picture of who participants are. How long have they lived in Arlington? How old are they? Do they rent or own their homes? How do they perceive the affordability and availability of housing in the community? In addition, polling shows participants where they fit in the demographic make up of their community and tests their knowledge of housing issues.

Polling results show that 97% of participants currently live in Arlington and the majority (34%) moved there in the 1990s. Sixty-three percent of participants are aged 45-64, and 26% are 65 or older. Also, 70% own their homes and the remainder are renters.

Regarding the quiz questions geared to test knowledge, the majority of respondents chose correct answers to four of six questions. The biggest surprise to the participants were the following facts:

- In contrast to Boston metro area where 51% of housing units are renter occupied, only 38% of Arlington's housing units are renter occupied. (The majority of respondents thought 40-50% of housing units are renter occupied)
- The 2015 average rental listing for a one-bedroom apartment in Arlington is \$1,655/month. (The majority of respondents believed the average price for a one-bedroom apartment was \$1,555)

Discussion Groups

Group Discussion Exercise #1

Group exercise #1 was an ice breaker exercise that consisted of four questions designed to get participants talking about the types of homes they have lived in throughout their lives and what type of home they hope to live in someday, if different than their current homes.

The majority of respondents lives have followed a similar pattern of growing up in a single family, living in apartments as a student or young adult, and currently living in a single family home in Arlington. Some variations included living in a two or multi-family home as a child perhaps with extended family, and currently living in a rental unit in Arlington.

Many respondents expressed interest in continuing to live in Arlington as they age and with 63% of respondents aged 45-64 this is a mounting concern. Responses about aging in community varied from staying in a current home for as long as possible, moving to an

apartment or condo, to buying a two-family house. Some respondents mentioned Arlington's walkability as a factor in their desire to stay. One respondent shared her shock at the cost of housing after moving from New Jersey to be closer to her son and his family.

Group Discussion Exercise #2

Exercise #2 consisted of four questions designed to encourage "perfect world thinking," which frees participants to imagine an ideal community without worrying about feasibility. The first question asked participants to imagine this ideal community and the following three, to identify the elements that are necessary to enable Arlington to reach this ideal.

How can a great community be even better?

Participants repeated that they like Arlington the way it is- with distinct neighborhoods, walkable business districts, and access to public transportation. The following ideas emerged as people thought about how to make an already great community even better.

Along with reducing the number of teardowns of small homes, groups reported that they would like to see smaller homes built and that these be mixed throughout existing neighborhoods. Additionally, most groups favored creating mixed use developments or updating zoning by-laws to allow construction of apartments over shops and businesses. Participants expressed a desire to maintain the walkability of Arlington and to create "villages" throughout the Town so that all residents could enjoy that walkability and proximity to shops and businesses. Furthermore, one group noted that housing development should be concentrated along public transportation routes providing residents access to business districts. Participants also rejected the mandate to provide so much parking per unit of housing as it reduces the already limited amount of developable land in Arlington.

Every group reported that they were interested in creative group housing and cohousing options. For instance, create housing cooperatives with income eligibility requirements, support roommate coordination for overhoused seniors, encourage cohousing in individual homes with shared common areas, and allow accessory apartments. Groups expressed concern about how to house seniors and many supported the idea of creating multi-generational communities or developments where seniors would benefit from the proximity and assistance of younger people.

Groups echoed concern about a variety of environmental issues including protection of open space, wetlands and mature trees. In terms of housing development, participants identified the need to de-lead many homes as an issue of concern and expressed an interest in retrofitting existing homes and building new homes that are more energy efficient.

How can seniors age in community?

This question aimed to address the issue of Arlington's growing over-65 population. The following themes emerged:

Rehab, upkeep and assistance

- Retrofit homes so they are accessible to seniors
- Create a Town-approved list of contractors and handy people who can help with upkeep and rehab of senior's homes

Accessibility and walkability

- Create senior specific free in-town transportation.
- Create more places for seniors to gather for socializing and recreation.
- Maintain and improve sidewalks, mandate snow removal on sidewalks.
- Develop affordable senior housing in "villages," close to services and shops.

Reduction in cost of housing

- Lower property taxes for seniors.
- Encourage accessory apartments and granny pods.
- Provide a service that connects senior homeowners to roommates and/or other seniors in need of housing.

Barriers, Opportunities, and Compromises

Finally, groups thought about what barriers, opportunities, and compromises should be considered to help address local housing needs. Zoning and financing emerged as the two loci of barriers and opportunities.

Zoning

- Allow mixed-use development in particular, encourage apartments over businesses.
- Allow shared parking and reduce parking requirement per unit of housing.
- Develop small and modest housing rather than large luxury condo complexes.
- Identify underutilized sites for re-development.

Financing

- Provide assistance to first-time homebuyers, both technical and financial.
- Base tax rates on rental property profit not property value.
- Create tax incentives for owner-occupied housing.
- Create landlord property tax credit for keeping rents affordable.
- Assess a fee when a two- or three-family is converted to condos. These fees could be part of an affordable housing fund.

Appendix I: Summary of Group Exercise #1

Participants worked in pairs.

Exercise #1: What types of homes have you lived in throughout your life?

a) What type of home did you live in when you were a child? A small single-family house with your immediate family? A large house with extended family? An apartment building or an apartment over a shop? A two-family house?

b) How about when you came of age? Did you move out of your childhood home?

c) How about currently – what type of home do you live in now?

d) Do you anticipate or hope for another type of home in future stages of your life?

<i>Home Type</i>	<i>Childhood</i>	<i>Coming of Age</i>	<i>Currently</i>	<i>Future Home</i>
<i>Single Family</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>Two Family</i>	x	x	x	
<i>Multi Family</i>	x	x	x	
<i>Triple Decker</i>	x			
<i>Dorm</i>		x		
<i>Apartment</i>	x	x	x	x
<i>Condominium</i>			x	x
<i>Downsize to smaller home</i>				x
<i>Co-housing</i>				x
<i>Assisted Living</i>				x
<i>Affordable Senior Housing</i>				x

Some responses about future housing options:

- “I would just like to buy something so I don’t have to worry about the rent going up all the time.”
- “I hope to downsize.”
- “I don’t know where I’ll go once the kids have grown.”
- “I’ll stay in my home for as long as possible.”

Appendix II: Summary of Group Exercise #2

Participants worked in groups of five.

Arlington's 2015 Master Plan and associated working paper on housing raised several questions about housing issues. The discussion topics are drawn from the Master Plan and designed to help your group imagine and create a better housing future for your community.

1. Using perfect-world thinking, imagine that Arlington had a variety of housing options for a range of incomes, ages, family sizes, and needs. What would that be like? Describe what your group sees.

Table A:

- A range of housing for different incomes and family sizes
- More options for first-time home buyers
- More single-family houses
- More accessible housing
- Co-housing
- Family-sized apartments (3+ bedrooms)
- Small houses

Table B:

- Support roommate coordination for overhoused seniors
- Opportunities for seniors and young families to live in close proximity
- Allow more accessory apartments
- Have a wider variety and more diverse styles of new construction
- More housing near services: stores, groceries, post office, etc.

Table C:

- A range of price and size options so people can stay in town as their needs and budgets change
- Self-contained senior village
- Affordable apartments and small family-sized houses
- Maintain and modernize existing housing
- Tree houses!
- More density and co-housing
- Diverse commercial space and keep it local
- More size and price options within neighborhoods
- Even better public transportation
- More de-leaded, energy efficient homes

Table D:

- Land trust and mixed-use development

- Real estate transfer taxes
- Turn Arlington back to 40 years ago
- Co-housing
- CPA funded affordable housing

Table E:

- Farms and orchards
- More mixed-use on undeveloped land--housing and commercial
- Build 3-4 stories over single-story shops-shop on first floor, public school on second, apartments on third and fourth
- “Villages”-- make sure every neighborhood has nearby shops and retail

Table F:

- 10% of units be deed restricted affordable and managed by a non-profit
- Aging in place in accessible apartments
- Co-housing concept
- Shared housing for seniors
- Keep Arlington the way it is

Table G:

- Children of existing residents can afford to stay and live here
- More affordable units including rental, condo, low- and middle-income
- Additional opportunities to keep neighborhood character but more affordable
- Access to business districts--more housing density on public transit routes

2. To build on your vision from above, what type of housing should be available in Arlington that is not available today? How can this housing reinforce or complement the character of Arlington’s existing neighborhoods?

Table A:

- Mixed-use buildings with apartments above commercial space
- Houses with larger lots

Table B:

- Co-housing in individual homes with shared spaces
- Restrict conversion of apartments to condos
- Granny pods
- Rooming houses
- More housing above commercial property
- A gathering place in Arlington Heights

Table C:

- Affordable housing in mixed-use development and small affordable homes within neighborhoods
- Fresh air and green space
- Protected senior community
- Mixed-use and mixed-income within neighborhoods and developments
- Mixed-age
- Co-housing for different ages and incomes

Table D:

- Cooperatives with income eligibility requirements
- Mixed-use--more than exists currently
- Mobile homes/manufactured homes
- Tiny houses
- Accessory dwellings/in-law apartments

Table E:

- Reduce fossil fuel use in housing, renewable energy and solar panels
- Accessory units and in-law apartments
- Additional units in large homes to be a source of income for seniors and source of housing for others
- Mixed-use apartments above stores
- Mixed-income within neighborhoods
- Build in-fill units on lawns of existing single-family homes
- Four-to-five-story buildings above existing shops and businesses
- More public housing, subsidized and Section 8 housing

Table F:

- More affordable single-family homes to counter Mansionization
- More mixed-use zoning
- Shared senior housing, roommate matching
- More single-level apartment buildings
- More multi-family homes near transit and bike path

Table G:

- Higher density and mixed-use on major transportation routes, mitigates parking issues
- More choices for seniors
- Multigenerational co-housing
- More lead-free housing
- More multifamily housing with 2+ bedrooms

3. *With Arlington's over-65 population increasing, older people may face certain issues that make it challenging for them to stay in their homes. How can the community better support aging in community for senior residents?*

Table A:

- Help with re-modeling so people can live on one floor; other floor can be rented
- Create a loan pool to help people retrofit their homes
- Have a group of workers to do this work who are vetted so they don't scam seniors

Table B:

- Need an accessible senior center
- Provide a roommate matching service for seniors
- Build a senior community center when Arlington High is torn down
- Senior housing walkable to services

Table C:

- Programs to help seniors stay in their homes, ie. shoveling
- Control property taxes
- Improve sidewalks and traffic enforcement
- Create assistance "villages" to provide home repair, transportation, in exchange for dues (like expanded HOA fee)

Table D:

- Landlord Tax Credit for rental affordability
- Social services to help with practical aspects of home ownership
- Expand "Circuit Breaker" and expand marketing to seniors

Table E:

- Create neighborhood groups for mutual aid
- Accessory housing over existing stores and single-family homes
- More assisted living
- Limit how much the rent can increase in buildings with large senior populations
- Allow seniors to rent part of their homes to roommates

Table F:

- Sidewalk plowing
- Broaden tax relief for seniors
- Increase funding to Council on Aging
- Better all-ages community center

Table G:

- Real estate tax strategies
- Increase Council on Aging budget

- In-town transportation for seniors
- Accessory apartments, ways to share home
- Lower cost rehab fund for home modification and repairs
- Increase rental options to seniors
- Recreational opportunities to maintain health

4. What other issues should be considered in the planning process? What barriers, opportunities, and/or compromises should be considered to help address local housing needs?

Table A:

- Assess a fee when a 2- or 3-family is converted to condo; -he money could go to a fund for affordable housing
- Loan center for what is needed to retrofit a home
- Easier access to trains
- Owner-occupied tax break

Table B:

- Very little developable land
- Preserve wetlands at Mugar
- If housing is close to public transportation, remove parking requirement
- Encourage Zip Cars

Table C:

- Keep investing in education
- Resistance to change
- Address climate change
- Clean waterways

Table D:

- Discourage tear-downs
- Vigorously enforce Fair Housing Laws
- Prevent excessive rent increases by not basing property tax on property value but on profit

Table E:

- Town Meeting must allow zoning changes
- Lower number of parking spaces required for housing
- Require housing be included in all bank buildings
- What if population projections are different than expected? What if population drops?
- Preserve mature trees

Table F:

- Over-population in school zones

- Densely developed already
- Support HCA to buy properties
- Allow buildings with less parking (if near transit)
- No very large developments

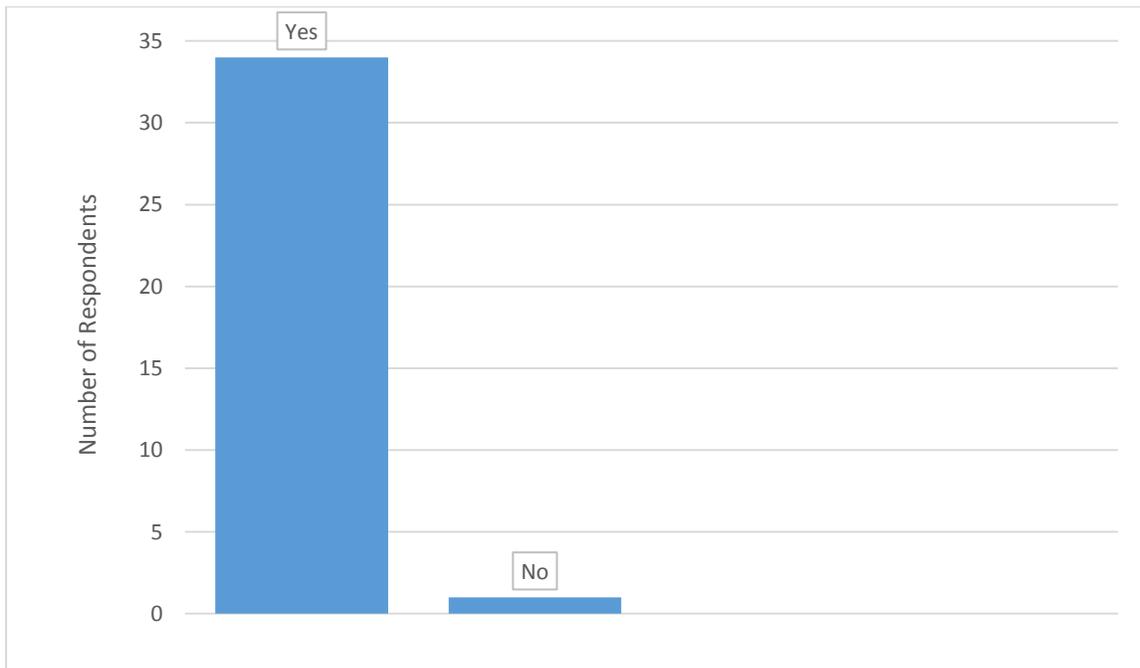
Table G:

- Proximity to public transportation
- Redevelop underutilized sites
- First-time buyer assistance/technical and financial
- Incentives to provide non-luxury/more modest housing
- Keep open space and green space
- Zoning changes to allow multi-use and shared parking

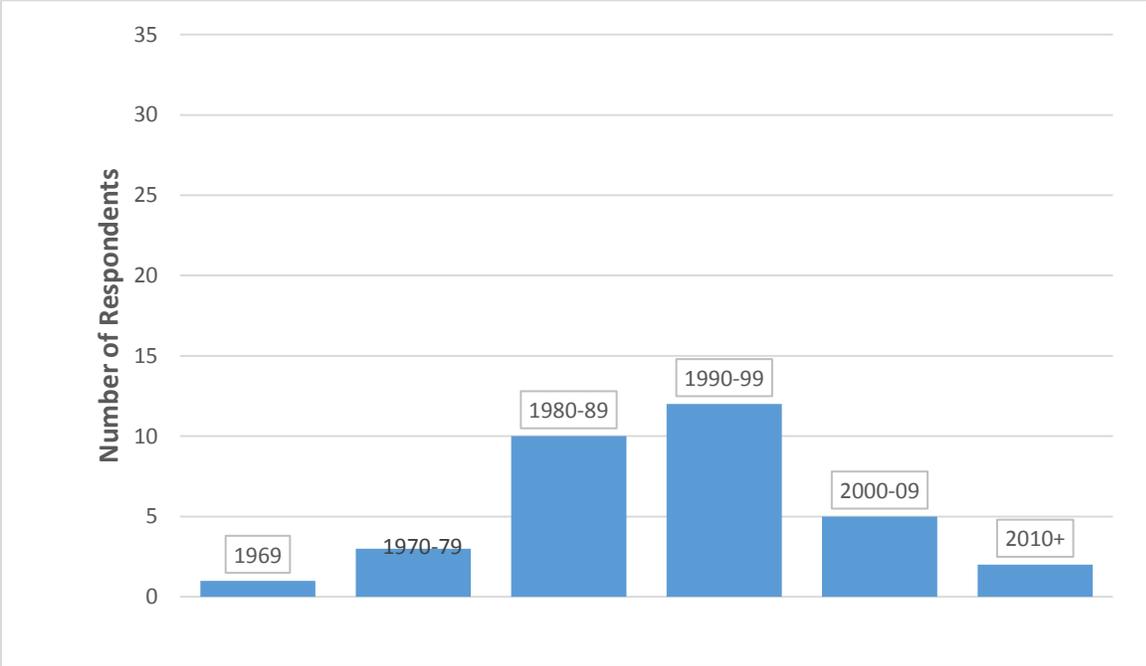
Appendix III: Summary of Group Polling

Labels in RED denote correct responses

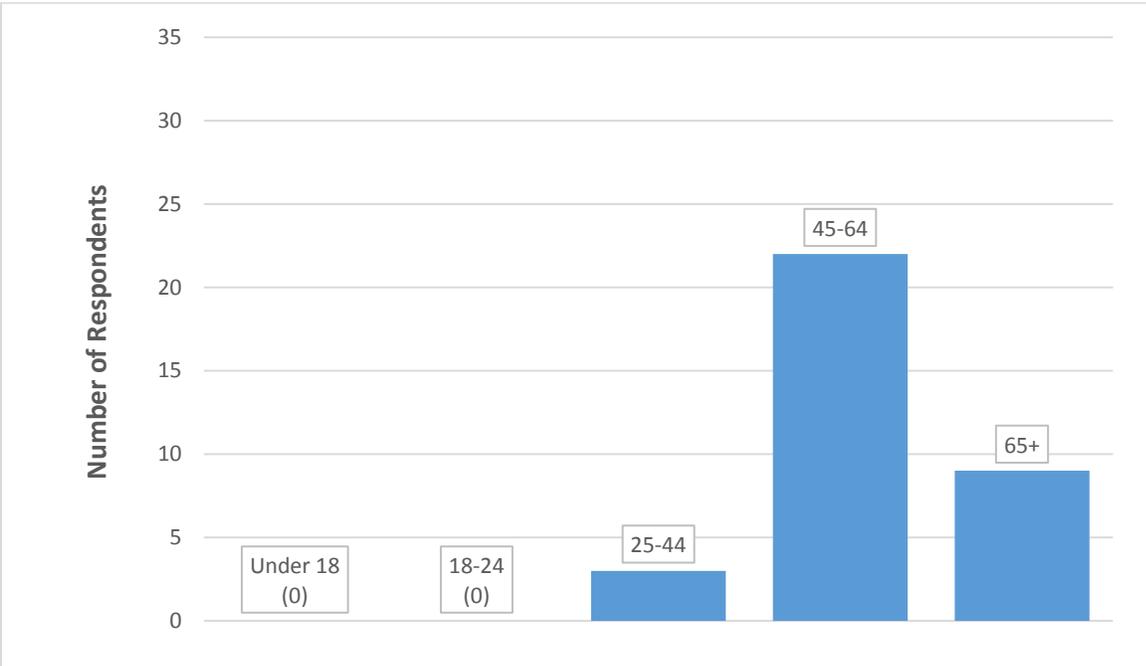
1. Are you a resident of Arlington?



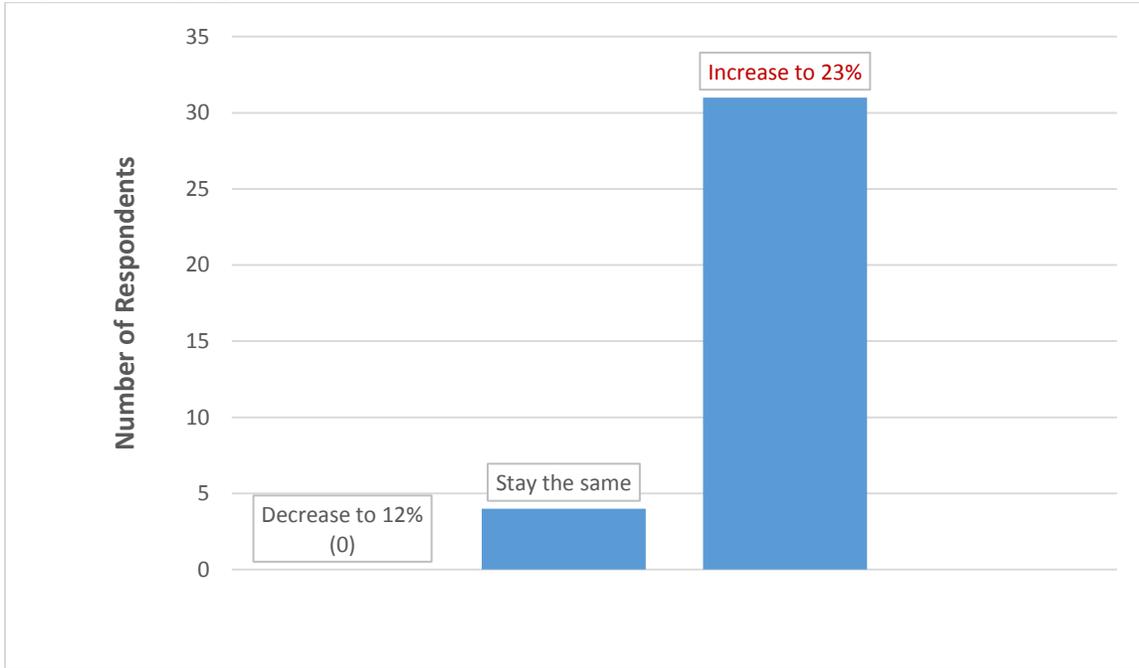
2. For residents, when did you move to Arlington?



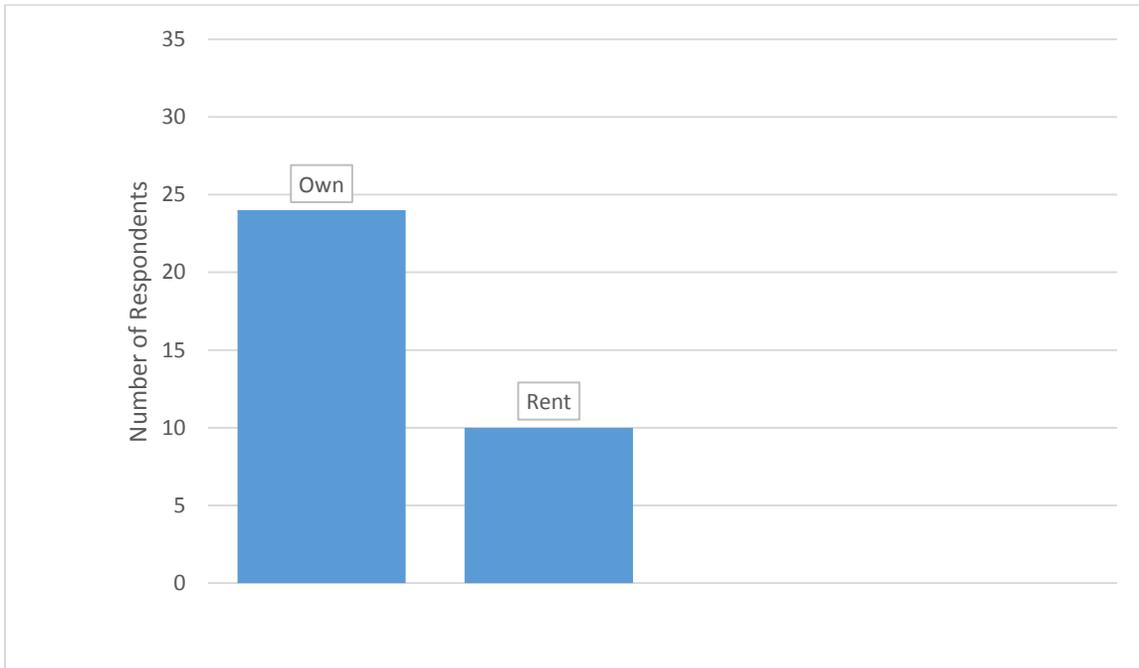
3. What is your age?



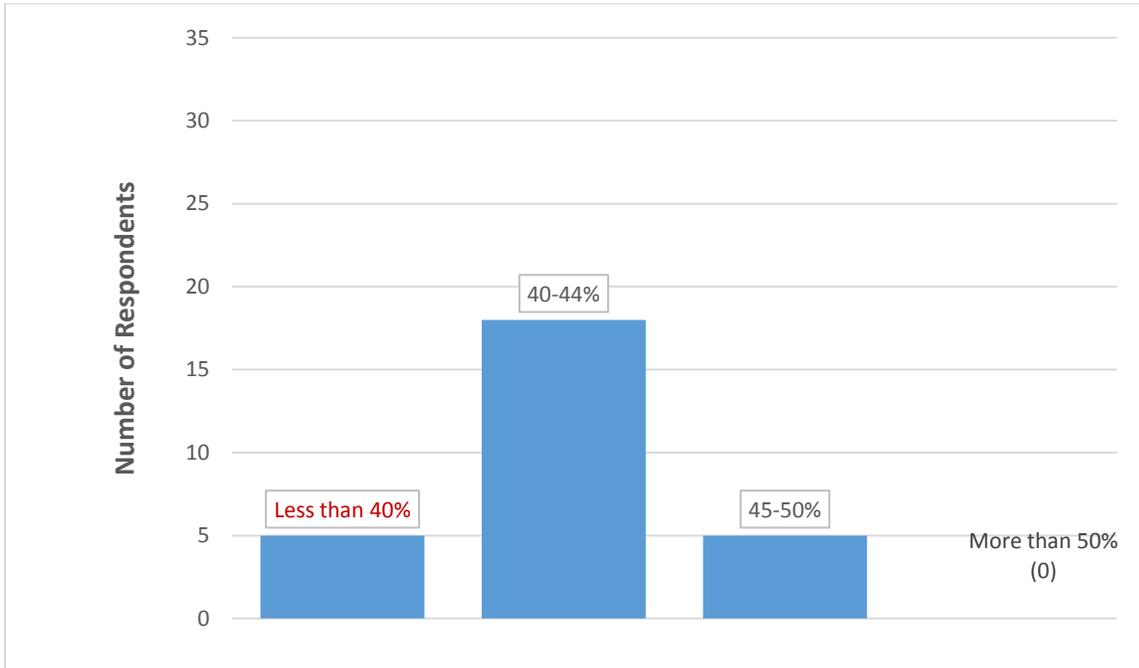
4. Per the 2010 U.S. Census, about 16% of Arlington’s population was age 65+. By 2030, the 65+ population is projected to:



5. Does your household rent or own your home?

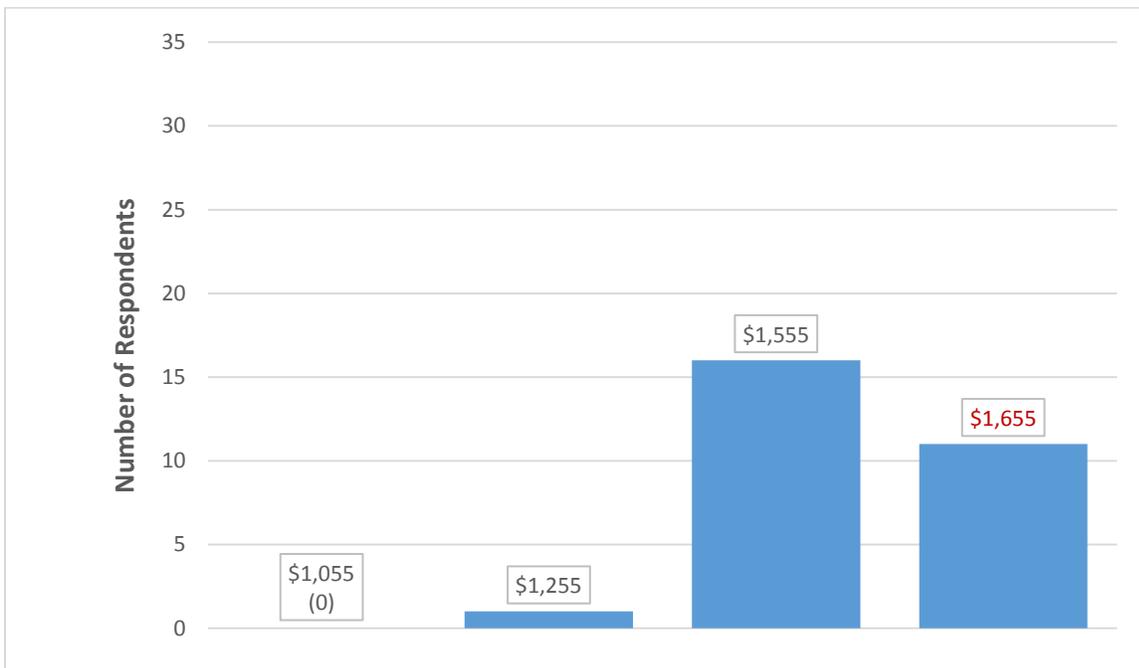


6. About 51% of housing units in the Boston metro area are renter-occupied. Roughly, what percentage of Arlington's housing units are renter occupied?



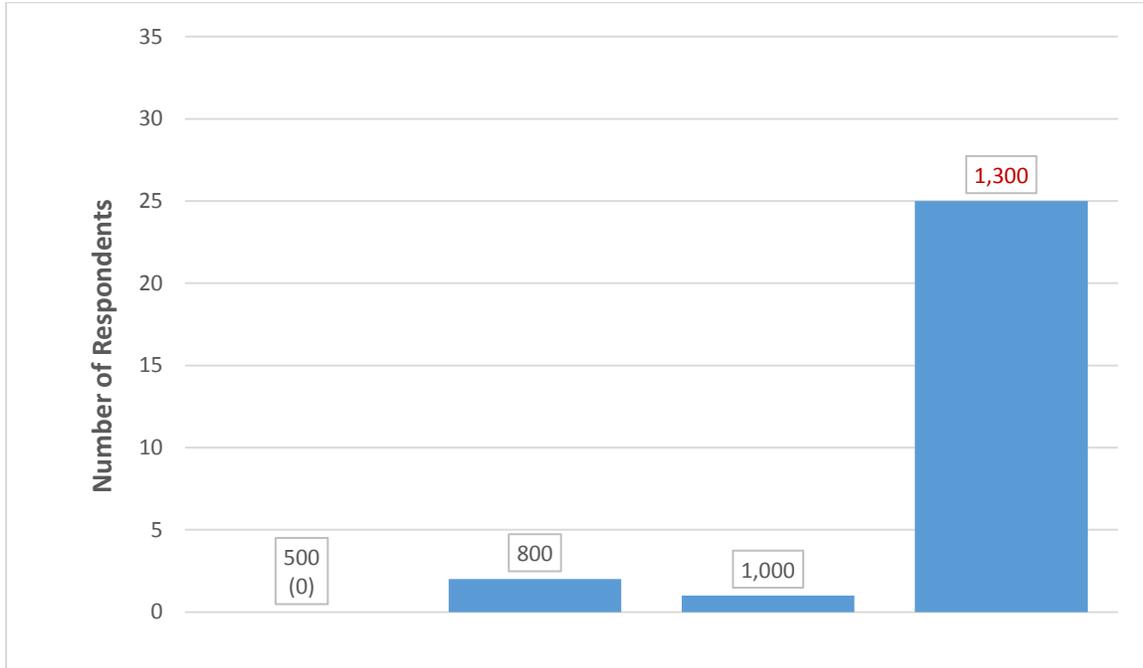
7. With the mean renter wage of \$21.91/hr in the Boston metro area, a renter with full-time employment (52 weeks/yr) could afford an apartment of up to about \$1,140/month.

What is the 2015 average rental listing for a one-bedroom in Arlington?



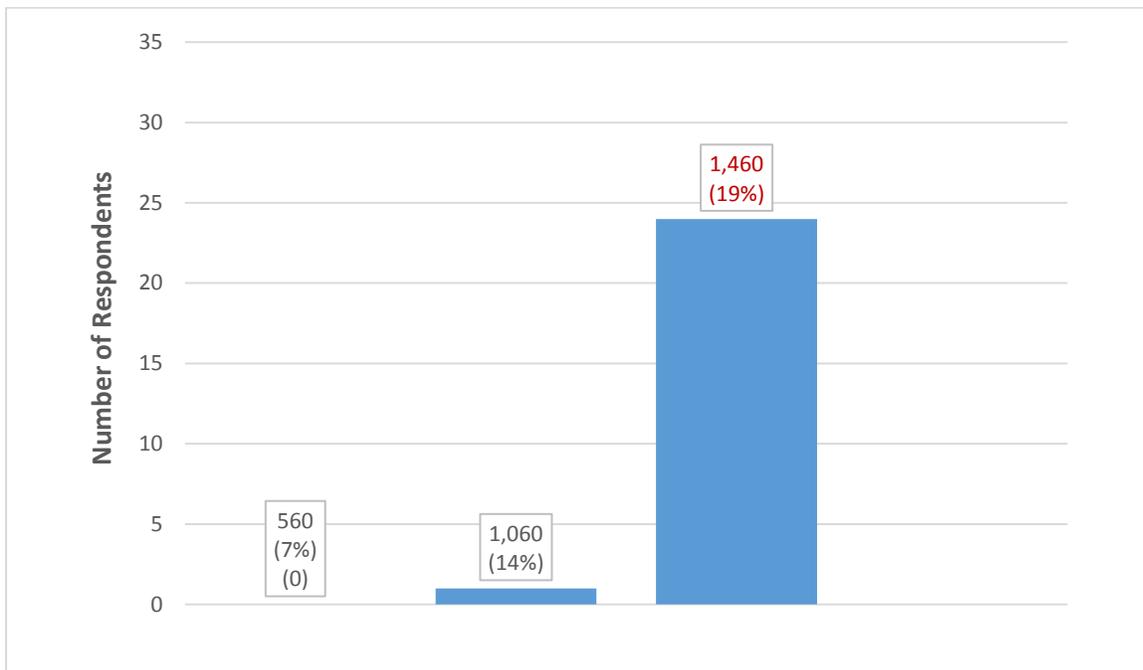
8. About 2,126 households in Arlington have extremely low incomes (2 person=\$22,600/yr.).

About how many of these households spend more than 50% of their gross income on housing costs?



9. In 2000, there were about 7,825 renter-occupied units in Arlington.

About how many apartments in Arlington were converted to condominiums since 2000?



10. What was the median sales price of condominiums in Arlington in 2015?

