

What Might Be the Impact on School Costs of More Housing?

Q. If Arlington adds more housing, what might be the additional costs the Town could incur to pay for additional school children arriving because of the new housing?

A. *Based on the Town’s experience with adding 283 units of new housing in the Brigham Square and 360 developments, the Town tax revenue is \$1.3MM and the cost of school children is \$0.27MM, a 464% profit! This, of course, does not include the other Town services that those housing units might incur, services like sidewalk maintenance, streets, police, fire, inspections, human services, etc.*

COST OF ADDING SCHOOL CHILDREN FROM NEW ARLINGTON HOUSING

Property	#Units	Annual Taxes	APS Enrollees	Cost of APS Enrollees	Net to Town
Brigham Square	119	\$ 477,510	32	\$ 262,292	\$ 215,218
360	164	\$ 772,860	1	\$ 7,297	\$ 765,563
TOTAL	283	\$ 1,250,370	33	\$ 269,589	\$ 980,781

Notes:

1. Annual Taxes are based on FY2020 tax bills
2. Cost of Enrollees is based on the higher estimate of the "Enrollment Growth Factor" numbers, assumed for FY2020. It is currently \$5016. Next year it is expected to be about \$7297.
3. Profit to Town: 464%

Q. Will additional housing bring in more children than our schools can handle?

A. *Arlington has completed an extensive renovation and new construction for all elementary and middle schools, with the new construction of the high school scheduled to begin soon. These schools are designed to meet the predicted maximum enrollment which is expected to peak in about ten years. After this period, given normal demographic cycles, the school population is*

expected to decline slightly, leaving room for additional students in the following decade. Data on this has been projected both by a demographic expert hired by the Arlington Schools and by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). Both studies predict that enrollment growth (due to senior led households being replaced by families with children, not due to housing construction) will peak next year and then decline.

Q. In what way could the town extrapolate from these cases to a broader housing policy compatible with the approved Town Master Plan's Housing Goals?

- To what extent would additional multifamily in Arlington resemble these large projects?
- How many sites are there that could support them?
- Is there opportunity for parcel consolidations to allow for such large projects?
- If we project out the projects that might happen with relaxation of zoning rules, to what extent would they resemble these large developments?
- Is there data on smaller infill (or replacement) multifamily housing)?

A. These cases show that large housing developments can bring in a lot of money to the town and impose little burden on the schools. This is an important message. New multifamily housing could be designed to meet the needs of people who are too young or too old to have children in school. It could be designed to meet the needs of families with children. It could be designed as market rate affordable housing or as governmentally subsidized affordable housing. There are many options all requiring the thoughtful, open minded discussion of Arlington citizens.

COMMENTS:

JS:

The housing diversity we need includes housing for low- and middle-income families who do have school age children. (And a deliberate policy choice to only produce housing that doesn't include school-age children would violate fair housing laws. There is also a state policy that requires affordable housing subsidized by the state to include 10% 3BR units.)

Here is a link to the only report I'm aware of that studies the link between housing production and school enrollment in MA. <https://www.mapc.org/enrollment/> Arlington is called out here as one of the few communities with increasing school enrollment during the period studied. See also pgs. 18-21 of Arlington's housing production plan, which discusses projections of Arlington's future school enrollment in some detail, comparing MAPC projections with separate projections provided by a consultant to the school department. Both predict that enrollment growth (due to senior households being replaced by families with children, not due to housing construction) will peak next year and then decline.

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/11/nz/arlingtonplan.pdf>.

The other place for good data is Mass Housing Partnership's Center for Housing Data. (See in particular "DataTown" which provides certain data by municipality.) <https://www.mhp.net/about-us/data#data-town>

PH:

While it's not up to date, the HPP shows that enrollment growth in the past has not been due to housing production. There has been so little housing production that it isn't enough to move the needle. MAPC also did some work last spring which comes to more or less the same conclusion looking forward - but MAPC did not assume that housing production would not increase enrollment if it happened, but only that housing production on the necessary scale wouldn't happen for a long time, if ever.

A finding that housing production did not contribute much to our current enrollment increase (because there was so little of it) does not imply that a large amount of new housing wouldn't exacerbate the problem. You need more information to make that prediction.

The next step in the analysis: once you have projected enrollment growth, what does that mean in terms of increased costs? You need to translate marginal students into marginal dollars.

AB:

While I agree with all of the facts in the post, I'm a little leery of the 464% profit emphasis. Schools are a little less than half of the town budget, so while they are a big question, they aren't the only question. If we had all the data we could ever want, I'd want to look at something as granular as how many students do we have per specific type of housing unit - single fam, 2 fam, 3 fam, 2 BR, 3 BR... and so on. Getting that data seems unlikely. There does seem to be general agreement that housing units without kids in them are a net benefit for the town budget. Would have to be for the town to break even. Thus, showing that two new recent projects have a lower density of kids in them than the town as a whole should be a solid argument for how those types of developments will not blow up the school and town budgets.

Also, I think the last figure we had from JS was \$8737 per student marginal cost, once benefits for additional teachers were counted.

JB:

I don't know if this is helpful, but in 2015 the Town Survey asked if people had children in APS because some of the questions were about how well-informed people about school issues and which channels do they rely on or prefer.

We also ask if people own or rent their homes.

Just sorting the database of 6000 or so answers it looks like 1167 responses indicated they had children in APS and 991 also own their home. 125 with students in APS rented.