# 40th Anniversary Stories

Housing Corporation of Arlington

## Story 9: HCA's Housing Development Through the Years

HCA's earliest rental housing was created in 2001, with the acquisition, rehab, and deed restriction of a 2-family home on Smith Street.

Now, in 2026, HCA is in construction on a 43-unit affordable housing development on Sunnyside Ave and is applying for financing for a 40-unit affordable housing development on Mass Ave and Newman Way. Our last 2-family acquisition was in 2008. After that time we started acquiring and creating slightly larger, or much larger buildings.

This diversity in HCA's housing portfolio is what makes is so special – there's something for everyone! Some households prefer, and do better in, a building with just 2 or 4 units. Others enjoy a bigger building with a community of neighbors. 2-family units are often larger, which is better suited for some families. Then again, our larger, more recently completed buildings have more modern heating and central air conditioning, which the older properties do not have.

HCA tends to build and acquire larger developments today for multiple reasons. One is impact. The pace of rent increases over the last few decades has been nearly unreal. Couple that with the terribly high inflation of the last several years, and ongoing housing shortage overall in greater Boston, and we see that the housing crisis here just keeps getting worse and worse. In fact, a recent Globe article noted that while other cities are starting to soften the crisis, in Boston, it keeps raging. *(Boston's housing market is so out of whack that it's in a class largely by itself, Boston Globe, 8-9-26)*.

Not only does the desperate need for affordable housing remain, but it takes a similar amount of staff energy and soft cost expenses (like legal fees or a land survey) to create one building of ten units of affordable housing as it does to create fifty. If we are going to invest resources into creating affordable housing, we want to end up with as many homes as possible.

Another factor for our project sizes is affordable housing financing. Land and construction costs are so high today that every affordable housing development needs significant amounts of subsidy to work financially. One of the only ways to create financially feasible affordable housing today is by using federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), which provide the most funding per unit than any other source available – by a long shot! Every project still also needs subsidies from the local community and the state, but without

LIHTC, most of the affordable housing projects in our state and across the country would not be possible. The joke is that you need as many funding sources as you have units in a project! Due to the complexity and cost of using LIHTC while also layering in many other funding sources, these projects require some economy of scale. We cannot use LIHTC on a 5- or 10-unit development. It just won't add up.

Even as so many other essential social programs have been slashed or eliminated during our current federal administration, LIHTC was strengthened and expanded. Perhaps that's because while it also is the biggest financial supporter of affordable housing across the country, it also provides large tax breaks over many years to investors whose investments become the subsidy dollars that help to build the homes.

Of course, HCA does not build larger buildings blindly. Our organization is rooted in Arlington and cares about creating great quality of life for all. We look carefully at context when picking sites and work with our architects to create a design that suits each exact site. Is the property on a major thoroughfare like Mass Ave that calls for a building with more impact? Or on a smaller lot on a side street? What do the neighboring buildings look like? How will people who live here access their building and what will it feel like to approach it?

Today, when we consider new sites for affordable housing – we sometimes consider if we can combine two smaller sites to create the economies of scale we need. This is not ideal, but it can work. Our buildings at 117 Broadway (where Arlington EATS is located) and 112-114 Lowell Street are an example of this. We took two different sites and turned them — on paper — into one development. With our emerging Emma's Court project, we acquired one site, but will be creating two different buildings on two parts of that site: one larger building right on Mass Ave and another of just 12 units and a very different architectural design on Newman Way.

As we celebrate our 40th anniversary we can look back to see how far we've come. From the earliest years when public sentiment was even against HCA acquiring vacant Town-owned land just to create two homeownership units…to 20 years ago when we had 38 units completed — including ten 2-family properties and the 4-building, 18-unit Mass Ave Preservation project…

To today, with our portfolio of 208 units and 83 in the pipeline. Today it's a time when many local homeowners and tenants alike are advocating for more affordable housing and are excited to see news of a new, thoughtfully designed 5- or 6-story buildings being developed by HCA. It's a time when our Town Hall is dedicating even more staff time and financial resources than they did in those early years to invest in permanently affordable housing for its residents.

We hope you will join us in October to celebrate our incredible accomplishments — not only in real estate, but also in our social services and civic engagement work. We will celebrate the last 40th years on October 9th from 6:30 – 9:00 pm at the Arlington Town Hall Auditorium.

Registration is now open for this great community party, which will include live music, delicious buffet (with vegan, vegetarian gluten free, and dairy free options), a timeline of HCA's history, historic photos slideshow, the new HCA video, and awards for incredible local leaders. We will finish out the night with dancing and dessert.

If you have connected with HCA in any way at any time — you've helped make this all happen! We look forward to looking back and looking forward with you in October.