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OPINION

BATES REPORT

Hub Town A Hot Spot

Arlington Puts More Homes Under Agreement Than It Lists

BY DAVID BATES

SPECIAL TO BANKER & TRADESMAN

In the first six months of 2014, the town of Arlington listed 25 single-family homes in the \$350,000 to \$399,000 range and put 26 listings in that range under agreement.

In the same time period, Arlington listed 18 single-families between \$500,000 and \$599,000 and put 19 of them under agreement.



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And in the \$600,000 and \$699,000 range in the first six months of 2014, Arlington listed 17 homes and put 17 listings under agreement. In other words,

Arlington might be the only town in Massachusetts where when 100 percent of the inventory goes under agreement, it brings down the average percentage of listed homes that go under agreement.

What makes Arlington a place where literally more inventory can go under agreement than is listed?

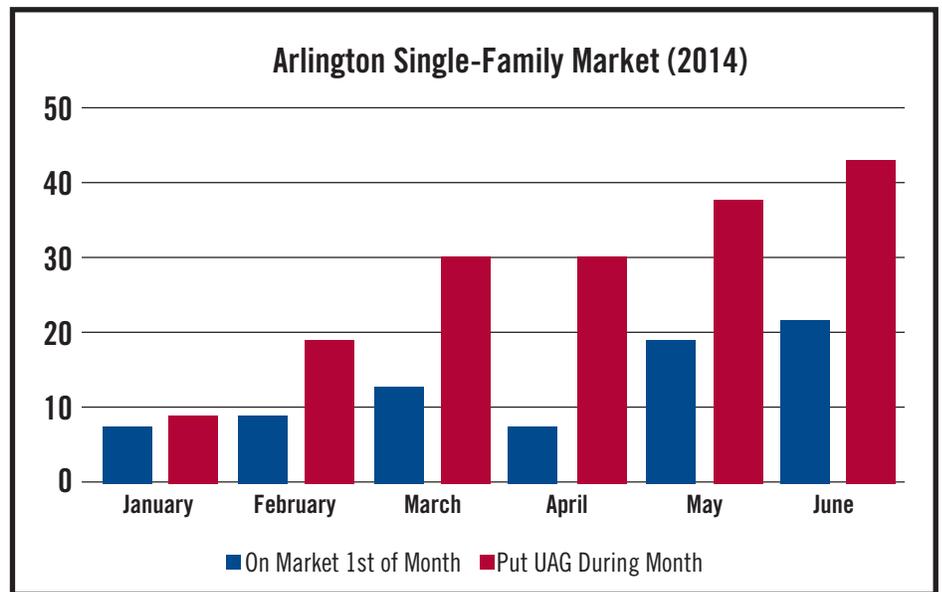
Ken Kohlberg, an attorney who has lived in Arlington for nearly 20 years, recalled a key factor that went into his decision to call Arlington home: "It was very affordable at the time and you could get some good value." The town's comparative value as a reason to buy has remained consistent.

Julie Gibson, a Realtor who sold 17 Arlington single-family homes in the last year, echoed this sentiment. She told me "you can

still get a lot more house in Arlington than in the three competing surrounding communities." In fact, the pricing of a single-family in most of the markets contiguous to Arlington can look prohibitive. According to MLS 2014 numbers, the median price of a single-family in neighboring Winchester and Belmont tops \$900,000, and the median price of a single-

nity for a to get a home, a yard, parking and maybe even a white picket fence, all in a location that has proximity to the urban core, and public transportation.

Bob Bowes, who has had a brokerage in Arlington since the late '60s, has seen it go from "from a blue-collar community to a white-collar community" and told me, "it's



family in neighboring Cambridge and Lexington is over \$1 million. So, for many of today's buyers – especially first-time homebuyers – Arlington's median single-family sales price of \$625,000 in 2014 makes it look like a viable condo alternative, and a good opportu-

just a dramatic change." Bowes listed some of the characteristics that in his eyes have created "a perfect storm" for buying in Arlington, including a well-run government, reasonable tax rates, a good school system with many renovated schools, great restau-

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rants, two movie theaters, a play house, Mystic Lake, Spy Pond and the feeling that it is safer than the city. Bowes said, "Because of all that Arlington offers, we're really being considered by everyone looking for a house inside 128." That type of enthusiasm could be why each year his firm sells more Arlington homes than Coldwell Banker, Century 21 and RE/MAX combined.

Part City, Part Suburb

Chris Legere, who has lived in Arlington since around 2009, noted that the town's central location feels like part city, part suburb. "I feel like it's where Cambridge and Lexington collide," he said. Legere, a trained architect and an avid biker, loves the Minuteman Bikeway, an 11-mile trail that travels through Arlington. Additionally, he takes advantage

of a recreation program that allows him to bring his four-year-old daughter, Gabrielle, to an indoor pool in Arlington for \$25 a year.

As a result of virtually every listed home finding a buyer, it's not uncommon for Arlington to start the month off with fewer homes being actively marketed than will sell in that month. For example on April 1, 2014, Arlington had only eight homes listed "for sale" on MLS. Yet, by the end of April, 30 Arlington single-families went under agreement. Additionally, in May and June, about twice as many Arlington single-families went under agreement during the month as were available on the first of the month.

Of course, Arlington's lack of inventory leads to bidding wars. While these bid-ups are not as crazy as neighboring Cambridge, where over-asks can go into the hundreds of

thousands, Arlington can get some substantial over ask bids. Out of 277 sales in 2014, 54 Arlington single-family homes garnered offers that were at least \$50,000 over-ask, and 14 went at least \$100,000 over-ask.

While Arlington does have a significant presence in more modest price points for single-families, there are signs of a higher-end market in the town forming as well. As recently as 2012, there were only six million-dollar home sales in Arlington. But in 2014, 26 Arlington single-families closed for over \$1 million. ■

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