

July 10, 2017

Dear Mayor Silberberg and Members of City Council,

We are writing to you as a coalition of community-based organizations, nonprofit developers, human service providers and faith communities serving low-income households in Alexandria. We want to express our concerns regarding the proposal to redevelop the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Development Authority's (ARHA) Andrew Adkins (Adkins) property.

We understand that the continued reduction in federal funding for the operation and maintenance of public housing requires ARHA to rethink how to best position their real estate portfolio to address their mission and remain economically viable. However, the following issues need further consideration.

Ratio of Market Units to Lower Income Housing. While we are dismayed that only 60 of the 90 public housing units will be replaced on-site, the creation of approximately 350 new market rate units on the original ARHA site is very troubling. Is this the best deal that ARHA could structure with the developer in light of the dramatic loss of affordable units in the City, and the significant increase in rents over the last ten years?

The mission of ARHA is to serve the most vulnerable families with extremely low incomes, and we believe they have an obligation to press for more affordable units at much lower income levels. Based on information provided by ARHA, the overwhelming majority of households at Adkins earn less than 30% of the area median income. The current proposal only provides for 20 of the 60 replacement units to be affordable to households at less than 30% of AMI. The optics of this proposal are not good, to say the least, and the reality is even worse.

We recommend 1) replacing all 90 units on site in perpetuity for households earning less than 30% AMI, and 2) including additional units at 60% AMI of area median income. These affordable units could be configured in two lower density buildings on site rather than one large (affordable housing) building. ARHA should consider using project-based vouchers for the 30% AMI units and/or putting more equity into the development to support the lower income units. This would create a final proposal that has a better balance of market rate and affordable units.

We are in favor of mixed-income development in all redevelopment efforts as long as each project ensures an equitable and viable mix of household incomes, and does not result in a net outflow of low-income households from their neighborhoods. That is what is currently proposed for Adkins. Permanently removing residents from their communities disrupts their lives and removes them from established social networks, schools, faith communities and neighbors. Practices like these contravene our core values of diversity, inclusion and social equity.

Transition Plan for Residents. Currently, there appears to be no meaningful transition plan for the residents at Adkins. A transition plan is required by HUD, so we recommend that a detailed plan be developed and presented to the residents now, to give them time to prepare for what is being proposed for their relocation.

Housing Affordability as a Citywide Priority. We respect the right of communities adjacent to the Adkins site to be engaged in this planning process by offering their comments and sharing their concerns. However, the Braddock Implementation Advisory group should not be considered the sole representative of interests in the area. We encourage ARHA to reach out to the small businesses in the area (who may employ Adkins residents), and faith communities who are concerned about the loss of housing affordability in the City or whose congregants may live at Adkins.

Broader outreach and discussion should be encouraged to allow greater community participation in this discussion of redevelopment and housing opportunities for extremely low-income families. Housing affordability has been and needs to remain a top priority for the City and as a community we need to maximize these opportunities to secure housing – especially when the land belongs to our public housing authority.

We appreciate the monthly work sessions between Council members Wilson, Chapman and City staff and ARHA's Board and staff that take a closer look at the details of each redevelopment proposal as they come forward. We believe these public sessions are critical for transparency regarding how ARHA's valuable assets will be redeveloped, and the community's understanding of the financial ramifications to providing deeply subsidized units. These sessions bring us to a better understanding of our housing needs and challenges. We reiterate our understanding of ARHA's mission to provide housing for the most vulnerable in our community, not to make profits in real estate transactions – as declared by ARHA's CEO Mr. Priest earlier in a public statement. This affirmation of their mission is essential to how we approach the redevelopment of these properties.

We urge Council and City staff to work with ARHA staff and their Board to evaluate the remaining properties slated for redevelopment and seek creative financing strategies and best practices that are economically viable, successfully integrate households with a mix of incomes, and maintain the integrity of these diverse neighborhoods.

Thank you for hearing our concerns.

Katharine Dixon, Rebuilding Together Alexandria

Jon Smoot, Habitat for Humanity Northern Virginia

Michelle Krockner, Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance and Housing Alexandria

The Rev. Mary Beth Blinn, Lead Pastor, Fairlington United Methodist Church

The Rev. Oran Warder, Rector, St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Kari Galloway, Friends of Guest House

Allen Lomax

The Rev. Jeanette Leisk, Pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Ann Marie Hay

Melanie Gray

Nathan Bridges, Lt. Corp Officer, The Salvation Army

Bill Harris

Shannon Steene, Carpenter's Shelter

Lynn Thomas, Community Lodgings

Pam Michell, New Hope Housing
J. Glenn Hopkins, Hopkins House
Shelley Murphy, Wesley Housing Development Corporation
Partnership to Prevent and End Homelessness in Alexandria, Shannon Steene & Lynn Thomas, co-chairs
Canek Aguirre, Economic Opportunities Commission
Evelin Urrutia, Tenant and Workers United
Will Monahan and The Rev. Anne Monahan
The Rev. Noelle York Simmons, Christ Church
The Rev. Juli Wilson-Black, Fairlington Presbyterian Church
Walter Webdale, AHC, Inc.
The Rev. Jo Belser, Episcopal Church of the Resurrection
Betsy Faga
June Stowe, ALIVE! Affordable Housing Committee
Rev. Donald Fest, Pastor, St. Joseph's Catholic Church
ALIVE! Diane Charles, Executive Director and Patrick Anderson, Board President
The Rev. Thomas James, Washington Street United Methodist Church