

TO: Chairman and Board of Supervisors of Fairfax County
FROM: Leadership Council, Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance
RE: Communitywide Housing Strategic Plan
DATE: May 18, 2018

Dear Board members:

As affordable housing developers, human service providers, policy analysts and members of a regional advocacy organization, we are writing to support adoption of the Communitywide Housing Strategic Plan presented to you on May 8. Fairfax County has been thorough in documenting the housing challenges of a growing percentage of the population, and now it's time to take action. We were heartened to hear many of you express a sense of urgency about this issue, and applaud your interest in expediting the plan's timeline as well as receiving monthly updates on the plan's progress.

Once the plan is adopted, we urge you to consider immediate implementation of the following actions:

Streamline the approval process and assume an appropriate level of risk. The Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RHA) cannot allocate funds to affordable housing projects without risk. If developers have demonstrable experience and financial capacity, the RHA must change its requirements for the use of its subordinate loans to make it 'first-in' funding. That is standard practice; no other municipality that provides financing requires these conditions from borrowers, and the current practice has been an impediment to getting proposals approved.

Co-location of housing with public facilities. As you have done most recently with the Residences at the Government Center, co-locate housing with public facilities where residential development is suitable. This strategy is a regional best practice and has been successfully implemented by many of our neighboring jurisdictions. The strategy of co-location should be embedded in the CIP process to maximize opportunities to develop housing.

Give high priority to updating the Affordable Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinance and Workforce Dwelling Unit (WDU) policies in the Zoning Modification (zMod) process. These tools should be simplified to support and facilitate market-rate developers who include affordable units in their projects. Experience has shown that WDUs serving households earning more than 80% of the area median income are difficult to rent, as applicants can find market-rate units at this price point without the extensive paperwork and income qualifications. As a result, we recommend that WDUs are no higher than 80% AMI, eliminating the income levels above that (for rental units only, not homeownership).

Approve a taxable bond issue of a minimum of \$50 million for 2019. Developing housing for low and moderate income households cannot happen without gap financing. This investment by local government is reflected in the competitive scoring for projects applying for low income housing tax credits – the major source of equity for these developments. This funding would be a meaningful addition to the current HCD funds, attract affordable housing developers, and result in a significant impact toward meeting the goals of the Housing Blueprint.

Realize the promise of the One Fairfax pledge. Safe, decent housing is the platform upon which families gain stability and thrive. This cannot happen for those who are in unstable or overcrowded situations, or are paying over 50% of their incomes for housing costs. Certainly a good first step was the creation of a housing advisory workgroup following the EMBARK Richmond Highway approvals, to focus on creative preservation strategies that could be informative for county-wide preservation policies. These older communities are home to a greater percentage of households of color and those experiencing higher levels of poverty.

If Fairfax County is serious about promoting racial and social equity, the County will make the investments in these less prosperous communities to benefit households who are struggling to keep their families together and maintain a safe, affordable home.

We are encouraged by the energy supporting this plan, and are ready to work with the County to implement the goals. Thank you for your leadership and consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Michelle Krockner, Executive Director
The Leadership Council of the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance

AHC Inc.
Alexandria Housing Development Corporation
Alliance for Housing Solutions, Arlington
Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing
Coalition for Smarter Growth
Cornerstones, Inc.
E&G Group
Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.
Fellowship Square Foundation
Good Shepherd Housing and Family Services
Habitat for Humanity Northern Virginia
JBG Smith
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Neighborhood Fundamentals, LLC
Rebuilding Together Alexandria
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