Testimony by Michelle Krocker, Executive Director, NVAHA
before the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
Budget Hearing for FY2020 and Guidance for FY2021
April 11, 2019

Good afternoon, my name is Michelle Krocker, Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance. I’d like to provide some comments about the County’s affordable housing needs and the proposed FY2020 and 2021 budgets.

Housing that is affordable is a significant concern for a growing percentage of the county’s population. In a recent County survey, ‘Housing and Neighborhood Livability,’ ‘affordability’ and ‘equity’ were all identified as top priorities for 2020 and beyond. Data from the Housing Strategic Planning process can help us understand why:

- **Housing costs have grown faster than wages.** While average rents in Fairfax County have increased by 17 percent, and home prices by an average of 22 percent, over the same period, household incomes increased by only 10 percent, and for many low-wage workers, incomes did not increase at all.
- **With average monthly rents of $1,788, and the average home purchase price of $548,800, 44 percent of renters (more than 55,000 households) and 23 percent of homeowners (more than 60,000 households) spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.** Working families living paycheck to paycheck are anxious about rent increases and concerned about where they would go if their homes become unaffordable.

Recommendations from the County’s Housing Plan for 15,000 units of rental housing over the next 15 years, combined with the existing housing shortage of 31,000 units, demand a bold new approach with land use tools and strategies like those outlined in the Plan recommendations. We support these recommendations, but today urge the Board to make larger investments that would begin immediately.

First, we urge the Board to allocate $10 million to the housing trust fund in the upcoming FY2020 budget.

Second, beginning in FY2021, we ask for an annual appropriation of $50 million dollars for the County’s Housing Trust Fund. This appropriation would provide investments in new housing production; housing preservation; an expanded rental subsidy program; and affordable homeownership – goals identified in the Housing Policies of the County’s Comprehensive Plan.

These funds will begin to address the thousands of new homes needed, and bring the County in line with comparable jurisdictions throughout the region who have made similar substantial investments in their housing trust funds. Last week, Montgomery County announced that they were considering doubling their fund from $50 million to $100 million.
Today, only 9,700 units of market-affordable housing remain in the county. With an acquisition fund and creative zoning strategies, the goal of preservation should be less about saving old buildings, and more about preserving affordability for the families who live there, by extending the life of existing affordable housing stock, or developing new, mixed income communities with no net loss of affordability.

By 2022, it is estimated that there will be 20,000 senior households with incomes less than 50% of the area median income and 10,000 disabled households in Fairfax County. An expanded rental subsidy program is needed to sustain housing for these extremely low-income households who may be ineligible or waitlisted for existing programs.

Opportunities for affordable ownership have declined, but regionally jurisdictions are trying to address ‘Missing Middle’ housing, which refers both to an affordable price and housing types such as duplexes and triplexes that are compatible in scale and style with single family homes. Tools like Community Land Trusts can provide a way forward in creating more affordable homeownership in the County.

With all of this activity, staff capacity must be increased in the appropriate agencies to support a more expansive level of affordable housing production and preservation as a result of increased financial resources.

Finally, we note that the shortage of resources to address homelessness, affordable housing and preservation has a disproportionate impact on people of color in Fairfax County. Investment in these areas will support healthy, diverse neighborhoods in low-income communities, promoting greater access to opportunity. This is the true test of the County’s commitment to the One Fairfax pledge.

In closing, housing affordability is a regional issue. As the largest and wealthiest jurisdiction, we urge Fairfax County to join ongoing regional conversations on housing solutions, and become a regional leader by responding to the housing challenge with a substantial commitment to addressing unmet housing needs for its own residents.

I would like to ask those in the audience today in support of these comments to stand. Thank you for considering our recommendations.