

TO: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Housing and Human Services Coalition coordinated by the Northern Virginia
Affordable Housing Alliance
RE: Recommendations for the County FY2021 Revised Budget
DATE: April 21, 2020

Members of the Board of Supervisors:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Revised FY2021 Budget. These are unprecedented times, and we commend the Board for your commitment to providing continuity and transparency of government.

We are writing as a coalition of human service organizations, affordable housing developers, members of faith communities and housing advocates who have worked for many years to improve and advance opportunities for low and moderate income households in Fairfax County to be successful. Now we are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, responding to the critical and rising needs of residents in our community.

As you consider the FY2021 budget, we urge you to leverage state and federal resources to prioritize assistance for vulnerable people in need of food and shelter, and nonprofit organizations struggling to sustain their operations during this pandemic.

We recommend the following:

Protect Vulnerable People

- **Provide funding for households who have lost their jobs and need food for their families.** Work in collaboration with experienced community-based organizations to coordinate food distribution and access. The level of anxiety among residents worried about food security is very high;
- **Thank you for leveraging state funding with county resources to provide hotel rooms to safely address the needs of persons who are homeless.** The inability to practice social distancing is a great concern to shelter staff and other residents if exposed individuals become ill in an overcrowded shelter. Shelter providers will need resources for transportation, testing and staffing for the persons being served;
- **Provide rental and utility assistance to tenants who have lost their jobs and live in properties not covered by federally-backed mortgages or state protections against evictions;**
- **Ensure that undocumented households who are impacted by COVID-19 and ineligible for federal funding receive food and rental assistance.** This is a moral and racial equity issue that should concern us all.

Support and Sustain Nonprofit Organizations

Sustain the organizational capacity and operations of human service providers and nonprofit property owners.

Mission-driven developers operate on slim profit margins. The loss of rental income will have a significant impact on the ability of nonprofit owners of affordable rental housing to adequately maintain and operate their properties. Once stay-in-place orders are discontinued, it will take time for residents to resume work or find new jobs, so rent delinquencies could continue for an extended period of time. Likewise, human service providers have been forced to close services such as childcare or afterschool programs that provided critical operating revenue. In some cases, organizations have had to reduce staff, even as demands for their services have increased.

As tenants are unable to pay rent, landlords are unable to pay mortgages, and our housing resources will be put at risk. Trusted human service organizations are providing essential services for residents who would otherwise turn directly to the county for help. Therefore, we recommend that:

- The County convene experienced nonprofit housing providers and human service organizations to assess their operational needs resulting in loss of income due to COVID-19. Provide funding for loss of rental income, and maintaining operations. Nonprofit organizations should be eligible for grants (not loans) through the Economic Opportunity Reserve Fund and/or additional CDBG funding received through the CARES Act.

As stated in the Board resolution: “COVID-19 Economic Mitigation Projects allow for the investment in projects that mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 response to the economic success of Fairfax County and resident businesses.” Supporting low and moderate income workers and the organizations that sustain them is essential to the economic success of Fairfax County.

Housing Affordability for Fairfax County

With our focus on the current health and economic crisis, we must continue to plan for the county’s future. COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of low-income families, particularly people of color in the county who have suffered disproportionately from the impacts of the coronavirus. Their vulnerabilities are heightened by the shortage of housing that is safe and affordable, healthcare that is accessible and attainable, jobs that provide a living wage and a pathway to advancement, and mobility without a car. Investments in these elements of county infrastructure are more important than ever before.

We recommend the following:

- Retain the half penny (approximately \$13.5 million) of the RE tax for the county’s Affordable Housing Fund and suspend the recommendation that it be used exclusively for preservation;

- Ensure that county funding for affordable housing projects and proposals in the pipeline for development is secure, to include the recent RFP for Autumn Willow, a proposed 150- unit senior affordable housing development in Centreville;
- Fund Bridging Affordability and the Housing Blueprint at FY2020 levels;
- Retain the \$240,000 in rate increases for providers of contracted homeless services;
- Upon examination of the CARES Act funding provided to the County and how it can be applied to address budget gaps as a result of the COVID response, we ask you to repurpose funds to prioritize housing and make a \$10 million allocation to the County's Affordable Housing Fund;
- As you follow quarterly reviews for the FY21 budget, prioritize the Affordable Housing Fund as revenue permits;
- Retain the FY 21 budget guidance for affordable housing in the approval process for the FY2022 budget to include:
 - Dedicating the value of one penny of the RE tax to the county's affordable housing fund;
 - March 2019 Recommendations of the Affordable Housing Resources panel;
- Maintain the Chairman's directive for a county affordable housing conference in 2021.

The need for housing in Fairfax County is well-documented, and the link between housing and quality of life outcomes such as education, health and well-being, transportation and the environment is understood. The message to all county residents should be that community benefits accrue to the county when we have safe, decent affordable housing opportunities available for people at all ages and stages in life. This understanding is essential for countywide endorsements of the investments needed in FY2022 to meet the minimum goal of 5,000 affordable housing homes in 15 years.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns and offer these recommendations. We understand that these are extraordinary times. Please know that those of us engaged in housing and human services, along with members of our faith communities and citizen activists, stand ready to partner with you to get through these uncertain times and serve those families and individuals most impacted by COVID-19 in Fairfax County.

Sincerely,

AHC Inc, Walter D. Webdale, President & CEO

Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Dr. Randy Orndoff, Lead Pastor

Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing, Nina Janopaul, President/ CEO

Coalition for Smarter Growth, Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director

Conrad Egan, Providence District

Cornerstones, Kerrie Wilson, CEO

Enterprise Community Partners, David Bowers, Vice President & Mid-Atlantic Market Leader

FACETS, Joe Fay, Executive Director

Fairfax County Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, Kerrie Wilson and Del Rip Sullivan, co-chairs

Fairfax County Alliance for Human Services, Lisa Whetzel, Chair
Fairfax County NAACP, Sean Perryman, President
Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, Meg Mall, Executive Director
Fellowship Square Foundation, Christy Zeitz, CEO
Good Shepherd Housing & Family Services, Inc, David Levine, President & CEO
Habitat for Humanity of Northern Virginia, Rev. Jon Smoot, Executive Director
Kelly Hebron, Lee District
Homestretch, Christopher Fay, Executive Director
Housing Association of Nonprofit Developers, Heather Raspberry, Executive Director
Islamic Center of North America Virginia, Br. Hamid Munir, President
Jerry Hopkins, Providence District
Lorton Community Action Center, Linda Patterson, Executive Director
Victor Marshall, Groveton Baptist Church, Chair Social Services Team & VIC Steering Cmtee
Patricia McGrady, Lee District
Ken McMillon, Providence District
Mt. Vernon at Home, Jan Ridgely, Executive Director
Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church, Rev. Dr. Kate R. Walker, Minister
NAMI Northern Virginia, Concerned Fairfax Advocacy Group, Kristine Konen, President & CEO and William Taylor, co-chairs
New Hope Housing, Pam Michell, Executive Director
Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance, Michelle Krockner, Executive Director
Northern Virginia Family Service, Stephanie Berkowitz, President & CEO
OAR, Derwin Overton, Executive Director
Pathway Homes, Inc, Sylisa Lambert-Woodard, President & CEO
Alicia Plerhoples, Dranesville District
Jerry Poje, Hunter Mill District
Second Story, Judith Dittman, CEO
South County Task Force, Mary Paden, Chair
Tenant and Workers United, Evelin Urrutia, Executive Director
The Lamb Center, John MacPherson, Executive Director
United Communities, Alison DeCoursey, Executive Director
Irvin Varkonyi, Providence District
Ventures in Community, Joe Fay, FACETS and William Collins, Baha'i Community, co-chairs
Wesley Housing, Shelley Murphy, President & CEO