

## NORTHERN VIRGINIA AFFORDABLE HOUSING ALLIANCE

### ADVOCACY ACTION ALERT

#### Alexandria Housing Activities February 2021

**The Heritage at Old Town** After 3+ hours of testimony, the Planning Commission approved the proposal for The Heritage at Old Town in a unanimous decision. **Thank you** to the dozens of housing advocates who spoke or submitted testimony in support of this important project! It was a victory for affordable housing and the power of advocacy. The Commissioners shared their enthusiasm for the project, citing the proposal's design, stormwater management strategies, and increased open space as improvements to the existing development. But the vision of the City to anticipate the potential loss of affordable units, and the thoroughness of the South Patrick Street Housing Affordability Strategy process won the day. The passion and commitment of supporters was also noted by Commissioners. The significant loss of market-affordable units and the impact on low and moderate income workers made the case for the density and scale of this project, created through the [RMF](#) zoning tool. Several Commissioners expressed the hope that this new zoning strategy will become a model for future affordable housing proposals. The Heritage goes before the City Council in February.

**Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance** By a vote of 6-1, City Council approved [an ADU policy](#) with strong support from housing advocates. ADUs exist in multiple communities nationwide, and are seen as a proven strategy that can provide options for single persons and small households in a city with a chronic shortage of both housing supply and affordability. While there was considerable opposition from civic groups and neighborhood associations, fears of proliferating ADUs being used as 'Airbnb' short term rentals is not borne out by the experiences of neighboring jurisdictions in Arlington, the District and Montgomery County who have adopted ADU ordinances. In Arlington - where an ordinance was adopted in 2009 and updated in 2019 - 20 ADUs were created in 2019; with 41 created in 2020.

ADU policy must be adopted as an ordinance and is not law until final passage. City Council will introduce the ordinance in early March with final passage anticipated by the end of March.

[Fiscal Year 2022 Budget](#) On February 16 at 7 PM the City Manager will present the FY2022 proposed budget to City Council. This will be a virtual session and is open to the public. The [Budget Calendar](#) and supplemental resources from events late last year to inform Council's decision-making can be found [here](#), and residents can provide input on the budget process [here](#). This will be an especially challenging budget year, given the economic impact of COVID on the City's businesses, vulnerable residents and small landlords. Stay tuned.

**Ramsey Homes Symposium** The City of Alexandria invites the general public, especially residents of Parker-Gray, to a [symposium on the Ramsey Homes](#), which served as affordable housing units from 1953 to 2018. Originally built as *temporary* housing for African American war industry workers in the 1940s, *the homes served as permanent affordable housing for Alexandria residents for 65 years*. The Ramsey Homes were located in the heart of the Parker-Gray Historic District and the African American enclave known as Uptown. This symposium tackles issues of race and equity in housing, of community and community memory, segregation's impact on the African American workforce and the landscape of public housing. The Covid-19 pandemic has made America understand the importance of access to affordable housing, transportation and amenities for all. This symposium examines Alexandria's public housing history and the strides made in making Alexandria a livable and welcoming community. Redeveloping unhealthy and poorly maintained Ramsey Homes to provide quality, safe housing for the Black residents who lived there, and to expand housing opportunities for lower income city residents was a long fought, but notable achievement for housing advocates. We hope that you will take the time to watch this important forum on the history and legacy of Ramsey Homes. This event is free but you must [register](#) for the link. This symposium is one of several events remembered and celebrated during [Black History Month in Alexandria](#).

**City Council Primary Elections are June 8.**