

NORTHERN VIRGINIA AFFORDABLE HOUSING ALLIANCE

ADVOCACY ACTION ALERT

Arlington County Housing Activities March 2021

FY2022 Budget County Manager Mark Schwartz presented his [Proposed FY2022 Budget](#) to the County Board on February 18. The proposed budget maintains a flat tax rate of \$1.013 per \$100 of assessed value, and continues many of the holds put in place during the pandemic. These include foregoing merit-based pay increases for employees, delayed hiring, delayed facility re-openings and reinstating some County services. However, it does make investments in ongoing pandemic relief efforts, housing affordability, equity work and Arlington Public Schools (APS).

Funding for housing-related programs includes \$2.6 million for [housing grants](#) for a total of \$12.7 million and \$592,000 for permanent supportive housing. The budget also includes \$21 million in federal funding for housing choice vouchers and \$8.9 million - \$8.3 million from general fund revenue and \$0.6 million in federal funding - for the **Affordable Housing Investment Fund** (AHIF). Additionally, payment waivers for AHIF loans would be extended through December 31, 2021, providing continued debt relief to nonprofit development owners. The budget also recognizes the \$20 million of future allocation for AHIF as a result of the proffer contribution for Amazon's HQ2 site plan approval and land purchases for future affordable housing production. As in other jurisdictions, the Manager will revisit the budget if anticipated federal funds are approved (At this time, the House of Representatives has passed the American Rescue Plan Act and sent it to the Senate for their consideration). Go to the [Budget Timeline](#) and the [Work Session](#) (March 9) for housing programs and activities for additional information about the FY22 budget.

Eviction Prevention Information and Data Tools While Virginia has received \$524 million in federal funding for COVID-related rental assistance from federal legislation approved at the end of 2020, getting the information to residents and landlords about where to apply and eligibility requirements for the program continues to be a challenge. Tenants can submit an application for rental assistance to [Virginia's Rent Relief Program](#). Landlords can submit applications for tenants through [Housing Virginia's Landlord portal](#). All rental assistance is sent directly to landlords. Additional COVID relief for unpaid electric bill balances comes from [a provision passed by both chambers of the General Assembly](#) that directs Dominion Electric to provide a three month extension to forgive customers' unpaid balances that are more than 30 days in arrears as of December 31, 2020.

[The Northern Virginia Apartment Association](#) is sponsoring "**NoVA Rent Relief: Everything a Landlord Needs to Know**" on **Thursday, March 4, 1-3 PM**. Representatives from all Northern Virginia jurisdictions as well as officials from Virginia Rent Relief Program and Landlord portal will attend. **Legal Services of Northern Virginia** will provide the most current information about federal directives and state legislative activities pertaining to evictions. NVAHA is pleased to be the moderator for this important session. This session is open to all, but there is a [small registration fee](#). NVAHA's [timeline of COVID-19 related aid programs and funding streams](#) (hover your cursor over the dots on the timeline) and the [Eviction Prevention and Neighborhood Stability Toolkit](#) provide a comprehensive view of local, state and federal activities in one location. We encourage you to bookmark that page.

[Affordable Housing Master Plan](#) The County has released a [5 Year Report of The Affordable Housing Master Plan](#) providing an assessment of the progress that's been made toward addressing housing needs through 2040. Future communications will look at the tools and strategies used to address housing goals, assess their effectiveness, and share best practices. The [Housing Policy Matrix](#) from NVAHA's **Housing Toolkit** offers a review of policies across four NoVA jurisdictions.

Broadband for Arlington We support the work of [ArlFiber](#) and their goal for Arlington County to form a broadband authority and devise a strategic plan to provide a community-owned and -operated fiber optic connection to every property in Arlington that wants it. They believe that the vehicle of a broadband authority (either for Arlington or a regional one with Alexandria) is the best way to provide high-quality broadband service to every business, apartment, and private home that is currently underserved. They suggest that such an authority would use software defined networking to generate a competitive market for provider services and greatly reduce the cost of high-speed internet for all - which, in turn, would greatly reduce the public cost of subsidizing internet service for low-income residents.

Through a joint County/Schools Internet Essentials Grant Program using \$500,000 of CARES Act funding, the County is providing free, high-speed internet access to low-income families who qualify for Internet Essentials from Comcast. While we commend this action, it is a temporary solution to the longer term challenge of digital access and literacy and appropriate devices. The digital divide disproportionately impacts low-income households of color. NoVA jurisdictions must be bold and strategic as they confront this challenge. As programs and services move to a virtual platform, all households must have the tools they need for online learning, government assistance programs and telehealth. The findings of the County's [Digital Equity Access Project](#) affirm the urgency of this issue.

Metro's FY2022 Budget [Metro's budget for FY2022](#) is under consideration now, and Metro is requesting public feedback to assist the Board of Directors and management in making difficult decisions this spring. [Of particular concern for County residents should be the proposed station closures including Arlington Cemetery, Virginia Square-GMU, Clarendon, and East Falls Church.](#) These closures undermine County strategies that coordinate land use and transportation planning by locating affordable housing near transit. There are also plans for significant changes to [bus routes](#). While federal funding may provide the resources needed to avoid many of these cuts, strong advocacy will be needed to oppose these drastic measures to the transit system.

Metro is accepting public comment through March 16 at 5 PM. [Take the survey](#) and review the list of [virtual public meetings](#).

2021 Virginia General Assembly The approved biennium budget includes \$70.7 million in FY21 and \$55 million in FY22 for the state **Housing Trust Fund**. Thank you to **Delegate Alfonso Lopez** for his leadership for housing, and kudos to our statewide partner **Virginia Housing Alliance** for leading this successful advocacy campaign! This is a quantum leap from where the state fund was just a few years ago with an allocation of \$12 million. Clearly your advocacy works!! The budget also provides \$20 million in FY21 and \$34 million in FY22 for permanent supportive housing. The **Virginia Poverty Law Center** has been tracking important legislative protections addressing eviction prevention during this GA Session. Check their [website](#) for the latest updates.