

NORTHERN VIRGINIA AFFORDABLE HOUSING ALLIANCE

ADVOCACY ACTION ALERT

Fairfax County Housing Activities September 2021

\$18.7 Million for Housing Development Fairfax County announced their [request for proposals](#) to develop and preserve multifamily affordable housing with support from their \$18.7 million housing trust fund. This fund includes resources from the county's [Housing Blueprint Fund](#), the [Tysons Housing Trust Fund](#), the [American Rescue Plan Act](#), and [Virginia Housing's Amazon Impact REACH Fund](#) for Northern Virginia. Funds are awarded through a competitive process based on the eligibility and use requirements designated by the originating fund. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis through June 30, 2022, or until all of the fiscal year 2022 funding is committed. A [separate RFP](#) has been issued for \$2.5 million in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnership (HOME) funds to acquire, develop and rehabilitate affordable rental housing to further advance the Board of Supervisors' (BOS) goal of producing a minimum of 5,000 new units of housing affordable to households earning \leq 60% of the area median income by 2034.

Speaking of the County's Housing Goal The above-mentioned funding resources, coupled with the County's strategy of [identifying parcels of publicly-owned land for affordable housing development](#), and recent policy changes for [workforce housing units](#) and [housing preservation recommendations](#) send the message that Fairfax County is 'open for business' when it comes to developing affordable housing. Since the adoption of the '5K by 15yr' goal in 2019, a [total of 1,867 units have been created or are in the pipeline](#). **In two years, the county has reached 37% of its goal, and will easily produce 5,000 units before 2034.** It's time for Fairfax County to adopt a goal that comes closer to their true unmet housing needs identified in the [Communitywide Housing Strategic Plan](#) and COG's regional housing goals. The Board's commitment to housing, and the resources they have allocated, warrants adoption of a more aggressive target. Delay is not an option as the times we live in call for [bold action](#). **NVAHA calls upon housing advocates to urge the BOS to adopt a new goal of 10,000 units of new housing by 2034. You can [send an email](#) to the entire Board supporting this action.**

Mobile Home Communities Task Force The long-awaited first meeting of the County's **Manufactured Housing Task Force** is scheduled for sometime in September. The BOS adopted the **Preservation Task Force recommendations** to create a county interagency task force that includes community housing advocates, mobile home park owners and park residents. The goal is to develop a better understanding of the demographics of mobile home communities and the needs of the residents, realizing the important role they play in providing unsubsidized affordable

housing in the county. Through a community impact grant from **Virginia Housing**, Fairfax County contracted with NVAHA and **Tenants and Workers United** to conduct a survey of all residents at the **Harmony Place Trailer Park** on the Route 1 corridor. Resident ambassadors helped identify community priorities and develop survey questions. Once the survey responses are translated, analyzed and compiled into a final report, the residents will present the findings to the appropriate county agencies and elected officials sometime in November.

Affordable Housing at Tysons [A new affordable development proposal](#), providing up to 175 units at Tysons, has been submitted to the County's Department of Planning and Development. **Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH)**, a nonprofit affordable housing developer, is the applicant. This will be APAH's third development in Fairfax County. Located a quarter mile from the Spring Hill metro station, the proposed development will provide two and three bedroom units for households earning between 30% and 60% of the area median income. A second building on the site is anticipated at a later date in phase II of development. This project offers a welcome addition of affordable units for households earning below the workforce dwelling unit incomes required of market-rate developments at Tysons, and will be a source of housing for the hundreds of retail and hospitality workers there. APAH's proposal takes advantage of the \$17 million housing fund created by contributions from commercial development in Tysons.

The Eviction Moratorium Has Ended On August 26, the Supreme Court rejected the most recent eviction moratorium issued by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Read [our blog](#) to understand what happens next for Virginia tenants and landlords. When the **Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA)** legislation passed earlier this year, Fairfax County chose a direct allocation to administer their own rental assistance program through the **Department of Neighborhood and Community Services**, rather than send their funding to the state **Rent Relief Program (RRP)** established by **VA DHCD** and **Virginia Housing** in July 2020. [In March, the County received \\$34.4 million in ERA I funding for rent and utilities, and to date \\$12 million has been administered.](#) The US Treasury recently issued [guidance](#) on how to streamline the application process, addressing national concerns about the slow pace in getting funding to landlords and tenants. Some of the same concerns are shared by volunteers and community-based organizations working to help Fairfax County's tenants.

To receive assistance, landlords and tenants must collaborate to provide the information needed to submit an application. Landlords can submit the required documentation for multiple tenants through an [online portal](#). However, the county has not set up an online application process for individual tenants; they can only [apply by phone](#) (requests have been made for the County to establish an online tenant portal, and it's under consideration). Given the volume of calls, a high percentage of tenants end up leaving a message that depends on a call back. Other concerns identified by volunteers assisting tenants include: phone operators who provide conflicting information on eligibility requirements; poor communication with tenants who have submitted applications; less flexibility regarding required documentation than is allowed in the federal guidelines; limiting the ability of a third party mediator to assist individual tenants with the application process. This is especially needed for tenants who have language challenges or need assistance with securing documentation. We urge the county to take advantage of all opportunities to build flexibility and simplicity into the rental assistance application process and

to redouble their efforts to work with trusted community-based partners to provide outreach and assistance. Jurisdictions that have not disbursed 65% of their funds by the end of September 2021 risk losing them. While there are limited protections for tenants in Virginia, disbursing the rental assistance quickly is more important than ever. One bright spot during an eviction hearing: the majority of Fairfax County judges are holding landlords accountable to the state requirements to make tenants aware of the rental assistance program, and if needed to apply on their behalf.

Human Services Innovation Fund The County is exploring an economic mobility pilot program with **UpTogether** to address the persistent poverty that plagues 6% of the county's households. As [this presentation](#) notes, poverty levels have not declined in the last five years, even as median income levels have risen more than 10%. The UpTogether model leverages 'the power of communities to create their own solutions and move into the middle class.' We applaud consideration of a new approach to tackling poverty, and will wait to hear more details about the county's investment in this initiative. We encourage input from community-based organizations and faith community volunteers who are the 'boots on the ground' and work regularly with families in need. We also strongly urge a process that incorporates the participation of impacted households in the design of this program and priorities at the front end.

2020 Census The [Virginia Public Access Project](#) has a treasure trove of **2020 Census** data that include maps and visualizations on population growth, race, ethnicity and regions of the Commonwealth that will gain or lose representation as the result of redistricting. Check out the [Census data for Fairfax County](#), which also landed in the [top 5 regions that lost population](#) over the last ten years.

Bob Adams Retires Many of you have had the pleasure of working with **Bob Adams**, outgoing Executive Director of [HousingForward Virginia](#). Bob has spent his entire career dedicated to expanding and improving housing opportunities for the citizens of Virginia. In this [final blog](#), Bob looks back on our accomplishments as a housing and community development industry, but notes how much more remains to be done. Those of us who have worked with Bob will miss his thoughtfulness and his leadership. Thank you, Bob!