

MEMORANDUM

To: Russell Schroeder, Arlington County
Housing Division

From: Lisa Sturtevant, Affordable Housing Study Team

Date: 10/17/14

Subject: Summary of October 11 Public Workshop on Affordable Housing Policies

I. Goal and Structure of the Community Workshop

The primary goal of the community workshop was to get feedback from community members on broad affordable housing policy approaches. The discussion among attendees included comments on the pros and cons of various policy approaches and questions and considerations about each policy areas. These discussions will help guide the development of the final goals, objectives and policies document, as well as the policy recommendations for the comprehensive plan elements. In addition, the workshop provided another opportunity for building consensus around the principles of the affordable housing study and the overall goals of a County affordable housing strategy.

After opening remarks by a member of the County Board (Jay Fissette) and a representative from the County Manager's office (Gabriela Acurio) and presentations from a representative from the Affordable Housing Working Group (Mike Spotts) and a member of the consultant team (Dave Versel), community members participated in small group discussions around policy areas. There were two sessions lasting approximately 40 minutes each, so each participant was able to be part of conversations about two policy topics.

The morning forum ended with a reporting out from the small groups and a chance for general public comment.

There were 10 policy areas to choose from:

Policy Area 1. The County should facilitate the **production of a sufficient supply of affordable housing**, with particular focus on **long-term affordability and financial feasibility** of rental housing for households below 60% AMI and homeownership opportunities for households between 80 and 100% AMI.

Policy Area 2. The County should make every reasonable effort to **preserve the existing stock of affordable rental housing** (both CAFs and MARKs) and to **distribute CAFs within the County consistent with adopted land use policies and guidelines.**

Policy Area 3. The County should make every reasonable effort to **prevent and end homelessness** through shelters, CAFs and social services.

Policy Area 4. The County should help Arlington residents **age in the community** by supporting financial assistance, design principles and zoning and land use changes that create housing options.

Policy Area 5. The County should create options for **persons with disabilities to live independently in the community** by supporting financial assistance, design principles and zoning and land use changes that create housing options.

Policy Area 6. The County should provide financial and other targeted support to Arlington workers **who want to rent or buy a home in Arlington.**

Policy Area 7. The County should promote **coordinated housing and transportation planning** efforts.

Policy Area 8. The County should promote **environmental sustainability initiatives** (energy efficiency, water efficiency) in new, renovated and existing housing.

Policy Area 9. The County should consider the **use of public land to further affordable housing goals.**

Policy Area 10. The County should make provisions to **accommodate a wider range of household and housing types** within single family neighborhoods.

The policy areas that garnered the most interest were the production of affordable housing (policy area 1), the preservation of affordable housing (policy area 2) and the use of public land (policy area 9). As a result, two discussion tables were set up for these policy areas for both sessions, allowing for four discussion groups on each of these policy areas. The homelessness (policy area 3) and housing for people with disabilities (policy area 5) conversations happened jointly at one table. Similarly, the aging in community (policy area 4) and Arlington workers (policy area 6) were discussed jointly at one table; and Transportation (policy area 7) and Sustainability (policy area 8) were also discussed at a single table.

II. Key Takeaways

Throughout all of the small group discussions, several common themes emerged:

- It is important to understand affordable housing needs and to intentionally plan for those needs.
- Affordability is a growing problem in Arlington County.
- The high cost of land makes it difficult to provide affordable housing options.
- The County's affordable housing policy should be more proactive and creative, and less reactive.
- An affordable strategy should include a range of approaches, and not rely on one or two tools.
- It is important to target households with incomes below 60% of AMI, but other households have difficulty finding affordable housing.
- The County needs to re-visit zoning and land use policies to make them more effective at increasing the supply and accessibility of affordable housing.
- Market rate development is an important means by which the County will get affordable units or resources for affordable housing.

- The County should create local standards and requirements where state and/or Federal requirement are not adequate.
- It is important to distribute affordable housing throughout the County.
- It is important to balance affordable housing goals with other community needs.
- And, related, there is a need to consider the broad impacts of a particular affordable housing strategy.
- It is important to combine housing production/preservation strategies with the provision of housing and other services.
- The County should coordinate better with other County agencies, particularly schools and transportation.
- There are many different opinions about affordable housing in the County but it is important to try to build consensus.
- The County should work on improving communication with the community about affordable housing policies to ensure complete information is shared.

III. Detailed Notes from Small Group Discussions

Production of Affordable Housing

General Comments

- Good that the County is actually doing a study of needs and policies
- Important to have a mix of incomes
- Important to meet the demand of low-wage workers
- Racial/ethnic diversity is important
- Important to have a range of household/family types
- The County has a track record of being successful on planning issues (e.g. Metro corridors)
- Policy needs to be more proactive and creative than reactive
- Providing affordable housing in the County reduces transportation costs and can be good for the region
- Need to set specific goals for how much affordable housing is needed
- Preservation—as well as production—is important
- Need to combine production programs with other housing subsidy programs
- Without affordable housing the County risks having “economic segregation in this era of economic prosperity”
- There is potentially a limited supply of “goodwill” for affordable housing
- There is lots of talk on affordable housing but we need to come to consensus
- Cost of land can be “prohibitive”, need a full set of solutions
- Arlington can’t meet the whole region’s affordable housing needs
- Needs are substantial, waitlists for affordable housing are long, many are currently underhoused
- Need to recognize that this is a crisis
- Arlington is at the forefront of the affordable housing issue but the County is starting to get pushback
- Need to change the perception that people living in affordable housing are “bad” people

Specific Comments and Considerations

- Zoning and land use
 - Need to re-visit land use and zoning policies
 - Consider flexible zoning – flexibility in building uses (e.g. form-based code)
 - Increase bonus density
 - Reduce parking requirements
- Sources of funding
 - AHIF
 - The overall mission of AHIF needs to be better articulated
 - AHIF funding is not being used in the most efficient way
 - Should use AHIF funding for 40-50% AMI
 - Actually doing projects at 80% AMI is harder and needs more funding
 - Tie AHIF interest rate to income target (lower income, lower interest rate)
 - AHIF has been very successful
 - Developer contributions
 - Need to revisit developer contribution formula; not getting enough from developers under current formula and not getting enough on-site units
 - Important to revisit issue of developer contributions before relying on public land
 - Developers drive the process; more community input is needed during development review process
 - Community has been given bad information by developers
 - Need more incentives/requirements for affordability
 - Contributions from developers of commercial properties
 - Need to increase contributions from developers of commercial properties
- Production of units for special populations
 - Low income households
 - Greatest need is among household below 60% AMI
 - Population with incomes just above 60% AMI often have difficulty accessing units
 - Particularly disabled individuals and others that have greater than average household expenses (e.g. medical)
 - Still very difficult to make it at on an income just above 60% AMI
 - County employees
 - Need to do more for County employees, homeownership and rental
 - Accessible units
 - Provide bonus density incentive for fully accessible units
 - Create a local accessibility code or increase accessibility requirements in building code
 - There needs to be money to sustain permanently supportive housing
 - Accessory dwelling units (ADUs)
 - Need to change standards to make ADU policy work better
 - Single-resident occupancy (SRO) units
 - Common facilities, demand from single men but also others
 - Possible homeownership units
 - Homeowners

- MIPAP program needs to be restarted and re-done to reach more people
 - Downpayment service providers need to be better informed about what's going on with the program
 - Homeownership programs are not as important, won't help as many people
 - Family-sized units
 - Current production does not include enough
 - Live-work units – are there examples that have worked?
- Inclusionary zoning doesn't work well
- Balancing community needs
 - Need to balance open space / public land with affordable housing needs
 - Need to ensure other approaches (e.g. developer contributions) before using public land
 - Need to use public land in North Arlington
 - Need to compare costs on public versus private sites
 - Need to look at multiple uses on public land sites
 - Need more transparent process on public land issue, felt lied to
 - Need to balance school needs with affordable housing needs
- Household definition
 - Need to redefine “family” and “household” in zoning ordinance
- Geographic distribution
 - Important to spread affordable housing out
 - Too much concentration on Columbia Pike
 - Distribute not just throughout the County but across school districts
 - All CAFs have been going in zip codes in South Arlington, need better distribution
 - Adjust income limits for CAFs and put in all zip codes in the County
 - Very hard to find opportunities for CAFs in North Arlington
 - Wants to know more about the plans for Lee Highway
- Housing near transportation
 - Potentially too much emphasis on proximity to transit; proximity to other services/amenities also important
- Long-term sustainability
 - Important to transfer ownership to non-profits
- Decouple affordable housing from other community benefits

Preservation of Affordable Housing

General Comments

- Preserving MARKs is a no-brainer
 - Need to know how many MARKs are being created
- But preservation gives us a “headstart” but it's not going to add to what exists
- Affordability gap is widening
 - Tearing down affordable homes destroys communities
- People like it when older properties are preserved

- Important for people who already live and work in Arlington to stay
- Cannot “buy” our way out of the affordable housing problem, need to preserve
- The County needs to be more proactive than reactive
- Need more leadership from elected officials
- There are many different opinions in the community
- Tension between wanting own property values to increase while preserving affordability for others
 - Properly done, affordable housing does not decrease property values
- Need lower cost ways of preservation since money is limited
- Need to think about “throwing money at the problem” versus creating value through preservation solutions
- Need to know how much housing is needed
 - Regional planning efforts are important

Specific Comments and Considerations

- Zoning and land use
 - Increase allowable density
 - Allow higher density development in single-family neighborhoods
 - Increase density on existing affordable housing sites
 - BUT some argue that we cannot solve the problem through increased density
 - Use transfer of development rights (TDR) to preserve affordable housing
 - Reduce parking requirements and increase bonus density
 - Raise income limits to create incentives for on-site units
 - Use long-range plans for create more affordable housing
 - Update affordable housing ordinance
 - Do not allow off-site options
 - Do not allow cash alternatives
 - Current planning process has resulting in unintended consequences of higher housing costs
 - Need to understand how process will impact costs
 - Do not allow townhouses by right in RA zones
 - Opportunities for adaptive reuse (e.g. Madison)
 - Opportunities for co-ops
 - Re-zone single-family neighborhoods
 - Limit teardowns and “McMansions”
- Other means of preservation
 - Increase resources
 - Paying into AHIF creates distribution problems
 - Use historic districts to preserve affordable housing
 - Land banking
 - CAF tools to preserve MARKs
 - Convert MARKs into CAFs whenever possible
 - Options that require changes to state legislation/regulation
 - “Recycle” public facilities as affordable housing
- Preservation of units for special populations
 - Lower income households

- Need more information on the income levels where people qualify for affordable housing and who these people are
 - Older adults
 - Important to consider the impact of rent increases on older adults
 - Families with children
 - Consider access to child care or allow in-home child care in apartment (regulatory issue)
 - Immigrants
 - Preservation of affordable housing is key to preserving immigrant communities
 - County could track where immigrants choose to live to understand the impacts of the market on them
 - Garden apartments
 - Important to preserve garden apartments and preserve the communities around them
 - Ownership
 - Preserving ownership opportunities strengthens communities
 - Group homes
 - Potential for preserving some MARKs as group homes
- Transportation /transit corridors
 - Important to preserve along transportation corridors
 - Need to preserve affordable housing even as new transit is built
 - But it can be expensive to preserve housing near transit, could result in potential loss to developers when preserving housing near transit
 - Sometimes it's more cost effective to preserve housing off transit; more bang for your buck
- Geographic distribution
 - Some see concentrations of affordable housing as "ghettos"
 - Consider whether lower income households want to be concentrated in certain neighborhoods
 - Increasing density in single-family neighborhoods might not be appreciated by current residents
 - All affordable housing should not be on Columbia Pike
 - Low densities along Lee Highway are a problem
 - Need for a specific plan for Lee Highway
 - Important to think critically about what kind of housing we want along Lee Highway
 - Columbia Pike densities not appropriate for Lee Highway
 - Encourage the widest distribution as possible
 - Re-visit Rosslyn-Ballston corridor to preserve more housing there
 - But developing affordable housing near transit is more expensive, requires higher density and should understand the full impact of the increased density
 - There is a naturally occurring concentration of affordable housing
 - Re-zoning should explicitly deconcentrate affordable housing
 - Current concentration of affordable housing affects schools, social services
 - Important to have a mix/range of housing types throughout the County
- Long-term affordability

- Non-profit ownership will help ensure long-term affordability
- Need to better understand the long-term impacts on neighborhoods of 30-year (or more) affordability terms
- Balancing community needs
 - Important to examining preservation needs in light of other community needs
- Alternative housing models
 - Need to allow single-family homeowners to rent extra space (e.g. granny flats)
- Energy costs
 - Can energy costs be assessed and controlled

Public Land

General Comments

Unlike the other tables, there were strong discussions around the “pros” and “cons” of the public land issue.

Pros

- Land is expensive and using public land lowers the cost of producing affordable housing without any County money
- Land is limited and the County should steward well what we have
- Using public land allows for shared development (e.g. fire station and affordable housing)
- Multiple uses could and should happen together on public facilities
- A new community center is needed; could be combined with affordable housing
- There are too many parks or underutilized public sites in Arlington and most of the sites are not active parkland; use land to build
- Shared development of Arlington Mill had many benefits and affordable housing component helped to facilitate the redevelopment
- Using air rights can lower the overall cost of development
- Community process will happen when (if) a site moves forward
- Public land option provides another model, another approach in a comprehensive affordable housing strategy
- Using public land for affordable housing can help distribute it throughout the County
- Using public land is an alternative to getting money from developers
- Creates more options for providing affordable housing

Cons

- Parkland should be maintained as much as possible, and green space should not be taken away for housing.
- Jennie Dean Park area should not be used for housing development; it is the last part area in the region of Arlington and houses the most popular dog park inside the Beltway
- Other uses for public land are higher priorities (e.g. schools)
- Could lose parks altogether, focus on community centers in commercial corridors instead of parks

- At Lubber Run, higher density is not helpful and is not in character with the rest of the neighborhood
- Adjacent housing will encroach on parks
- Multi-family housing on a lot next to a park will have a negative impact on the park
- Density will have negative impacts on parks
- Public parks should not be used for development when there are other private empty parking lots
- People move to Arlington because of the parks, so we shouldn't use them for development
- Preserve existing housing and community resources instead of developing parks
- Need to preserve parking next to park as well as the parks themselves
- Affordable housing often creates a parking shortage or traffic
- Difficult to build consensus around uses of public land
- Development should be consistent with surrounding neighborhood

Comments and Considerations

- It is important for the County to retain ownership of the land if it is used for affordable housing/missed use development
- Build up and not out when using public land to minimize impact
- Be widely considerate of options across the County
- Take parks as a last resort; look at every other opportunity first
- Possible to include housing over our freeways (e.g. route 50)
- Don't restrict affordable housing to where it already exists
- Identify opportunities for affordable housing near route 50 corridor or future transit
- Consider collateral effects of housing and listen to local residents
- Need to plan longer-term and be creative
 - Be more creative generally about citing public services like schools
- County and school board must communicate around this issue
- Disperse affordable housing throughout the County or concentrate near transit
- There has been confusion, poor communication and a lack of information around the process for using public land for affordable housing
 - County must clarify proposed public land sites for affordable housing developments
 - There has been confusion on the impacts on parks/green space
 - Community is not listened to or notified enough about plan for public parks
 - County must clarify what kind of public land is available
 - It is important to define "park" versus "open space"
 - County should assess the suitability of public land sites for affordable housing and communicate that information to the community

Single-Family Neighborhoods

General Comments

- Provides more options, additional approaches within a comprehensive affordable housing strategy
- Allows for integration of affordable housing
 - Affordable housing where it doesn't exist now

- Promotes diversity within the County
 - But consider whether we want more diversity, particular in single-family neighborhoods
- Means of reducing homelessness
- New models can be attractive
- Can allow for aging in place
- Can provide opportunities for supportive services within buildings
- Can meet 60%+ AMI needs, freeing up resources to support housing for lower income households
- Need to balance with other community needs and create limits that address concerns (e.g. about parking, traffic)

Specific Comments and Considerations

- Potential negative impacts need to be considered
 - Increased congestion
 - Parking issues (limits on parking permits needed)
 - Need for enforcement
 - Enforcement always seems to be problematic
 - Need clear, enforced occupancy standards and proactive code enforcement
 - Clear methods to deal with tenant-landlord issues, more information/resources for tenants on due process/dealing with landlords
- Re-zoning opportunities all throughout the County
 - Lee Highway mentioned specifically
 - But important to distribute affordable housing throughout the County
- Specific housing types
 - Revise zoning / land use to build more duplexes
 - Consider rental opportunities for families
 - More family-sized units generally
 - Potential for smaller apartment buildings
 - Potential for buildings with smaller units, common space
- Study “grandfathered” apartments to see what the impact has been
- Need to ensure that the people most in need are the ones who benefit from the new housing options
- County and school board need to communicate, work together on this issue
- Consider whether it is more effective to focus on affordable housing in transit corridors rather than single-family neighborhoods
 - Either way, need to link affordable housing to good transportation options and services, retail
- Consider the edges of single-family neighborhoods for future redevelopment
- Keep new housing types lower density / less tall
- Need to understand the impacts of changing the housing mix in single-family neighborhoods
- Need to ensure that increasing the supply of affordable housing does not overburden other County services (e.g. schools)
- Possible for County to buy single-family homes and rent them out
- Balancing strategy with other County priorities is important
- Rental control an option
- County needs to communicate options for single-family neighborhoods with the community

Housing for People with Disabilities

General Comments

- Need to understand populations and housing needs for specific subpopulations
- Data in needs analysis report understates the number and share of the population with disabilities
 - Excludes people living in group quarters
- More County funding is needed for accessible units
 - 425 PSH units – front load housing needs

Specific Comments and Considerations

- Zoning and land use
 - Make zoning changes and provide funding for group homes
 - Change the definition of “family” to allow for more unrelated individuals to live together, save costs on services through shared housing
 - Give accessible units priority funding, incentivize production
 - Require a higher share of accessible units than what is required by the Federal government
 - Create incentives for building accessible units with supportive services
 - Seek local options for accessible building code requirements
 - Single-family detached formed based code that requires accessible entrances and interiors
 - Flexible housing types
 - Rental ordinance and CAFs need to include different housing types/ownerships for the disabled population
- Other means for providing housing for disabled people
 - Livable Home tax credit from the state
 - VHDA loans
 - More County funding; can’t rely on state/Federal programs
 - Public private partnerships
- Subgroups
 - People with cognitive & behavioral disabilities have different needs; need a better breakout that “cognitive” disabilities that is in needs analysis
 - Special education, autism needs in schools
 - Increase housing for people with physical disabilities and incomes below 30% AMI
 - Need a specific program to match people with physical disabilities with housing
 - Offer lower AHIF interest rate to projects that target lower incomes
 - Households and 30-40% AMI
 - Need more group homes
- Permanent supportive housing
 - Well short of the PSH goal of 425 units
 - Leasing barriers need to be overcome (e.g. credit, etc.)
 - Low income households may need wraparound services
 - Need funding for the unit, rental subsidy and services/staff
 - Need specific funding for families with children in permanent supportive housing

- Need to define, educate about “visitability”
 - All housing should be “visitable” – new and existing
- County should acquire properties for housing for the disabled population now before it gets even more expensive
- Shelter facilities need to be accessible

Homeless Population

General Comments

- Need more information on counts of homeless population
 - Needs analysis numbers are confusing; paragraph too short and not comprehensive
 - Important to understand needs for families versus individuals
 - Point in time count is insufficient
 - Need counts of doubling up / “couch surfing”
- More County funding is needed to fix gaps in housing, services
- More economical to stabilize people in housing before they need homeless services
- De-emphasize shelters, focus on permanent supportive housing
 - Need data on opportunity cost of keeping someone in housing versus eviction/emergency aid

Specific Comments and Considerations

- Need more information about plans to build homeless shelters
- Combine housing services with other supportive services
 - Job training and resources
 - Help with emergency needs
 - Pre-eviction support
 - Rent deposit/first month’s rent
 - Supportive services particularly in transitional housing
 - DHS staffing too low to meet needs
 - Supportive services issues need to be addressed in the needs analysis
- Permanent supportive housing
 - Well short of the PSH goal of 425 units
 - Leasing barriers need to be overcome (e.g. credit, etc.)
 - Low income households may need wraparound services
 - Need funding for the unit, rental subsidy and services/staff
 - Need specific funding for families with children in permanent supportive housing
- Use school system to provide services, forecast needs
- ADUs can be a means to provide housing to homeless people / families

Housing and Transportation Planning

General Comments

- Jointly planning housing and transportation is essential
- Make the best use of land while being realistic about what is possible
- County's current approach to concentrating affordable housing and transportation is failing and private homeowners are paying the price
- Many plans/programs have major costs and investments may take a while to pay off

Specific Comments and Considerations

- Parking issues
 - Arlington Mill has 167 spaces and only 60 are being used creating backlash because of overflow in the neighborhood. Somehow there is inadequate parking planned for.
 - In Forest Glen, there are concerns about parking issues, zoning problems
 - Even if parking is provided by the developers, residents don't want to or can't afford to pay for it
- Geographic distribution
 - Limited opportunities for siting affordable housing near transit
 - Need for reliable transportation to all parts of the County
 - County is looking at adding more bus transportation to allow affordable units to be better serviced; transit needs to be planned from this point of view
- Need to focus more on trash/street litter around the County
- Possibility of incentives for reducing cars/parking needs (e.g. incentive for trading in parking permit for a bike)
- Make it easier to use public transportation (e.g. Next Bus)