



**Housing Action**  
**March 9, 2006 Forum**  
**7:00 pm**

1. Larry Hayward, Pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, welcomed all.
2. Jim Hoben introduced Housing Action and objectives of the meeting. Introduction of present candidates (Vice Mayor Del Pepper, Councilman Gaines). Thanked Joyce Woodson for all of her affordable housing (AH) support and service.
3. Joyce Woodson commented that she is proud of what the city council is doing re. AH but we're not doing enough. Thanked Housing Action committee for its efforts.
4. Jim introduced new council candidates: Tim Lovain, Van Van Fleet, Ken Foran, Pat Troy. As well as City staff: Jim Hartmann and Mildrilyn Davis. ARHA's Melvin Miller was introduced. And all co-sponsor representatives stood for recognition.
5. Jim opened the discussion: the challenge is that we're losing a significant number of rental apartments (2,000-3,000 yearly) by raising rents or by converting to condos. The city is not yet getting AH units with each new development the city approves. We need to work with the development community as partners and with incentives. Council's response has been good thus far...\$.01 of property tax dedicated to preserving AH and \$.005 is turned into a bond to use for future AH. On current preservation efforts, up to 119 (rental units) in 4 different city projects are in early stages of agreement to be purchased and operated by non-profits. Wesley has 1 project, and RPJ Housing has 44 units on Commonwealth Ave in negotiation in partnership with AHDC. AHDC is still negotiating Gunston Hall apts (56 units). We, as a community, have not yet focused/organized/activated enough to significantly preserve and add AH units in city. Let's focus on having an AH game plan for the city: affordable housing and workforce units. We hope current council commits the city to an action plan regarding AH with a broad community impact and with funds for outside professional assistance. This also includes implementation of the plan, whose function should reside in city manager's office for the greatest city department coordination.
6. Nancy Carson: Let's talk about components of an AH action plan with the idea getting council so excited about the plan that they can't wait to get started! How Housing Action sees the city currently with regards to AH... we've been asking for an AH plan yet still haven't received one. The city says that the 'plan in place is a 5 year plan to add 100 units each year.' The Office of Housing department doesn't have the power to set into motion a far reaching plan. We need much better city teamwork between housing, Planning & Zoning, AHDC, etc. We must work with all the agencies and be committed to this goal. There are no far-sighted goals for AH through the current planning process—that's what will help developers while planning. We need AH units folks can afford to live in.  
  
How can we take advantage of what ARHA does? We need departments to work together. We need accountability. We need better incentives and creative definitions for our development community (other cities already do this). We need to find ways to make it work. If everyone wants this, we must find a way to do it. And though we have allocated money for AH we haven't adopted guidelines to protect that money. It's easy for money to start bleeding out without specific plans for its use. Money needs to be used for preservation and addition of AH. Please read candidates' responses to Housing Action's AH questions on our Web site.
7. [Jim introduced Mayor Euille and Councilman Smedberg, and Fran Lunney (Arlington County Housing Coordinator).]
8. Jim: NVAHA, the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance, brings together many communities re. the AH issue. The components of an action plan to discuss tonight include: stakeholders, inventory/demands (89% of city staff live outside of the City), targets, incentives, other ideas, and programs.

Stakeholders: who should be involved in creating the action plan? renters, property owners, developers, apartment owners, non-profits, commercial property owners, police/fire/emt and hospital staff, the people/citizens, seniors, churches (including those with property) and all faith communities, disabled residents, teachers, neighbors, PTAs, builders/construction workers, people who use roads and people who pay for the roads, taxpayers, all city employees, (about 2,500 employed by city government, plus 2,300 with school employees). [The largest employer is PTO now with 7,000 employees.] Govt employees including professional association workers. Minorities. Low-income.

Inventory: what do we need to know about the present AH stock? Age and condition, what's committed, what's market rate affordable now. Where apartment complexes are, and what the rents are. What isn't there now and what could there be. Size of apartments/rooms in each. Single family stock, too. Age of owners that might sell now. Demographics of current ownership. We have a very segregated housing vs. jobs issue in this metro area.

Demand: Where are our city employees living now and will/do we lose them because of their commute? Not everyone who works in the city wants to live in the city.

Targets: what kind and how do we set them? Look at similar city communities throughout the U.S. that might have a balanced demographic spread vs. Alexandria's uneven spread. Must be mindful of the Dillon rule. ARHA has obtained 800 public housing units, 111 mod-rehab, 131 market rate (about 1,130 units per the resolution). Can set targets by income populations or unit types or based on what we'd like to have vs. what we can realistically achieve with our present resources (which aren't always cash). Don't reinvent the wheel on what's working in other cities. Why hasn't a model been done yet for Alexandria when we've been talking about this for years? There is a unique philosophical undercurrent regarding 'what kind of community do you want to be?' Set targets for service industries, too, including retail. What is the exact number of units? Why are service people leaving now – is it for bigger houses or more land, do they want condos/etc? Why would you want to live in the city? City should adopt an ending homelessness policy, too.

Incentives: what would help preserve AH or add to it? Higher density in exchange for affordable units. Catholics for Housing, as a non-profit, is being held to the same standards as developers are – look at an institutional proffer structure to make it more favorable to non-profits. For a generous set aside, a state record bond was made available to developers. A variety of incentives lie in the tax arena and it doesn't always have to be a local incentive. There is a state bill to be passed to assess AH units based on affordability not market rate. City should adopt a one-stop shop for plan approval with a highly expedited process for developers, without compromising standards. Mark up to market agreements with the federal government were helpful (used in Fox Chase). We must also look at barriers in place now.

9. Jeremy Flachs briefly discussed 'where might we go from here?' What do we want as a city? We want an affordable housing action plan. We need to hire consultant to do a detailed roadmap, and employ a staff person in the city who would be the point person on this AH effort. Council must allocate \$400,000-500,000 for the consultant and a staff person. When? Now. It should be allocated out of the current budget. Council, how can we implement an action plan so everyone can have access to affordable housing?. (Audience member: wasn't this what AHDC was supposed to do? Jim: No, not really, and currently they're without an executive director.)

10. Nancy facilitated the Council candidate comments:

Mayor Euille: this is an important meeting. It's nice to see city staff and management and employee. The city has a problem but we're not alone. Local, statewide, regional, national, international. We must all work together knowing the challenges we're facing. Thanks to Housing Action for keeping this in the forefront. We need to keep having forums like this to bring it to the forefront. Affordable housing doesn't mean housing for poor folks. Many of us are one check away from becoming homeless. I support everything in Housing Action's plan, and have been advocating for an awful long time. We have a commitment to make things happen. We're hiring a deputy director for housing to have one person to help focus and keep things going and know what's going on in the city. This is in the works, it will happen. Dedication of \$.01 of the property real estate tax, leveraged to \$22 million. One major project in the works...hoping to buy 400 units in the Winkler complex. We can hire staff and a consultant but not

without community buy in. We need to maintain diversity we have in this city now, which includes the working class. I don't want to be a part of a city that's all wealthy and poor folks. We need a paradigm change. We need to stop talking and start acting. Don't be critical about bonus density. We must work together.

Mary Riley for Rob Krupicka: I applaud the Housing Action efforts. The history of the city is tied to diversity, which we must create more of. Five years ago, 80% of the housing was affordable. Today only 30% is. Council has done something but we must do more. We must increase the current goal of 100 units/year. Transportation must be examined as well. Land use tools must be examined too. Council should approve a plan of housing options. I will push for action by this fall. Housing opportunities should exist for a range of incomes here in the city.

Paul Smedberg: Who are the stakeholders...everyone in the city is a stakeholder in this effort. We must get community buy in though. It's very critical and is a big challenge. We need housing for retail, seniors, police.... The majority of the community isn't convinced affordable housing is what the city should focus on. We must convey the importance of affordable housing. How can we build something and keep it affordable? Federal funding is slashing assistance – what do we do with ARHA? The city is doing quite a bit but we can do more. We must educate residents on what is out there and available for them. We must work regionally too, work together. The tax structures need to change at the state level too. Potomac Yards, Huntington Towers, Landmark – we should make a difference in all of these projects.

Del Pepper: If anyone read my answers to the housing questions, I was so busy getting in facts... but I do have the energy and excitement for what Housing Action is bringing forth. I believe better teamwork and more accountability is needed. We should have an affordable housing report card to compare yearly. We need goals. We need better incentives for developers. I enjoyed what I didn't hear tonight ('let's study this for another year'). A new position in the city manager's office (new deputy for office of housing) should bring a good bit of energy to that department if [that position] they're just focused on affordable housing. WE should put the deputy in the city manager's office. This is a caring community. You do have a caring council, too. The Toolkit for Affordable Housing Development is a great tool.

Pat Troy: I second and third Housing Action on their work. And I agree with everyone. 3 years ago JW stood up on poll for affordable housing. It is a must, we're losing too much every week. 11% of city employees live here. That's ridiculous. They can't live here. It creates many problems without workforce living available here. Now they must live outside. Which creates traffic. Congestion is caused by commuting of our workers. Other counties are building affordable housing units, why can't we? Whatever it takes, we must do it.

Ken Foran: I have a three year career as a school board member and we had to import teachers for our schools. But then they find they must have four roommates (instead of two or three) to afford to live here. I tried to get reduced-price housing for teachers, near Hammond school, but other school board members wouldn't go along with me. They wouldn't give up school property for anything. We could have gotten units for teachers. Now it's 'gone condo'—the opportunity is lost now. The majority of our teachers live out of the city. The city must make provisions! It's a bad sign when your own people can't live in their own city. We've got to make affordable housing available in the city. We must have an action plan for housing. Arlington has it and it is successful. We should promote an active plan for housing preservation and addition. And a report card on annual gain/loss too.

Ludwig Gaines: We have a very serious problem in Alexandria. Diverse communities helped build this city. Those diverse communities are leaving. Gentrified now. If we don't act now, we'll lose that history. We pride ourselves on a community of many colors. It will soon be of one color: green (to afford to live here). We have to act now. I'm proud to hear density bonuses, live where you work issues. I've pushed for these issues. We need a plan. We need to act now. Let's work with the current plan to make it sufficient so we can move forward. I don't care about convincing communities about affordable housing. Leadership without action is immobilized. Leadership 'acts' and that's what we need to do. The community has spoken and it's a priority. Council has spoken and it's a priority. We must act on it now!

Bernie Schulz: In this election year, I'm excited about what I hear tonight. In three years I haven't seen any action from council. I haven't seen any action regarding working with out legislation in Richmond. We need to work with the state to examine assessments, too. I want to work with renters who want to be owners. I want to live here because of the city's history. The community is at risk right now. If we have a plan before us, I'll work to act on the plan. And I'll work on the planning process. I'll work so citizens come first, not developers. I'll add structure to the one cent allocation. We need to work with faith communities and tap into their resources. We need to look into federal funds regarding affordable housing. I will work my heart out to work on this issue in this community.

Tim Lovain: I am in strong support for an affordable housing action plan. It's important priority for the city. Annual quotas are important. The city has made great steps, one penny, but more can be done. More needs to be done. We need to have an act of political will to empower the city manger to insist city departments work together to make affordable housing happen. First, talk to people who'd live in affordable housing and ask their needs. Transit oriented development must also be considered. Connect affordable housing and transit development. A regional approach is important too, as are state and federal. We need community insistence that something must happen. Then we'll see affordable housing happen in the city.

Van Fleet: I endorse an action plan. What was taking place 3-6 years ago regarding affordable housing? Alexandria lacks sufficient affordable housing. Service workers should be able to buy within the city. Tax assessments need to be reviewed. We haven't come a long way in 6 years. This is a great start. Units are getting less, not more. Condo conversions are killing us. Property tax is a whole other issue. It depends on affordable housing... as long as tax rates keep increasing, we'll end up with the very rich and the very poor with no one in between. Gunston Hall is a good attempt. Huntington Towers was a fiasco... VDOT won't sell to a developer. Those are problems we need to solve in the city. Major problems we must solve.

Craig Miller: I bring a unique perspective other candidates don't. I'm a mortgage loan officer. I help find creative ways to get service folks into Alexandria. It's become harder and harder over the years. We need an action plan. We need to get on board with teamwork and accountability. We need to know what people need in their homes. I disagree with Councilman Gaines. Leadership is the right thing to do, but there has been none. We need inclusive leadership. We need to push council to do the right thing to get more affordable housing units on the market.

Nancy and Jim closed: grateful for everyone's participation. Next meeting in city council with a resolution. Thank you.