

## Workforce Housing Questions & Responses

Submitted 3/10/06 by: Ken Foran, Council Candidate (R)

**1. Priority. How important is workforce housing to Alexandria?** A healthy and economically sustainable community has a mix of housing options for its residents. Alexandria is becoming an increasingly expensive housing market which has resulted in hardships for residents of all income levels.

While the range of mid- and high-income home ownership options has been increasing as a result of condo conversions and new construction, the low income market has been declining. Alexandria is increasingly acquiring a reputation as indifferent if not hostile to the poor. A dramatic shift in thinking is necessary to address this situation.

If restaurants cannot find employees, or if shops cannot find sales clerks and cashiers, our community's quality of life declines proportionately. And this is already becoming increasingly difficult in our city.

While an elected member of Alexandria's School Board, I advocated a plan that would increase housing options for our new teachers. It was an innovative plan that would have allowed private use of otherwise unusable school property in return for housing units for new teachers. It is this kind of new thinking that will help to alleviate our housing difficulties.

Additionally, the city must commit to holding developers more accountable for providing housing units affordable to lower incomes as part of the site-plan process. This is perhaps our best opportunity to preserve and expand workforce units.

Finally, to protect Alexandrian's at all income levels, we need to regain control of our city spending. To sustain the upward spiraling spending, the City Council has voted to increase taxes by more than 100% in the last 5 years. This has not only pinched the higher income homeowners, but has literally driven senior citizens on fixed incomes and middle and lower income residents out of their homes and out of our city. This is not the caring and inclusive community I envision for Alexandria.

By slowing the growth of spending, we can moderate tax increases to a more sustainable level and become a truly inclusive and vibrant community that welcomes everyone.

**2. Targets and Tools. Will you support an Action Plan and implementation tools, and how will you get City staff to implement it?** If anyone is unhappy with the responsiveness of the current City Council, they ought to look for reasonable alternatives.

Without a plan, there is no means of evaluating the city's efforts to be a welcoming community for residents of all economic strata. With no evaluation, there is no accountability. I will take the lead on Council in developing a plan complete with preservation and new unit goals.

Additionally, to ensure success of the plan, it needs Council to allocate the resources to support it. That means both budget and adequate staff to carry out Council's vision. I will fight to ensure a majority of my colleagues on Council support this vision.

**3. Accountability. An Action Plan would require the City to provide an annual report. Will you support this accountability?** I reiterate my intent to lead the on Council to establish such a plan, complete with an accountability report. Firefighters, police, teachers and senior citizens deserve the opportunity to

live in our city. Failure to measure our progress in a reasonable manner is another way of avoiding the responsibility and accountability that is missing from the current Council.

**4. Opportunities. Will you support density increases if properly planned and coordinated with open space, transportation mitigation and mixed use?** The process of awarding bonus density in return for developer proffers is a win-win situation for almost everyone. Infrequently is a “by right” development the best solution for our community.

There are many categories of proffers developers might offer in return for density. My objective on Council will be to elevate workforce housing to a consistent priority in the process. Importantly, the inclusion of new units in the process must be a priority.

Proper planning that takes into account all factors including open space, transportation impact, schools, and other factors is paramount, and will result in sustainable density in appropriate parts of our city.

**5. Funding. Will you commit to continued City funding to support workforce housing?** The workforce housing plan that I will take the lead on developing must be supported with adequate resources. Failure to do so means there is no real commitment. My preferred method of funding is to develop a plan with specific targets and to have Council develop a budget that meets those goals. I will also consider any other reasonable method of financing, including a dedicated stream of revenue.

**6. AHDC. Should the City widen its options, beyond AHDC, by working more closely with other nonprofit and for-profit housing developers?** The city should be the last means of providing housing, not the first. By working creatively with a myriad of private non-profits with expertise in the issue, Alexandria can best provide continued workforce housing to its residents. This works well in Arlington and that can be one model for us to consider as we develop our own.

Working with for-profit developers should be a priority within the site plan process. In other cases, we should enthusiastically evaluate all options on a case by case basis.

**7. Policy and Preservation. Will you commit to a tax policy for workforce housing?** The key is recognition that the uncontrollable upward spiral in residential property taxes is hurting Alexandrians at all income levels. It is unsustainable and must be better controlled, something this Council has been unwilling to consider. Restraining the rate with which this Council has been anxious to raise taxes will be of benefit to all Alexandria residents of all income levels.

I will actively explore any and all ways of providing tax relief to residents including income-based valuation, deferred payment, or any other reasonable method. It might be that one or the other is the best solution, or a mix of approaches might be best. There may be something we haven't considered yet. Abatements for the preservation (including rehabilitation) of workforce housing needs to be part of the mix as well.