

## Workforce Housing Questions & Responses

Submitted 3/9/06 by: Ludwig P. Gaines, Council Candidate (D)

**1. Priority. How important is workforce housing to Alexandria?** Workforce housing is exceptionally important to the City of Alexandria and critical to ensuring our city's population remains racially, ethnically, and economically diverse and local businesses have an accessible workforce vital to maintaining our strong local economy.

I am proud to have fought to establish, along with Council member Krupicka, the City's first live where you work program that provides home ownership loan assistance to city employees.

To be clear, the City of Alexandria finds itself at a critical juncture in its history. One that will define who we are and what we look like in the future. It is apparent that the poor are not the only members of our community lacking affordable housing opportunities. The affordable housing crisis is also impacting teachers, police officers, firefighters, health and child care workers. Individuals we rely upon daily and who directly contribute to the high quality of life we enjoy. To appreciate the full scope of the crisis we must add to the list of the impacted the many older and long-term residents on fixed incomes who are struggling to pay rising property taxes, and their children, now young professionals who find it increasingly difficult to afford to live in the city in which they were raised.

Steps critical to maintaining a range of housing options include first and foremost creating a comprehensive workforce housing plan of action, acting upon (implementing) that plan, and consistently measuring the plan's progress. The issue of workforce and affordable housing goes to the very core of our city. There is no more fundamental issue impacting our history, and who we are and will be than the issue of workforce/affordable housing. If we are serious about preserving Alexandria's diversity, we must act and act now! Our precious diversity is leaving this city by moving van after moving van. More than individual material possessions piled in the back of a truck, Alexandria is collectively losing the very people who have made us the great and diverse city we are. We are losing an irreplaceable part of our heart and soul.

**2. Targets and Tools. Will you support an Action Plan and implementation tools, and how will you get City staff to implement it?** I enthusiastically support Housing Action's Plan for housing. In fact, I am the only member of City Council on record specifically recommending this plan to the city manager for consideration and possible implementation.

Targets are critical to assessing progress. In the area of affordable housing ad hoc approaches have proven to be of little long-term value. We must begin to see the big picture, which requires coordination and collaboration between key city agencies and departments such as planning, transportation and environmental services, housing and social services, the Alexandria Housing Development Corporation (AHDC), ARHA and the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee among others. The beauty and utility of an action plan is that all groups read from the same sheet of music. This effort must be centralized through the city's manager's office to ensure effective coordination. It is of such importance that I believe it requires a dedicated member of city staff to oversee, facilitate and coordinate efforts. We must insist upon benchmarks that include numerical preservation of units as well as clear annual targets for new units if we are ever to adequately measure progress.

**3. Accountability. An Action Plan would require the City to provide an annual report. Will you**

**support this accountability?** Yes. Accountability is essential. We must have annual an accurate reporting and tracking to ensure that progress is being made, goals achieved and that city and community resources are most efficiently and effectively utilized.

**4. Opportunities. Will you support density increases if properly planned and coordinated with open space, transportation mitigation and mixed use?** Yes, I agree and support density increases that are carefully planned. In fact, Council Member Krupicka and I fought to gain the authority from the general assembly to make density bonuses possible in the City of Alexandria. Why? Because mixed-use transit oriented and denser development is the essence of smart growth. When appropriately planned and placed around mass transit, high-density development can be an invaluable tool in reducing our reliance on the auto and mitigating the negative impacts that accompany gridlock. Most importantly, it can have a direct impact on the availability of affordable housing in new development. We must look critically at ways to “incentivize” construction of affordable housing units. High-density development when carefully planned has proven an effective strategy.

**5. Funding. Will you commit to continued City funding to support workforce housing?** Yes. Both City Council and our community have stated that affordable housing is a top priority. When it comes to funding affordable housing it is time to put our money where our priorities are. As a member of Council, I am proud that we have made significant investments in the city’s infrastructure. It is clear that one of the most pressing infrastructure needs in the city and region is the availability of work force housing. We need only look at the current and projected regional job-housing imbalance for proof. As a city we are confronted with multiple funding challenges and limited resources. Prioritization is critical. It makes little sense to fund expensive capital improvement projects if in the future the only people who will be able to enjoy such investments are the wealthy. If workforce housing is a priority for the City it must be reflected as such in our budget. We can and must do more.

**6. AHDC. Should the City widen its options, beyond AHDC, by working more closely with other nonprofit and for-profit housing developers?** AHDC has the potential to be a great asset to the City’s efforts at preserving and acquiring affordable workforce housing. The City has invested in AHDC and must insist upon seeing a return. AHDC is but one potential avenue. Public private partnerships and establishing relationships with non-profit and for profit housing developers such as those utilized in Arlington and Montgomery Counties must be explored and maximized in Alexandria. A home is not built with one tool alone and our affordable housing efforts must utilize all available tools to be effective.

**7. Policy and Preservation. Will you commit to a tax policy for workforce housing?** I am open to exploring and exhausting all options, and think it essential to employ a multifaceted approach that includes funding AND legislative options. I am deeply concerned about the rising real estate tax burden in Alexandria, and particularly its impact on low and moderate-income individuals. An overwhelming priority of our budget going forward must be to bring tax relief to property owners, particularly Alexandria’s homeowners. Coupled with rising housing costs, if we are not proactive we will become our own worst nightmare – a city of haves and have nots, with no middle or core.

Legislatively, we are limited by the Dillon Rule in what we can and cannot do to bring relief. For example, I strongly support a homestead exemption, yet, because the General Assembly has not granted localities the authority to offer such an exemption, we cannot. This reality requires creativity, a clear plan of action, and most importantly, action. Yes, I would strongly support a tax abatement for the rehabilitation and preservation of workforce housing.