

February 15, 2006

Honorable Wm. Euille, Mayor
Alexandria, Virginia

Dear Mayor Euille:

On behalf of Housing Action and people who can no longer afford to live in Alexandria, we ask that you commit to an Action Plan that will result in retaining a range of housing choices in our city. The Plan must include community consensus and teamwork to implement the strategy. Without an aggressive approach by the City, Alexandria will become a city of the very rich and the very poor. We reject this future.

Goal Five of the Alexandria Strategic Plan reads, "A caring community that is diverse and affordable." The corresponding 'top priority' policy action is to develop an 'affordable housing policy and strategy.' At the January 28 Economic Summit, 'More affordable housing' was identified as a crucial element for assisting small business and entrepreneurs. Despite these goals, the City at present has no strategy other than the 'Consolidated Plan,' which is to add 100 units of affordable housing per year. We are losing units much faster than this.

We consider these points essential to an effective Action Plan:

1. **Teamwork.** City departments, specifically Planning and Zoning and the Office of Housing and TES, must work *together* to keep housing options at the forefront of the City's agenda. Providing a range of housing choices does not appear to be a top goal for the Planning and Zoning effort, as the current review of the Braddock Road Small Area plan illustrates. Housing targets must be brought into the process at the beginning of development as builders approach the City. Despite past pledges by staff, this is not happening. Creative incentives for developers are not on the table in Alexandria.
2. **Accountability – Goals and Targets.** Numerical goals for units preserved or added will make it possible to track progress. The City should provide an annual report, stating the number of units lost, preserved and added to the stock by affordability for residents such as hospital employees, retail workers, senior citizens, firefighters, and young families.
3. **Incentives.** We are convinced that the development community will respond affirmatively if given sufficient incentives, predictability and clarity in the planning process, and that neighborhoods will be improved at the same time as housing choice expands. For example, plans must articulate how increased density could work in coordination with open space, transportation mitigation, mixed use and other components of wise development. Housing experts, developers, advocates, financial specialists, planners and community activists point out that Alexandria must grow in carefully designated areas to achieve significant amounts of mixed-income housing.
4. **Funding.** The outstanding action by Council in dedicating a portion of the property tax for housing, and leveraging those funds through the bond market, must be followed by adoption of explicit guidelines (including income targets) to ensure that funds go to preserve and increase real housing choice. In addition, keeping a close watch on property tax burdens, and making sure that assisted, covenanted units are taxed at the appropriate level (not fair market) is crucial as part of the Action Plan.

On Wednesday March 9, we will co-host a discussion of new approaches to housing choice for the City. We plan to present strategies that would make Alexandria friendly to far-sighted development. The meeting will be held at 7 PM at Westminster Presbyterian Church. We have invited all candidates for City Council to join us to share ideas. We hope that you, with the support of the City Manager, will respond as well. We will also publicize ideas on our website, www.housingaction.net.

We all want a vibrant, successful and diverse city. Developing and implementing a comprehensive approach to housing is the first step.

Sincerely,

James Hoben, Nancy Carson, Fran Becker, Katharine Medina, Helen Lewis, Stephen Wade and Jeremy Flachs—for the *Housing Action Leadership Committee*

Copies to:

James Hartman, City Manager
Alexandria City Council
Allen Lomax, United Way
Rev. Lee Earl, Shiloh Baptist Church
Paul Glist, Brett Issarow & Anne Herlin -Alexandria Interfaith
Jon Liss, Tenants & Workers United
Mel Miller, ARHA
Wm Harris, Commission on Aging
Bill Clayton, Agenda Alexandria
Francis Chase, Alexandria Teachers' Union
Molly Danforth, School Board
John Moorehead, Black Firefighters Union
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