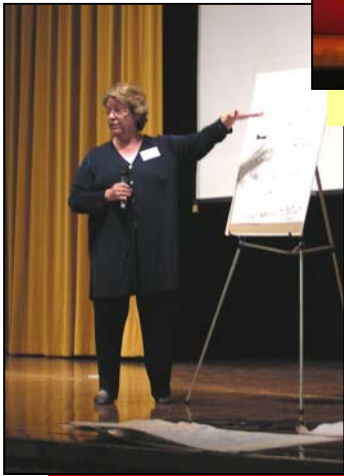


# Arlington's Future is in Your Hands

Report from the  
Consolidated Plan Community Forum  
October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2004



October 2004

# I. INTRODUCTION

---

On Saturday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, more than 60 Arlington residents, advocates, and housing and service providers attended the Community Forum<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of the forum was to gain community input on County policy related to housing and community development for use in developing the County's next Five-Year Consolidated Plan. The Consolidated Plan, required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), will provide the framework for implementing housing and community development programs over the five-year period, Fiscal Years 2006-2010.

Ms. Barbara Favola, Chairman of the County Board, began the forum by welcoming attendees and soliciting their input. Board member Mr. Walter Tejada included welcoming remarks in Spanish. The Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC), a Boston-based non-profit consulting firm, provided a presentation of best practices in supportive housing and an overview of the Supportive Housing Plan that is currently under development for the County.



Supportive housing is affordable housing designed to serve persons with special needs, such as mental illness, mental retardation or physical disabilities. The housing is integrated with services to help residents sustain that housing and address other service needs. The County is developing a Supportive Housing Plan which will guide its future efforts to expand the availability of supportive housing. The Plan will include a supportive housing needs assessment; best practice recommendations; financing strategies; recommendations for the delivery of support services; an implementation plan; and a supportive housing communications plan.

Following the opening session, participants met in focus groups on affordable housing; home ownership; supportive housing for special needs and homeless populations; fair housing; issues facing immigrants (held in Spanish); and community participation. Each group provided ideas on potential tools and strategies to include in the next Consolidated Plan. In each focus group, a participant agreed to report back to the larger group in the closing session. The closing session allowed all participants to hear the outcomes of each

focus group. The next section details the responses and ideas generated in each focus group session.

---

<sup>1</sup> Appendix I details the methods of outreach for the forum. Simultaneous translation was available in Spanish. Vietnamese, Amharic and Farsi translators were also available.

## II. FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

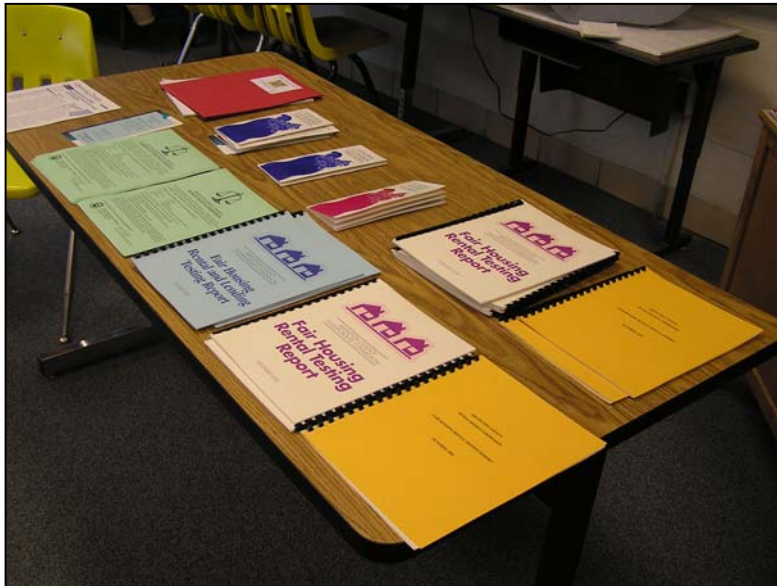
---

Six focus groups met for an hour, one on each of the following subjects:

- Affordable Housing;
- Home Ownership;
- Supportive Housing for Special Needs and Homeless Populations;
- Fair Housing;
- Issues Facing Immigrants (held in Spanish); and
- Community Participation.



In each focus group, there were staff members knowledgeable in the subject area that either facilitated or took part in the session. Each participant received background materials and a list of questions that were to be discussed in the focus group. The subsequent pages outline the staff members and community participants—as well as the questions and responses—in each focus group.



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOCUS GROUP

---

**Facilitator:** David Cristeal, Coordinator of Housing Development, CPHD

**Recorder:** Rolda Nedd, Neighborhood Planner, CPHD

### Participants:

Ellen Bartlett (Arlington Interfaith Council)

Stacy Pethia (Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments)

Frederick Nelson

Tor Winston

June O'Connell

Alicia Carpenter

Elizabeth Perry

Kree Lee

Howard Bellany

Gene Betit (Queen of Peace)

Patricia McGrady

Stephanie Britt

Sayondra Yen

Dolores Rubalcava (Arlington  
Schools)

Jean Falvey (Arlington Partnership for  
Affordable Housing, APAH)

Inta Malis (Planning Commission)

James Shea (Alliance for Housing Solutions, AHS)

Alice Hogan (Resident, Department of Housing and Urban Development)

Vicki Price (The Arlington Community Temporary Shelters, TACTS)

Larry Withers (Resident, Community Development Citizen's Advisory Commission)

Doug Peterson (Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing, APAH)

Laake Tesfaye (Ethiopian Community Development Council, ECDC)

Kristin Carbone (Buyers and Renters Arlington Voice, BRAVO, Housing Commission)

Jill Mulrooney (Ashton Heights Neighborhood Association)

Kathryn Scruggs (Arlington Education Association)

Tillman Neuner (Coalition for Housing in Arlington)



## Questions and Responses

- Do you have ideas for new tools for the creation of affordable housing, for example, amending the zoning ordinance to allow accessory dwelling units in a limited area?

Response:

- Display data annually in the Consolidated Plan to reflect the amount and source of funds; the increases or decreases in Section 8 recipients; and the number of units produced or lost from affordable housing inventory during each year.
  - Funding
    - HOME funds: consider using as rental supplement (e.g. tenant-based rental assistance that is authorized by HOME regulations).
    - Increase local funds available (e.g. like Montgomery County, which has a dedicated revenue source – a transfer tax on real estate).
    - Right of first refusal (of existing market rate affordable units; to non-profit developers or County).
  - Zoning & Other changes
    - Schools (put affordable housing units on excess school land adjacent to school; especially with redevelopment opportunities).
    - Areas – North Glebe Road (e.g., locate affordable units along appropriate transportation corridors in North Arlington, including Lee Highway/Old Glebe Road); continue existing efforts to spread affordable housing throughout County.
- 
- What are some pros and cons of the proposed new tools?

Response:

- Legislative Tools
  - Zoning
    - Large employers to obligate funds/provide affordable housing options for their employees.
    - Minimum wage (e.g. if wages were higher, people could afford more housing).
    - Staff dedicated to research other programs, more creativity.
  - Other
    - Staff to explore federal register, foundations.
      - Green Communities funds: The Enterprise Foundation/ Enterprise Social Investment Corporation (ESIC) and the Natural Resources Defense Council
  - Financial
    - Consider lending County funds at 0% interest for first 10 years of loan period.

- Should the consolidated plan address the needs of moderate to middle income households?

Response: Yes

- Consolidated Plan (and Arlington County) should address housing needs of moderate income persons.
- Group: What is moderate income?
  - Some discussion required to define “moderate income,” or more accurately, figure out who would be included in this group (e.g., 80% to 100% of the area median income (AMI)<sup>2</sup>? Or 80% to 120% AMI? Or what?).
  - Find way to support middle income (see above – moderate income folks).
    - Increase Moderate Income Purchase Assistance Program (MIPAP) income limits (e.g. existing limits don’t help many families in Arlington’s current market; up to \$50,000?).
- Zoning
  - Accessory Apartments (‘granny flats’ and other means to add units to existing properties) – change needed to zoning.
  - McMansions – change zoning ordinance to multifamily.
  - Single Family homes; look at tax incentives to allow them to be donated to non-profits for affordable housing.
  - Help seniors use tax benefit on homes; donate state tax benefits used toward more (affordable) housing.
  - Allow more duplexes; 2-story flats. Create different housing styles to accommodate more population. Expand housing options/styles.
- Question: Any housing planned for North Tract?

- What kind of NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back Yard) response might we expect to the expansion of the County’s supportive housing programs? What marketing efforts might the County or nonprofits undertake to help minimize community and landlord resistance?

Response:

- Link between affordable housing and schools, e.g., stigma and equation of affordable housing and children on free and reduced lunches). Several members in group suggested that because Arlington schools are of uniformly high quality, this shouldn’t be a big issue in reality. Arlington Schools are accredited so there is no basis to this.

---

<sup>2</sup> Appendix II provides the area median income (AMI) figures for 2004.

- Homeowners don't think of affordable housing as an issue until it is no longer affordable for their kids (when they cannot afford to live in Arlington, close to them).
- Explain why market is failing (as housing cycles through iterations of ownership, it does not necessarily decrease in cost; production of most new housing in Arlington is toward high-end stock, rather than meeting the full range of housing demand). This will help educate residents on need for affordable housing.
- County Board and others to back up their statements for support of affordable housing with actions that produce affordable housing.
- Affordable housing to be viewed as positive housing for teachers and firefighters.
- Outreach by non-profit educators, neighbors about project; standards.
- Diverse community – maintain this in Arlington (as is vision for Arlington).
- Affordable housing makes for better community, housing for everyone – viable community. Single-family homes tax incentives to be donated to non-profits.

One participant shared comments from an Alliance for Housing Solutions (AHS) conference held in September. Appendix III summarizes these comments.

## HOME OWNERSHIP FOCUS GROUP

---

**Facilitator:** Terri Lynch, Director of Arlington Agency on Aging, DHS

**Recorder:** Doug Myrick, Home Ownership Program Coordinator, CPHD

### Participants:

Terry Beltz (Virginia Housing  
Development Authority, VHDA)  
Dianna Boomershine (AHC, Inc.)  
Charlie Rinker (Arlington Home  
Ownership Made Easier, AHOME)  
Karen Serfis (AHOME)  
Donald Hunter



### Questions and Responses

- Should the consolidated plan address the needs of moderate to middle income households?

Response: Yes

- Tiered financial assistance to households earning up to 120% of the AMI.
  - Tiered MIPAP down payment/closing cost assistance.
  - A lower MIPAP interest rate, e.g., 0%, would minimize the goal of a revolving fund/self-funding program.
  - Allow households with physical disabilities earning up to 80% of AMI (or possibly 100% of AMI) to purchase accessible homeownership units.
- Should condo developers be encouraged to set aside some units (market rate or affordable) to be marketed to and prioritized for teachers, police, nurses, etc., with moderate to middle income?

Response: No—for affordable units; Yes—market rate units

- Teachers, police, etc. are not the only low/moderate income households who need assistance to purchase a home in Arlington.
- Assistance should still be decided based on household income.

- Home ownership program staff should approach condominium developers to determine if they would like to give some type of consideration (financial or otherwise) to County and School Board employees, first-responders, etc.

- Should the county investigate the possibility of creating a land trust?

Response: Yes

- Where would land come from (existing County parcels, or purchase of market rate land)?
- If located and designated, land trust property could be held by non-profit.

- What should the county do about predatory lending?

Response:

- Reverse mortgage seminar for seniors (May 2004).
- Study should be conducted to determine extent of predatory lending practices, who is targeted, etc.
- “Don’t Borrow Trouble”—existing HomeFree, USA/Freddie Mac predatory lending videotape.
- Events/outreach should be conducted in both English and Spanish.
- Not just in mortgages, but payday loans and home improvement loans as well.
- County assistance programs (Home Improvement Program [HIP], etc.) persons have fear that county will “take” their home.
- North Carolina – state is currently “Best Practice” on addressing predatory lending/subprime lending.

- How can the county create supportive homeownership opportunities for special needs populations?

Response:

- Universal Design facilitates aging in place; it should be the standard for new construction.
- Visitability – concept that a person with physical impairments can visit a home (no steps to entrance, doors widened, ground floor bathroom accessible).
- Is rental the best affordable option for some clients (housing payment fixed at 30% of gross monthly earnings, no maintenance/upkeep issues)?
- Nature of disability may determine whether homeownership is best option for client.

- Marketing Issues: difficult to identify persons with physical disabilities who have enough income to purchase even an affordable accessible unit (most persons with disabilities interacting with Department of Human Services [DHS] and other advocacy groups tend to have very low income, e.g., SSI).
- Human services should be integrated with housing services.
- Virginia Housing Development Authority has special mortgage program where loan can be up to 110% of purchase price, with the “extra” 10% utilized for adaptations for accessibility.

## FAIR HOUSING FOCUS GROUP

---

**Facilitator:** Bob Villa, Coordinator of MR Residential Services, DHS

**Recorder:** Fran Lunney, Coordinator of Housing Planning, CPHD

Antonio Acevedo, Human Rights Office, CMO

### Participants:

Denny Phipps (Northern Virginia Board of Realtors)

Carol Johnson (Legal Services of Northern Virginia)

Ann Rudd

Jane Burr (Resident, DHS)

Raana Raza (DHS)



### Questions and Responses

- Were any impediments or barriers left out of the draft Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing (AI)?

Response: Yes

- Sometimes tenants who have housing vouchers or housing grants cannot get a lease the calls landlords refuse to participate in the programs.

- What other strategies are needed?

Response:

- Amend the Human Rights Ordinance to include “source of income” as a protected class.

- Of the proposed strategies, which are the highest priorities for the next 5-year period?

Response:

1. Amend the Human Rights Ordinance to include “source of income” as a protected class.

2. Create a position in the Human Rights Office that is solely responsible for enforcement of the fair housing ordinance and for development of a broad educational and outreach program.
3. Add a provision to contracts with developers of Committed Affordable Units (CAFs) related to participation in County programs serving persons with disabilities.
4. Create/distribute a citizen guide on how to identify and avoid unfair lending practices.
5. Develop programs that foster homeownership for people with disabilities by taking advantage of new mortgage tools available through private banks and modifying of the County's Moderate Income Purchase Assistance Program (MIPAP) regulations.

The group identified a need for education for immigrants on fair housing, tenant-landlord issues, credit, and support services for persons with special needs. Immigrants may need education on the concept of being a tenant.

Some tenants with disabilities faced problems getting housing if they have a history of evictions for credit or inability to care for their units. They and/or their landlords may need education on the rights to retain their units when their behavior is inappropriate or disruptive, but support services can ensure improvement. There is a need for more support services to facilitate independent living and there is a need for more guardianship.

Education for immigrants and for persons with disabilities should begin at the point of entry into the county system, for example, into the Department of Human Services (DHS).

## SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOCUS GROUP

---

**Facilitator:** Ann O'Hara, Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC)

**Recorder:** Tony Turnage, Homeless Program Coordinator, DHS  
Cindy Stevens, Supportive Housing Coordinator, DHS

### **Participants:**

Anita Robinson (Pathway Homes)

Kathy Doxsee (The Arlington Community Temporary Shelters, TACTS)

Robert Atkins

Ann Morris (ElderCare consulting, DHS)

Helen McIlvaine (Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing, APAH)

Nina Janopaul

Carol Skelly

Dave Leibson (Resident, Housing Commission)

Edgar Rivera (TWSC)

Patrick Hope (Buckingham Community Civic Association)

Emilia Richichi (Community Services Board)

Lora Rinker (Resident, Arlington Street People's Assistance Network, A-SPAN)

Ed Rea (Arlington-Alexandria Coalition for the Homeless, AACH)

### **Questions and Responses**

- How should the county communicate its supportive housing vision to the wider community with the goal of overcoming possible community or landlord reluctance to support new supportive housing initiatives?

Response:

- Provide as much education as possible to the community about affordable housing. Education would include information about the need for supportive housing programs (number of people), information about definitions & terminology, and information about the cost effectiveness of support housing programs (less use of valuable resources).
- Definitions and terminology should be clear across the board (do not use varying terms).
- Information should be circulated as broadly as possible.
- Need clear policy from County Board on Supportive Housing.
- Need to talk to Civic Associations as early as possible about project ideas.

- Have supportive neighbors from existing programs come in and talk with other neighborhoods about the success of the program.

- What kind of NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back Yard) response might we expect and how should we plan to address it?

Response:

- The group felt that they are currently dealing with various forms of NIMBY in Arlington County and would expect additional responses in regards to supportive housing projects.
- Make sure that supportive housing projects are successful – they have enough supportive services in place.
- Ask landlords with successful programs to testify to that success.
- Address all concerns of neighbors, such as parking, etc.



- What issues would you expect when Arlington County starts implementing new supportive housing programs?

Response:

- It will be difficult to provide the deep subsidies required to make the housing affordable.
- Issue of siting and geographic concerns (Some areas may feel that they have enough affordable & supportive housing projects in their respective community).
- Every project should have a level of supportive housing as a condition of AHIF loan.

## SPANISH-SPEAKING FOCUS GROUP

---

**Facilitator:** Jennifer Daniels, Neighborhood Planner, CPHD

**Recorder:** Odalis Barrios, Home Ownership Program, CPHD

### Participants:

Antonio Hernandez

Lois Athey (Tenants' Association of the Buckingham Neighborhood [BU-GATA])

Leni Gonzalez (The League of United Latin American Citizens – LULAC 4609)

Sandro Torres

Armandina Mardones

### Questions and Responses

- What groups/organizations in Arlington do you feel a part of or do you feel represent you (not necessarily in the context of development)? Examples are civic associations, Buyer's and Renter's Arlington Voice (BRAVO), faith communities, soccer leagues, others).



Response:

- We feel that there are not many organizations that can represent us, but BRAVO.

- Where (in what groups/places) do you feel comfortable discussing your views about community issues?

Response:

- “Natural groups” already in the community, church, soccer leagues, parents’ association, project family and organizations that represent each country.

- How can the County involve households more in the planning and development processes?

Response:

- The County should have more contact with the different groups in the community, also should have an office for “Latin affairs,” provide public education through brochures, flyers, committee, “promotoras sociales” that can come to the community. The County should have a link on the web site that connects the Hispanic population in need of information about housing and immigrations issues. Encourage health fairs, picnics, cultural festivals.
  
- What are your Supportive Housing needs? Are there persons with disabilities who need specialized housing?

Response:

- We should focus on families that are having problems with their children and persons who need housing and are living in rooms without leases.
  
- Are there persons with special needs who need services brought to them in their home?

Response:

- The County should serve the people in their own community.

**(En Español)**

- Cuales grupos ú organizaciones en Arlington Ud. siente que lo representan ? (Por. Ej. Asociaciones civicas, BRAVO, Iglesias, grupos religiosos, grupo de deportes, de su pais, etc).
  - Sentimos que no hay muchas organizaciones, que nos representen, excepto BRAVO.
  
- Donde ó en que grupo Ud. se siente a gusto discutiendo su punto de vista concernientes a asuntos de la comunidad?
  - En “grupos naturales” ya existentes en la comunidad, por ejemplo : la liga de futbol, iglesias, asociaciones de padres, proyecto familia, organizaciones de cada país.
  
- Cómo el Condado puede envolver más a Ud. y las familias en los procesos de planificación y desarrollo?
  - El Condado tiene que tener más contacto con los grupos en la comunidad. Impulsando en Arlington una oficina para asuntos latinos, concientizar através de volantes, comites, promotoras que vayan a la gente, al grupo de base comunitario. Tener un link en la página de la internet del Condado que ayude a los hispanos en la busqueda de información para sus necesidades de vivienda, topicos de inmigración. Promover ferias de salud, picnics, festivales culturales.
  
- Cual es su necesidad de este tipo de vivienda ? Hay alguna persona con discapacidad que necesite un tipo de vivienda especial?
  - Las familias que tienen problemas con sus niños, personas que viven en cuartos sin tener contratos.
  
- Hay personas con necesidades especiales que necesitan que esos servicios se lleven a ellos en sus hogares?
  - El Condado debería de llevar los servicios a estas personas en la propia comunidad através de promotoras sociales.

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION FOCUS GROUP

---

**Facilitator:** Palma Strand, The Arlington Forum

**Recorder:** Jane Eboch, Coordinator of Community Development, CPHD

### Participants:

Melissa Bondi (Housing Commission)

Bob Boucher

Judy Yoder (Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing [APAH])



### Questions and Responses

- Does development in Arlington affect you? How?

Response:

- Many are priced out of housing.
  - Job choices are actually improved.
  - Those with income over 80% of AMI can't afford to purchase homes and must continue to rent if they want to stay in County.
  - Residents benefit from great transit.
  - Equity in homes increases.
  - There is a widening gap of who can afford to buy and who cannot.
  - Our property taxes are "subsidized" by development.
  - Development changes the make-up and fabric of Arlington.
- Do you (you personally) have the ability to affect the course of this development, the development decisions that are made? How?

Response:

- I have a role through my civic association. I got involved by personal invitation and word of mouth.
- There are real barriers to reaching out to the condo community because access to units is restricted (can't deliver newsletters and fliers).
- People can get involved when a crisis emerges; especially when it appears to be a negative impact.

- Question how the community at large can influence development when the interests of individual neighborhoods are so “loud.”
  
- Have you previously participated in any of the forums that currently exist to express your views on community decisions—either via official government avenues such as commissions and hearings or with community groups such as civic associations or others? If so, how did you experience those (welcoming, comfortable, meaningful or cold, intimidating, pointless or in-between)? If not, what gets in the way (logistics, lack of particular skills, unfamiliar setting or environment) of your participating in them?

Response:

Previous experiences have been:

- Suspicion on the part of all parties.
- Repeat of same participants from past projects.
- Attitudes carry over from past projects – can’t start clean on each new project.
- Conflict depletes resources- citizens, staff, developers all spend time and money on conflict.
- Uncertain or open-ended time line wastes time.
- Some citizens are very sophisticated in the way they participate or influence development decisions.
- Many people are not heard in the development conversation because of the need to survive and support a family.
- Some people are actually fearful about participating in public process.
  
- What is your vision of the ideal role of community members in development decision-making in Arlington?

Response:

- The development process for projects would be clearly structured and have a timeframe that all would agree to follow.
- Clear ground rules and expectations would be articulated to all interested parties.
- Recognize that all parties at the table are not necessarily equal (County residents should have more weight than outside developers).
- Community members would be included at all stages because various modes of communication and points of contact would be used.

### III. NEXT STEPS

---

The number, level of knowledge and enthusiasm of the Community Forum participants was very impressive. In many jurisdictions around the country—both large and small—far fewer residents and housing and service providers take part in the community participation process of the Consolidated Plan, often evidenced by low attendance at public hearings.

The forum was only the first opportunity for the community to be involved in the Consolidated Planning process. Staff will also be pursuing other means to obtain community input—from immigrants and from residents within the County’s Neighborhood Strategy Areas (NSAs). The community input obtained through these various means will help staff to develop strategies for the Draft 5-Year Consolidated Plan.



The Draft 5-Year Consolidated Plan will be released to the public by the end of February, 2005. All participants of the Community Forum and other focus groups will receive the draft executive summary and a web link to the entire draft plan. The County will solicit comments and questions on the draft, which can be directed to the Housing Division. The Housing Commission and the Community Development Citizens’ Advisory Commission (CDCAC) will hold a public hearing in March to also gather feedback. Finally, the County Board will hold a public hearing for approval and adoption of the plan in April of 2005. A final plan, including any revisions directed by the Board, will be submitted to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in May of 2005.

## APPENDIX I: METHODS OF OUTREACH

---

County staff undertook a comprehensive outreach approach for the Community Forum, including email announcements, fliers, brochures, and notices in local papers and on a webpage. The email announcement/registration form was sent to numerous email lists, including interested parties that receive Housing Commission agendas and Housing Online newsletter; members of 18 County Board advisory commissions; the Homeless Services Coordination Committee; presidents of civic associations; a list of non-profits that work with CPHD and DHS; the Arlington Interfaith Council; the Neighborhood Strategy Area Service Providers' Committee; and other governmental agencies in the region.

Staff circulated stacks of fliers in English and Spanish through the County's recreation centers, Outreach Centers, libraries, public schools and 600 were given out to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes through the Clarendon Education Center. An announcement of the forum was included in The Arlington Gazette and the Arlington Connection and an article was in the County's Housing Online newsletter.

Finally, the Housing Division included a webpage linked through its "news and events" with detailed information about the forum and the focus group sessions. There was a link to this site from the County's main webpage the week before the forum.

## APPENDIX II: 2004 MEDIAN FAMILY INCOMES

HUD estimated that the median family income for a family of four for the Washington Metropolitan Area for 2004 was \$85,400. HUD computed median incomes by household size from that by formula.

Number of Persons	1	2	3	4	5	6
Median Income	\$59,780	\$68,320	\$76,860	\$85,400	\$92,232	\$99,064

Consolidated Plan Income Limits						
Income Level	1	2	3	4	5	6
Moderate Income	\$51,250	\$58,550	\$65,900	\$73,200	\$79,050	\$84,900
CDBG and HOME	\$40,250	\$46,000	\$51,750	\$57,500	\$62,100	\$66,700
Low – Section 8	\$30,450	\$34,800	\$39,150	\$43,500	\$47,000	\$50,450

Income Required for County-wide Average Rents, 2004		
Size of Unit	Average Rent 2004	Required Annual Income If Rent = 30% of Income
One Bedroom	\$1,152	\$46,080
Two Bedrooms	\$1,457	\$58,280
Three Bedrooms	\$1,803	\$72,120

Income Required for Average Rents at Garden Apartments, 2004		
Size of Unit	Average Rent 2004	Required Annual Income If Rent = 30% of Income
One Bedroom	\$945	\$37,800
Two Bedrooms	\$1,175	\$47,000
Three Bedrooms	\$1,417	\$56,680

## APPENDIX III: SUMMARY OF COMMENTS FROM AHS CONFERENCE

---

Participant Mr. Jim Shea provided the following summary of comments from the Alliance for Housing Solutions (AHS) Conference held in September.

- It is important to change perceptions about affordable housing and convince people of the importance of affordable housing to a viable community. These are key to making any real progress on the issue. Specific suggestions follow.
- The term “affordable housing” comes with a lot of baggage. To many people, it means public housing, or principally housing for poor people. New language is needed. The term “housing that is affordable” has been tested with positive results.
- The issue of housing that is affordable should be tied to other issues about which people are already concerned: education, economic strength, traffic, pollution, quality of family life. Housing advocates need to work with advocates for those issues and visa versa.
- Listen to and understand the concerns of homeowners opposing projects involving housing that is affordable in their neighborhoods. For many, their homes are their largest investment, and it is an unmovable asset.
- Use language and numbers that non-experts can understand and relate to. For most people, 60% of the area median income doesn’t mean very much.
- Invite Montgomery Action to tell us how it became an effective voice for housing that is affordable.
- Focus on getting the faith communities involved in the issue.
- Get private and public sector employers involved in the issue (for example, school board and administrations, health care providers, hotel executives, etc.).
- Reach out to Prince William and Loudoun Counties, which are now supplying housing that is affordable.
- Engage young people in the issue, particularly around the issue of home ownership.