

Notes from Public Forum

Table Conversations

**numbers next to comments indicate the number of tables that shared that comment*

1. How important are developer contributions to helping Arlington achieve its affordable housing goals? Should affordable housing be incorporated as a community benefit on **all site plan projects, or do some exceptions exist that can be defined and considered?**

- Yes, we need to get affordable housing from developers. (8)
- Affordable housing should be a fact of doing business in Arlington.
- Affordable housing should be included in all site plan development, but consideration should be given to projects that include other major stated community benefits.
- There needs to be a mix of market rate and affordable, with the market subsidizing the affordable.
- Developers are integral in obtaining affordable housing.
- Retail, restaurant, gas stations and other business owners should contribute.
- Should prioritize community benefits, but affordable housing is at or near the top.
- The ability of developers to contribute is hampered by land costs and other sunken costs.
- Developers should factor into their budget the cost of community benefits.
- We should not rely solely on developers to provide affordable housing
- It is important to first really define the “need” for affordable housing, exactly how many units are needed (not based on a budget, but the actual need)? A study should be done to accurately determine this.
- If we don’t include affordable units in new developments, where will they come from?
- Need for more research before determining how much, little or nothing developers should contribute.
- Study how other jurisdictions are getting contributions. Are there models in other states, etc that have stood to litigation? Study other areas with high-rise development and how they garnered units.
- Developers have the skills and supply to deliver housing. Want units, ok if off-site.
- Affordable housing is a responsibility of developers and churches
- Why change from funds to square feet if things have been working?
- Roundtable to create codified process, instead of negotiated process.
- Site plans benefit developer, community should get benefits too.

2. How do we best serve Arlington's affordable housing goals with developer contributions for affordable housing?

a) Should contributions be on-site units, off site units, or cash? Why?

Argument for on-site:

- It is important to disperse the location of affordable housing units, not concentrate the units off site at other locations where they might currently exist.
- Developers are in the best position to add affordable units
- Arlington is being built out. If we replace a garden apt with a high-rise, we need affordable units
- Want units on-site – ensure diverse neighborhoods. (2)
- Concern about off-site affordable units and creating “disadvantaged areas.”
- Housing should be near Metro.
- Plan for mixed-income communities with a higher percentage of CAFs on-site.
- Smart growth with affordable housing – people need to be able to live where they work and have access to transit. Corridor units. (3)

Arguments for off-site

- Bigger “bang for the buck”; it is extremely expensive to build in the Corridor
- Scattered affordable units included on-site in new projects along the Corridor are minimal compared to the size of the projects, the number of units provided is not enough
- We must begin to talk about getting larger “chunks” of units (ex. Barcroft, 1000+ unit conversions)
- Maybe better way to get affordable housing than on-site given impacts on neighborhoods
- Could get 2x's as many units off-site sometimes

Combo

- Need combination of on-site, off-site and cash, tailor to individual project
- Residential projects – provide on- or off-site units
- Some flexibility, balance throughout County (2)

Comments about Cash

- Commercial projects – should be cash.
- No cash – want units.
- If cash, should you look to single-family homes as a resource? Could you get more value there? Ex: for a duplex house.
- Cash from developers could go to buying single-family homes by nonprofits for group homes, persons with disabilities (supportive housing).

Arguments against Cash

- Cash should not be the easy way out, it should be enough of a cost to be
- Could give incentives in areas outside the site plan process to get more density if include affordable units

-Off-site units let developers off the hook. Need new units and to preserve existing units.

b) Should the definition of affordable be broadened to include either above and/or below our current benchmark, 60% of median income?

- Less than median income at 60% is ok.
- Should reach extremely low income (one resident focused on her own situation living of \$11K social security disability benefits and the lack of affordable housing for that particular economic segment of the community).
- Raise the benchmark above 60% because many are priced out. Need to reach median income as well (2).
- Need police/firefighters, janitors, etc. to be able to live in the community. Affordability benchmark to reach these populations (2).
- Benchmark below 60% for renter and above for ownership.
- Workforce housing up to 120% of Area Median Income (AMI).

c) Should the focus be on preservation of the existing stock of affordable units or developing new affordable housing?

Preservation over development:

- The units already exist, which makes it less complicated
- It is best to first start save what you already have
- Preserve affordable housing where it exists since there are existing communities living in these locations that will benefit.
- By focusing on new development you limit where affordable housing units will be built, since most of the new construction is in only a few locations. The rest of the County where there is no new construction will not gain these units.
- Many apartments on top of each other. Garden apartments/older apartments are better environments.
- Developer could purchase a number of garden apartments as affordable.
- Get larger family units through preservation of off-site units.
- Preservation: tax exemption/tax laws for nonprofits.

Development over preservation:

- Preservation doesn't distribute the affordable housing units throughout the County, it concentrates them in certain areas
- Development leads to more dispersion of affordable units
- Communities in these existing affordable areas are currently underserved; dispersion opens up more opportunities/ greater access to services

Other arguments

- Both preservation and the development of new housing should be considered; not either/or (2)
- Diversity will be lost if we could not build or preserve affordable housing.

-Cost of building on-site: “Cadillac to a few vs. Ford to many.”

d) With all of these choices, how can we achieve the best value with available affordable housing resources?

-Clear priority for on-site, but allow for flexibility.

-Must articulate goals, set targets and evaluate progress. Arlington is doing a good job at doing this now.

-Goals should focus on spending dollars in a more innovative way

Other comments made, not directly in response to questions:

-Use bonus density to ensure a mixture of income levels.

-New approaches could include having a public housing authority; employee sponsored housing (sponsored by the County, Schools, etc.); and Cooperatives

-With the new development trend in South Arlington, how will this compare to other areas that now have affordable housing -like Columbia Pike?

-Why does a community need affordable housing?

-Losing affordable single-family housing too – not a developer issue but County could suspend development, guidelines re tearing down (historic districts)

-Land value increasing by taxpayer investments. Developer ends up paying. Need to recoup affordable housing from increase in value.

-Percentage of people need to be near transit ($\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile)

- o People who can't afford cars. \$20-25k a parking space. Don't count in parking. (2)

-Stigma to affordable housing – don't want to know which are affordable.

-What about renting space in a single-family home as affordable housing?

-Employer-assisted housing (3).

-Want to keep residents in Arlington that care. Diversity is what makes it attractive.

County services for disabled are excellent. Those are the kind of things the taxpayers like.

-Enable nonprofit developers to get a leg up so can compete with the big guys (ex. Rosslyn Ridge)

-Single Room Occupancy units (SROs) have caused an uproar in the past. Why are they an issue? Example of Fairfax County's SROs in their County facility.

-Just see high-end product; what about the full spectrum?

-There is a by-right option with site plans. What does the community capture with this? Not sure getting enough.

-Civic association perception of “affordable housing” stereotypes.

-Site plan process is only control County has. Developer has all the cards, i.e. State legislature.

-Community changing from family orientation to younger

-County-owned property for affordable housing.

-Housing trust fund.

-County land/church land/school property. (4)

- Development is not in the best interest of homeowners. Taxes are going up and up and not sufficient to keep up with service need.
- Purely commercial development is dead at night. Need mixed-use.
- No data on how Arlington County “proffer” compares to commercial development in other jurisdictions.
- Rental as priority – mechanism that works.