

## **Draft Affordable Housing Principles – staff recommendation**

### **Arlington Vision Statement**

*"Arlington will be a diverse and inclusive world-class urban community with secure, attractive residential and commercial neighborhoods where people unite to form a caring, learning, participating, sustainable community in which each person is important."*

As an element of the Comprehensive Plan, Arlington's Affordable Housing Plan must be consistent with and contribute to achievement of the Vision for Arlington County. The Housing Principles form the core philosophical foundation of Arlington's approach to affordable housing within the context of the County's total housing stock, economic base, and social fabric. These principles provide direction for Arlington's affordable housing goals, priorities, and policies.

#### **1. Housing affordability is essential to achieving Arlington's vision.**

The limited availability and high cost of housing present challenges that the Arlington community as whole must face forthrightly and that Arlington County government must take an active role in addressing.

Housing affordability directly contributes to the community's diversity and sustainability by enabling a wide range of households to reside in Arlington especially for persons and households with limited means and special needs. Inclusivity builds on diversity, welcoming diverse populations into the community, and encourages and empowers persons of diverse races, ages, abilities, and incomes to be fully engaged in the community.

A sustainable community seeks to balance, the economic, environmental and social elements of community. A wide range of housing choices are needed to support the diverse jobs and wage levels needed to sustain the local economy. Businesses are better able to attract and retain workers when there is housing that is affordable nearby, contributing to the economic health of the community.

If housing affordable to lower wage workers is unavailable, it will force them to live outside of Arlington, further from their employment. Housing a greater share of its workers has positive impacts on Arlington's environment, such as on traffic congestion and air quality. Housing affordability directly contributes to smart growth and transit-oriented development that minimizes reliance on single-occupancy vehicles and long commutes.

Housing an economically diverse workforce residing in the same community in which it works contributes to the sense of community. Residents can meet the full range of their needs within the community, and have opportunities to interact with the diversity of the community, leading to greater social cohesion. Availability to housing and employment opportunities by all segments of the community addresses social equity issues.

Housing affordability is dependent on both cost factors (i.e., what it costs to produce housing) and who pays (including availability of and access to public and private resources). Arlington will address cost and resource issues to optimize the quantity, range, quality, and availability of affordable housing.

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### **2. Arlington County government will take a leadership role in addressing the community’s housing needs.**

Arlington will seek the active participation of for-profit housing developers and owners in expanding the range of choice through clear land use and development policies. The County will partner with the private and non-profit sectors to provide housing for persons and households that the private housing market fails to reach.

### **3. Affordable housing will be available throughout the County’s residential and mixed use neighborhoods for persons of all income levels and needs.**

Choice and distribution of housing opportunities across the County requires supplementing market rate housing to address needs of persons and households that are not adequately served by the private market.

Affordable housing should be available and accessible for persons of all needs; this includes different household sizes and family types, elderly persons, and persons with physical, mental and intellectual disabilities. Investments in affordable housing should be coordinated with other associated investments in community infrastructure, transportation infrastructure and services, neighborhood, and recreational, cultural, and human services to create community.

### **4. No one should be homeless.**

Preventing and ending homelessness is a critical element of the affordable housing plan. In concert with the previously adopted ten-year plan to prevent and end homelessness, the following guiding principles are incorporated:

- commitment from all sectors of the community;
- the implementation of best practices and evidence-based solutions, including “housing first”;
- the availability of affordable, appropriate housing options;
- culturally competent and consumer-centered supportive services; and
- commitment of financial resources adequate to meet the need.

### **5. Housing discrimination should not exist in Arlington.**

Fair housing law prohibits discrimination in housing. Persons and households who have less choice and resources due to low income, less education or knowledge of rights, uncertain legal status, and less access to legal assistance are more likely to be victimized by violations of fair housing law. Arlington will be vigilant in monitoring compliance and enforcement of fair housing laws to fully and consistently achieve the promise of non-discrimination.

### **6. Affordable housing should be safe and decent.**

Local codes and ordinances mandate minimum conditions to ensure healthful and safe housing. Persons and households who have less choice and resources may live in housing that does not fully and consistently meet codes or are overcrowded or not conducive to a high quality of life. Arlington will be vigilant in monitoring compliance and enforcement of all health and safety codes and will aspire to a high quality living environment for all persons.

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### **Explanation for removal of draft principles**

Former Principle 4, “Maintaining and expanding the affordable housing supply requires the participation and partnership of the public, private and non-profit sectors.”

This speaks to how we approach the supply of affordable housing. It is more of a strategy element that supports or follows from principle number 2 and 3. The strategy of partnerships between the public, private and non-profit sectors will be preserved in the description of principle 2.

Former Principle 5 “Affordable housing investments should complement the quality and character of the surrounding community.”

The meaning is not clear. Many persons commented that this would be an open invitation for NIMBY opposition to affordable projects to use this principle against a project. The terms used in the principle are open to subjective interpretation; complementary, quality, character.

The county has neighborhood plans in place and zoning codes that apply to all development projects. The planning in place are meant to ensure that neighborhood context is considered in the approval of all projects.

Some of the issues related to the concerns that gave rise to this principle are articulated in the descriptive text of principle 3.

Former Principle 6 “Housing assistance will be targeted to the lowest income households; particularly those with children, members who are elderly or members with disabilities.

This principle is targeted narrowly at housing assistance as provided through the Housing Grants program. The statement should be directly tied to the program that it is aimed at through a goal or target or in the definition of the housing grant program policy. The principle also establishes priority populations which do not include all types of households that might receive housing assistance in its broader interpretation (CAF tenants). The identified populations will be identified specifically in the narrative for principle number 3.