

## Summary of Community Forum Focus Group Discussions

### Affordable Housing Goals & Target Focus Group Discussion

The Affordable Housing Goals and Targets break-out session included a presentation on what the existing Goals and Targets are as well as what changes are being put forth by the Housing Commission's Goals and Targets Subcommittee. One of the main changes is to include a goal to prevent and end homelessness, which includes targets to reduce the chronically homeless; increase the number of shelter beds; increase supportive housing units; broaden the housing grant program funding and eligibility to meet the need; and to provide skills training, employment placement, or enrollment in public assistance benefits. Other recommendations include having the County create an annual report on housing inspections and violations to be presented to the Tenant-Landlord Commission; identify upcoming expiring committed affordable units; track affordable units added based on when they are built and available; track the loss of market rate affordable housing; and increase assistance for households to prevent foreclosure.

Participants in the sessions recommended the following:

- Broaden eligibility for Housing Grants to include working individuals. Increase per unit subsidy to match fair market value of housing in Arlington.
- Better identification of the homeless – many homeless are not on the streets, but have moved in with friends or relatives
- Increase the real estate tax rate and dedicate the funding towards affordable housing development
- Need units affordable at lower income levels and they should be built into the project so that the units would be committed at that income level
- For the goal of adding 400 net new committed affordable housing units per year, identify how many units we want at each AMI percentage
- We have been focused on creating family sized units, but we should look into the need to add efficiency units especially to achieve the new homeless goal
- Avoid displacement of low-income residents during redevelopment, especially the displacement of minorities
- Encourage sustainable green practices for affordable housing so tenants can save money on utility bills
- Prevent and remediate unwanted institutionalization of the disabled
- Commit to smart growth, mixed-use and mixed-income development
- Track new units compliance with the Fair Housing Act
- Revise the geographic distribution goal
- Increase the number of accessible committed affordable units
- Need an accessibility database that tracks units based on what features they have and when the units are available. This database should also track demand and whether the units are filled with tenants who require the given accommodations in the unit.

The process going forward includes two meetings by the Housing Commission's Goals and Targets Subcommittee to review feedback from the forum and to finalize their recommendations. Those meetings will take place on October 13 and 27. The Housing Commission will receive the recommendations as an informational item and receive public comment at its November 5 meeting and on December 3 the Housing Commission will take action on the recommended changes. All meetings are open to the public, will start at 7:00 p.m. and will take place in room 311, 2100 Clarendon Boulevard except for the November 5 meeting, which will meet in the Cherry and Dogwood rooms of 2100 Clarendon Boulevard.

### **Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Focus Group Discussion**

The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing (AI) 2009 breakout session included a presentation on the existing barriers to housing choice, such as housing supply and location, the physical accessibility of housing, vouchers, source of income, the accessibility of prime financing, foreclosures, and language access. The analysis helped to highlight areas where actions might broaden the housing options for persons protected by fair housing laws. The DRAFT Fair Housing Plan 2009 highlighted the current efforts of Arlington County to address fair housing.

Below is a summary of participants' recommendations.

#### *Affordable housing, foreclosures, subprime lending, and language access*

- The implementation of the accessory dwelling (AD) ordinance should be improved. There are still too many barriers, e.g. cost, that limit widespread adoption.
- In negotiations with developers, units should be asked for more than money in lieu.
- Real estate tax relief should be increased for owners and developers of affordable housing.
- A higher proportion of state tax credits should go to Northern Virginia.
- Developer fees should be unrestricted for developers of affordable housing.
- To improve foreclosure prevention, flyers should be distributed with the names of non-legitimate and legitimate financing and counseling organizations. They could be put in Laundromats. Partner with civic associations.
- The language access policy is good, but implementation needs to be improved.
- To improve the geographic distribution of affordable housing, public land and facilities should be used. The Cherrydale and Alexandria firehouses both incorporated affordable housing. Potential also exists during the development of Westover library, Kenmore, Lubber Run. "School campus" concept should be explored for the schools as a way to build teacher housing on school sites.
- Developers and owners of affordable housing should have access to more incentives, e.g. density, tax breaks, a fast approval process, reduced real estate taxes, payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreements. These could be used to preserve market rate affordable housing (MARKS), especially along Columbia Pike and in conjunction with code enforcement activities.
- Use tax breaks on a small scale to preserve affordable housing. One community member said they own a second property in Arlington and they keep the rents affordable. This behavior should be incentivized.

- Community Land Trusts (CLT) were suggested as a vehicle for creating and maintaining affordable housing. Arlington should investigate cities that have used this tool.

*Vouchers, barriers based on source of income, criminal background checks, credit histories, and housing for people with disabilities (accessible housing)*

- Persons with disabilities need value of vouchers increased to 120% Fair Market Rent.
- If person with disabilities has personal assistant or equipment, they need to be accommodated with a 2-bedroom unit.
- Increase availability of housing vouchers.
- Promote more accessible housing for residents in nursing homes. To move people out of nursing homes, more accessible homes and apartments are needed. This is dictated by the Olmstead case. Maybe there should be a voucher preference for moving people out of nursing homes.
- Rental offices must be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Information for renters should be provided in accessible formats, including for those with low vision.
- Arlington should “test” for accessibility and Fair Housing accessibility requirements.
- There needs to be a list of available properties where vouchers are accepted and this list needs more transparency. There should be categories with available properties and who is on the waiting lists. This should also be done for Committed Affordable Units (CAF).
- When renters are under a month to month lease, they have difficulty demonstrating proof of good tenancy to the next landlord.
- Need requirement for roll-in showers to promote accessible housing, similar to the “barrier-free” program. Bath tubs should be removed from new units. This practice promotes aging in place and complies with the Olmstead case if nursing home residents can return to the community to live. This is a less expensive option.
- Supportive housing for the mentally ill is needed. Such housing should include some type of psychiatric rehabilitation services.

The process going forward includes further input gathering from residents via community meetings ([link to the doc that lists ways to stay involved?](#)), the Consolidated Plan blog, and the Consolidated Plan survey (En Espanol).

### **Homelessness in a New Economy Focus Group Discussion**

The Homelessness in a New Economy break-out session included a presentation highlighting the seriousness of homelessness in Arlington County noting that the “Point in Time” survey indicated that there was a 28% increase in homeless individuals in one year, there were 57 homeless families and 40% of the homeless persons were unsheltered. The presentation also focused on efforts to implement the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness. Activities include preventing homelessness by moving people who do become homeless into housing rapidly and providing the wrap-around services necessary for them to maintain their housing.

Participants in the sessions recommended the following:

- Need funding to have more creative housing arrangements – group housing, roomers, accessory dwellings

- Tenants need training in life skills and job training
- Mediate and work with more landlords to prevent evictions and access to housing
- Better job of refining measurements that evaluate effectiveness
- Development of residential studio apartment
- Replace existing Emergency Winter Shelter with year round shelter ASAP
- Need residential studio apartments sooner (rather than later), County needs to seek several funding sources
- Need to go to areas where homelessness is more prevalent and work with civic groups to help eliminate homelessness
- Need more housing for poor people, not just moderate income people.
- Need computerized system that indicates where there are apartments available
- Young people need more coaching (to acquire better life skills and employment) to help prevent homelessness
- More access to legal assistance to prevent eviction and foreclosure

The Leadership Consortium and the Implementation Task Force of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness will continue to meet monthly to discuss issues such as housing for the homeless, ways to prevent homelessness, developing a range of programs that addresses income and financial literacy needs and identifying and establishing funding for homeless services.

### **Community Development for Low-Income Persons Focus Group Discussion**

The Community Development for Low-income Persons break-out session included a presentation on housing services, jobs, economic opportunity, workforce training and education, energy conservation, asset building, and financial literacy.

Participants in the sessions recommended the following:

#### *Workforce Training*

Types of workforce training that would be beneficial:

- utilize computer training/programs in native language to make training easier
- training in health care technology
- basic training in on-line applications and training in life skills particularly for youth
- combine workforce training with energy conservation, green jobs
- high demand for short-term training in healthcare and child development

Obstacles to employment training:

- lack of very basic computer skills, one suggestion is to introduce cyber seniors teen program to encourage intergenerational learning
- language and computer literacy
- increase funding available to enroll in short-term programs such as, CDL training, cosmetology, culinary arts, child development
- lack of information on availability of training and services offered by county and other nonprofits
- Need a comprehensive resource guide
- Certain clients, e.g. OAR and homeless, often need mentors for success
- some facilities are not readily accessible for physically handicapped and other disabilities

### Skills in demand and future skills needed

- training in green jobs, such as retrofitting and rehabilitation
- computer skills in native language
- healthcare technology

### *Financial Literacy*

- include financial literacy in employment training
- in addition to volunteers, need to pay trainers to train people in financial literacy
- make financial literacy a part of education for youth before graduation from high school
- lobby to have Individual Development Accounts and VIDA restrictions and eligibility criteria revised to benefit more participants
- need to involve businesses in financial literacy and savings programs

### *Energy Conservation*

- support green efforts with incentives, such as tax benefits, loans, grants, e.g. Berkeley model
- relate energy savings to money saved and provide incentives to attend w/shops
- in addition to targeting condominium owners, condo boards should also be targeted for energy saving programs
- provide education to property managers, tenants and about energy conservation
- encourage local politicians to support tax and other incentives for homeowners for energy conservation programs.

The process going forward includes writing up the community development section of the Consolidated Plan with the input from the forum, collecting more recommendations from the financial literacy advisory group, and incorporating the responses to the community development-specific survey.

### **Timeline for the Development of the FY 2011-2015 Consolidated Plan**

- Sept 26, 2009 – Community Forum
- Fall/Winter 2009 – Staff Drafts HUD Narratives
- Feb 2010 – Draft Consolidated Plan Published
- March 2010 – Housing Commission and the Community Development Citizen Advisory Committee Public Hearings
- April 2010 – Board Approves Consolidated Plan and 2011 Action Plan
- May 2010 – Submit to HUD with requisite reports (AI, Fair Housing Plan, etc)