



**Housing Master Plan Meeting  
Defining the Challenge  
Thursday, May 6, 2010 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.**

**Meeting Summary**

Meeting materials are available online at: [www.Alexandriava.gov/housingplan](http://www.Alexandriava.gov/housingplan)

**Housing Tour Wrap Up**

Mildrilyn Davis, Director of the Office of Housing provided a wrap up of the HMP housing tour that was conducted on May 1. The tour included 44 out of 55 total assisted affordable properties in the City -- about 3400 out of 3500 assisted units. The important take-away from the tour is that there is a wide diversity of units in a rather broad geographic distribution. *All materials from the tour are on the web.*

**Presentation #1: Locked out of our Neighborhoods (posted to web)**

**Presentation #2: Defining the Challenge: A closer look at demographics and affordability data, as well as projections for the future (posted to web)**

**Discussion/Questions from the Advisory Group and the Public: *(Staff responses are provided in italics, as needed).***

What do you mean when you say a “loss of units”? *When the rent on a unit increases so that it is no longer affordable to households with 50% or less of AMI, then that unit has been “lost” as an affordable housing resource.*

What is the definition of “Affordable”? *Spending 30% or less of your gross income on housing and utility costs.*

Can you explain the gap between 3000 and 10,000 on slide 12? *Many people are spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing costs.*

Which units are most at risk with regard to the attrition of assisted units? How many assisted units will we lose, how fast and why?

- *About 1000 units could be lost in the next 5-30 years. The City recently dodged the following major losses:*
- *Old Town West (I, II and III) recently sold where 319 units could have been lost. The purchasers ( Priderock bought I & II and Alfred Street Baptist Church bought III) have committed to keeping the units affordable at least in the near-mid term.*
- *Fields of Landmark – bought by Foulger Pratt, intending to keep affordable.*

- *Foxchase – is currently on five year renewals of 400+ project based vouchers, but they have to give residents 18 month notice if they plan to withdraw from the program. No such notice has been given at this time, so we’re assuming no changes in the near future.*
- *Office of Housing tracks/monitors upcoming expirations. There is a list in the Consolidated Plan with this information. We will post the list to the website separately.*

With regard to the forecasting and growth crescent, why can’t the City just require that a percentage of development be dedicated to affordable housing?

- *Alexandria can’t do this because of the restrictions of Virginia’s Dillon Rule-based form of government. Several years ago, Arlington required a percentage of development be dedicated to affordable housing. The government was sued by developers and the requirement was reversed. The VA General Assembly agreed not to pass a law specifically disallowing the requirement to exact affordable housing, if the City agreed to only require a contribution in the case of bonus density, or ask for (not require)voluntary contributions in other cases. This has worked to some degree, because most developers expect to contribute as the natural course of business in most jurisdictions.*

Despite the legal challenges, would it be useful to establish a number/percentage of the amount of affordable housing we need to achieve through new development? *Yes, a definable target is a good thing to establish as part of this plan. HMP process will provide info on what development is in the pipeline and what can be expected.*

Is it realistic from a financial perspective to assume that every neighborhood should have affordable housing? *This process will need to come to a resolution about how to realistically distribute affordable housing, given cost, availability of land and other factors. Our September 16 meeting will look closely at this.*

What percentages of required affordable housing are common, and what kind of trade offs are involved? *This information will be provided in the housing economics session in September.*

Can you provide more data on the market affordable units, both rental and sales? *This will be provided in the housing analysis gap information in September.*

Unit size and household type are a big mismatch. There is a wide variety in both, though in Alexandria, household size average tends to be smaller than in other places. It would be useful to define the need for affordable housing in terms of the unit size and type. *Unfortunately, the census has a gap with regard to income by family (household) size -- which provides the “demand” information. But the consultants will derive some information from other sources such as property owner surveys, ARHA, renting agents.*

As a landlord, RPJ gets a lot of calls for 3BR’s – and has very little inventory of that size. *It is notable that all of the rents have come down slightly in 2009 except for the units that are 3BR and larger, indicating a short supply/higher demand.*

Suggestions for further consideration during the planning process:

- With an aging population, we should push more 4-story housing with elevators. These are much less expensive to build (stick built) than high-rise, but can accommodate accessibility for seniors and others.
- The Center for Neighborhood Technology has a “Transportation Cost Calculator” that tests housing affordability by wrapping in the cost of commuting, and is a good measure of true affordability. The cost of housing should be calculated in combination with transportation costs. When these are combined, they should not exceed 45% of a household’s gross income to be affordable.
- Important to keep some industrial jobs, but it would be good to see some of the one story warehouses in the City convert to or redevelop as housing.
- Would like to see more developer produced stacked units and granny flats.
- The city should develop housing proportionally in growth/transit corridors, so that affordable housing residents have accessibility to transit, services and support system. Develop with regard for the quality of life for people in the units.
- When we discuss demographics, it’s important to talk about changing household sizes and ages so we can understand the impacts on future housing needs, as well as schools and infrastructure.
- We should explore ways to combine housing with industrial uses, when safe.
- I don’t think we should be subsidizing homeownership. Especially if \$133,000/year, is in fact what it takes to buy a home at the average price?

Questions requiring further study:

- What is the impact of many development projects that were originally slated to be condos that were transitioned to rental in the declining economy?

Comments:

- Potomac Greens was marketed to singles and couples, but has ended up attracting families. Increase in the cost of land has resulted in increased housing cost and decreased affordability as land becomes scarce.