

## **Remarks of Steve Davis, chairman, Arlington Green Party to the Arlington County Board of Supervisors, June 15, 2013**

Good morning members of the Arlington County Board. My name is Steve Davis and I am chairman of the Arlington County Green Party and longtime resident of Arlington, and am pleased to announce that the Arlington Voters Registrar told us earlier this week that she determined that we have submitted enough voter signatures to qualify the referendum to authorize a public housing authority here in Arlington. I am here today to ask you to approve the referendum for placement on the November ballot in the forthcoming general election, as specified under Virginia law.

We believe that Arlington's current housing assistance program has failed to stem the loss of affordable rental units. We believe that a public housing authority would:

- #1, bring new Federal HUD funds not now available to Arlington
- #2, reduce administrative and overheads costs for Arlington's current housing program
- #3, increase access to bond markets, and Federal tax credits for our housing program; and
- #4 provide one-stop shopping for Arlington tenants who are now shuffled around looking for vacant subsidized units.

### **Our goal—A housing authority in Arlington with more resources and better use of existing resources**

Our goal is to create housing authority in Arlington modeled on the very successful Fairfax Housing Authority (FCRHA) that brings together all the separate government units into one to help a low income person in one place. In FY2011, the Fairfax Housing Authority served nearly 3,000 people in its public rental housing units spread out throughout Fairfax with an average income \$20,032 for a family of three. Then it provides rental housing for nearly 20,000 other people with an average income of \$26,000 in 2011, an income level called "extremely low income" by HUD. It also provides subsidized rental housing to higher income working people, such as entry level Fairfax public school teachers, police, and firefighters, and Fairfax Inova Hospital nurses through another program "workforce housing."

### **Why the need for a new approach to affordable housing in Arlington**

Today in Arlington about one-seventh of residents need affordable housing assistance: In 2010 over 14,000 families in Arlington (roughly 28,000 individuals) needed affordable rental housing, according to the Va Tech Center for Housing Research. Va Tech also indicated that Arlington County had the most expensive rental housing in the entire Metro DC area except for the City of Alexandria.

There were 15,000 people living below the official federal poverty level in Arlington in 2010, according to the U.S. Census, and Arlington had a higher rate of poverty than Fairfax County. The number of Latinos living in Arlington fell by 11 percent in 2000-10, mostly because of the higher rents and demolitions.

In 2000 in Arlington, there were about 20,000 private, market rate private apartments for rent that were affordable to people making 60-percent or less of the area median income (AMI); by 2011, there were only 5,300 apartments. **This means at this rate within three years from today (2016), there will be NO private rental apartments affordable to people making \$60,000 or less in Arlington.** The only affordable units left will be the few subsidized CAF units.

### **Arlington's current housing program**

Under Virginia law since Arlington has no public housing authority, it cannot directly own and operate affordable housing units and thus turned over these units to private groups, some for -profit and some non-profit companies to operate 6,300 subsidized units. The county gives them direct funding from its own tax revenues, funds from bonds issued under the county's industrial development authority, and indirectly from HUD, and Federal tax credits, and indirectly from the Virginia Housing and Development Authority.

There are many private organizations that now provide subsidized housing in a, very decentralized, haphazard and disjointed program. A person seeking a subsidized unit in Arlington has to go to each separate apartment complex, and obtain information on their own; in Fairfax, their housing authority assists and directs the person to a vacant unit.

There is little oversight and cost control over these private companies, and difficult to gauge if the rental apartments are truly affordable to tenants. The executive director of the largest nonprofit provider is paid in excess of \$240,000, a salary well above our county manager and our school superintendent. Each private organization has its own staff duplicating both county staff and those of other nonprofits. The cost of working through such a complicated, fragmented system is very high; meaning the county often spends excessive amounts for each apartment added to the stock of subsidized units. A housing authority can lower administrative costs, improve efficiency and raise funds more easily.

The few subsidized apartments in Arlington mainly serve those making over \$60,000 a year, leaving the truly poor—those making \$20,000, \$30,000 or \$40,000, underserved and vulnerable. The number of units added each year is far smaller than the 1, 1000 affordable private rental apartments lost each year. In 2011, only 11 of the 295 CAFS units added were for people earning less than \$40,000.

**County Board members:** we in Arlington pride ourselves on having the best government programs in whether field; we can do better. Let's try a new approach that our giant neighbor Fairfax County has tried to great success.

Thank you

Steve Davis, Chair -the Arlington Green Party Email [info@greensofarlington.org](mailto:info@greensofarlington.org)