



# AFFORDABLE HOUSING ADVISORY COUNCIL

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today, and for your service on behalf of Fairfax County residents. I am Kerrie Wilson, CEO of Cornerstones, and speaking tonight on behalf of the Fairfax County Affordable Housing Advisory Council.

The Board rechartered AHAC in 2021 to recommend strategies and monitor progress against the community-wide housing strategic plan. This charge includes resource and policy requirements for new housing production, strategies to preserve and enhance existing affordable units and neighborhoods, increasing internal capacity, and promoting inter-departmental coordination around related issues of homelessness, and fair housing, among other policies.

Your appointees to this council have embraced this charge and come to this work with the **unequivocal understanding that housing is foundational** for the economic success of this county and every resident. Your commitment to providing affordable housing for low-income workers, their families and dependents is **essential to achieving the “One Fairfax” policy – and I am so grateful to work with them in this cause.**

Our priorities for the FY2024 budget as it relates to affordable housing and the connected supportive services reflect areas you have championed, and that require continued planning and investment as foundational for our county’s growth and family self-sufficiency. Given the needs you hear individually from constituents and through the course of these public hearings, we are asking for you to invest more this year.

First – AHAC asked to acknowledge this Board for its commitment to the recommendations we have made to address the wide range of affordable housing options for the workforce and individuals and families with special needs for service-enriched housing. AHAC has spoken to these issues in prior hearings, but applaud your commitments to:

- Doubling the County new housing production goal to provide 10,000 new units by 2034 that are affordable to our families and residents at 60% AMI or approximately \$70,000, and committing to no net loss of committed affordable housing.
- Authorizing an affordable housing preservation policy aimed at maintaining the affordability of our existing multifamily and manufactured housing stock.
- Elevating the importance of Housing and related Supportive Services within the County Legislative Program for the Virginia General Assembly.
- Commitment to an expanded policy, program and action on Fair Housing for county residents.
- Recognizing that funding sufficient staffing resources for HCD and nonprofit partners is critical to achieving the goals we are all striving to achieve together.

Your commitment to these policies has been demonstrated in the investments in a number of affordable housing projects that are moving us towards that 10,000 unit goal. These include:

- \$14 million-dollar FCRHA financing in January 2023 to support development of Phase I of the



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- \$13 million-dollar allocation in December 2022 to support the SOMOS project in Tysons.
- \$3 million-dollar tax exempt bond authorization by the Board of Supervisors in October 2022 to support financing 148 units within the Ovation at Arrowbrook project.

Finally, we acknowledge the Board has taken action to make strategic investments of one-time funding that has been available to fill gaps in the funding necessary, including your allocation of:

- \$45 million of ARPA funding allocated to affordable housing initiatives.
- The proposed \$10 million recommended as part of FY23 3rd quarter review, and
- Use of similar resources for affordable housing in the future (through carryover funding and quarterly reviews).

In every way It is crucial that we prioritize affordable housing, and as the funds become available.

**However, in order to meet the goals that you have set, AHAC is asking the board to invest this year address the stated need for baseline funding as supported in the Communitywide Housing Strategic Plan and the 2019 Affordable Housing Resource Panel recommendations.**

With the exhaustion of the federal funds which have proven so successful over the last several years supplementing County General Funds, the County should work to build baseline County funds over the next few years to reach a total investment of two pennies on the Real Estate Tax rate for the preservation of existing and the development of new affordable housing units. Until this baseline funding is achieved, staff should be identifying quarterly review opportunities to provide sufficient funding to meet the cashflow needs of Board approved projects.

In the County's Budget Guidance for FY 2023 and 2024, the Board made a commitment to "build baseline County funds over the next few years to reach a total investment of two pennies on the Real Estate Tax Rate for the preservation of existing and the development of new affordable housing units."

**This budget falls short of that goal**, and we ask that you take steps to achieve that goal. We understand there are competing priorities for the \$90 million balance included in the FY2024 Advertised Budget. However, allocating an additional 1/2 cent would use only \$16 million of this available balance and the full additional penny would use \$32 million of the available balance—moving us nearer to the stabilized funds we need.

Finally, we would like to recognize the need to provide operating dollars for crucial supportive services, especially as we work to truly address homelessness in Fairfax with funding and policy. Without these crucial services needed in best-practice permanent affordable housing, we will not be able to properly address and house the most vulnerable in our communities.

As AHAC has commented in previous statements, the provision of affordable housing is only one aspect of the Board's priority and commitment. The other is to ensure that sufficient wrap around services exist



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for the occupants of the affordable housing. This is most often provided by your nonprofit partners or community programming, and the funding for these services has often lagged the need. To better address these needs, we encourage the Board of Supervisors to ensure that the ongoing cost for related social and resident services be included in the initial conversations about developing units and the costs be planned for in the appropriate future operating budgets.

Creating budgets means having to make hard choices. The influx of federal pandemic-related funding over the last few years helped us address the crisis, but with that funding ending, now is the time to create local, long-term, sustainable and affordable housing solutions for our residents and workforce. Thank you.

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