

**Statement of Julie Murphy,
Member of the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission**

My name is Julie Murphy, and I am a member of the city's Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission. We are pleased to support the proposed addition to the city budget of a small level of compensation for youth members of our Boards and Commissions.

Background

In 2014, The Children, Youth, and Families Collaborative Commission (CYFCC) provided the City Council and the Alexandria School Board with a comprehensive Children and Youth Master Plan (CYMP) for improving outcomes for Alexandria's youth.¹ The plan was updated every five years and is now in its 2025 phase.

Goal 3 of the 2025 CYMP includes recommended strategies 1) to build developmental assets² among Alexandria youth by providing them with the training and support to lead and make decisions, 2) to disseminate widely information about youth engagement opportunities and, 3) to provide leadership opportunities to the young people of our city.

It has been shown that participating in civic life and being a part of groups working together on an issue have clear and multiple benefits for young people. "Youth engagement can lead to increased academic performance and improved social-emotional well-being. It helps young people build skills and networks that are valued in the workplace and can thus be a source of economic mobility;"³

Issue

Yet, participating in the civic life of our city can be challenging for many of our youth. Finding transportation, forgoing work commitments to attend sessions, and juggling academic and extracurricular activities mean that many teens simply cannot engage in the work of these civic bodies.

The opportunity to engage in the policy work of the city of Alexandria is particularly important for young Alexandrians in marginalized communities. Furthermore, integrating the voices of youth across the spectrum of gender, race, socioeconomic status, etc. will better inform the city's policies and priorities.

Proposal

One obvious solution to this challenge is to offer stipends to youth members of Alexandria's boards and commissions.

According to After School Matters, providing stipends to youth participants reduces financial barriers for youth to participate, promotes youth financial literacy and economic mobility, and helps older youth support their families and meet their basic needs. "While stipends are not

wages, offering stipends allows youth from low-income families the opportunity to help support their families while continuing to learn and develop in an environment that is dedicated to their educational and social-emotional needs. Programs that offer youth stipends see higher demand rates and incentivize youth participation and engagement – correlating to youth receiving the intended skill development and social-emotional learning – and have been connected to better outcomes data.”⁴ While the After School Matters recommendations centered on youth development programs, the CYFCC believes this same logic applies to municipal boards and commissions.

Summary

The CYFCC believes this modest proposal would reap valuable benefits to the city and its youth. A community where young people are heard and empowered and where policies and programs are reflective of their voices is the kind of community we want in Alexandria.

¹*Children and Youth Master Plan 2025*, page 1

²Developmental Assets are traits, values, and experiences that all young people need to be healthy, successful and reach their full potential.

³Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Tufts University

⁴“Stipends As A Tool To Advance Economic And Educational Equity In Youth Development Programs,” After School Matters

8
4-13-24

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

From: carolyn.heasley@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Carolyn Heasley
<carolyn.heasley@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 11, 2024 5:33 PM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I am writing in support of increased allocation for affordable housing

[You don't often get email from carolyn.heasley@everyactioncustom.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Dear Alexandria City Council,

I am writing to call on the Alexandria City Council to increase the allocation to affordable housing in this fiscal year and commit to creating a new funding stream for sustained increased funds in future years. The current budget proposal does not do that and it neglects to allocate funding for two approved affordable housing projects comprising 466 units, leaving them in limbo as construction costs rise, and families wait. These projects are:

- Elbert Avenue (28 units of rental redevelopment and 63 new expansion), which was approved by City Council in February 2023.

- ParcView Apartments (149 rental preservation and 224 new construction), which was approved by City Council in February 2022.

Simply put, \$12 million a year for affordable housing is not enough during a crisis, be it FY 2025 or beyond. Now is when your public leadership and moral courage matter most.

Therefore, we call on you to:

1. Approve an additional at least \$10 million in the final 2025 Budget (above the \$12 M currently in the budget) to begin construction on approved projects.
2. Commit to creating a funding stream that will raise an additional \$20 million in ongoing revenue committed for affordable housing funds each year moving forward, so that approved projects do not wait years to move forward.

As a resident of Alexandria, I recognize that property taxes are the main source of revenue for the city. Therefore, if we want to increase funding for affordable housing, it means those of us who are fortunate enough to have homes will likely need to pay higher taxes. I'm in favor of this, especially if the extra revenue goes directly toward providing affordable housing for our neighbors who are in need.

Sincerely,
Carolyn Heasley
1206 Key Dr Alexandria, VA 22302-3408
carolyn.heasley@gmail.com

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8
4-13-24

Good Morning. My name is Jean McKean, and I am here representing the Friends of Burke Branch Library as well as the Friends of Alexandria's Libraries.

First, let me say "Thank you" to the Mayor, to City Council members and to the City Manager for recent increase in salaries for librarians and staff. These salary increases have helped with staff retention and recruitment of needed new staff. It is a proven fact that library services are vital to our Community and help to make Alexandria a better place to live for all.

The Friends Groups of Barrett, Beatley, Burke, and Duncan branch Libraries work diligently to raise funds to help support each individual Library as well as supplement all Library Adult and Children's programs and materials.

Today the Friends are asking that you create a dedicated, full-time Outreach Service Librarian position. A big thank you to Council member Aguirre for sponsoring this addition to the budget.

This Outreach Service Librarian position will:

- * Provide assigned staff for the electric outreach vehicle
- * Increase visibility and promote library services
- * Support equitable access to information and knowledge by bringing Library services into the community
- * Better serve the immigrant community, who are/may be reluctant to visit a Library facility
- * Attend more school events and community gatherings
- * Allow the Library to offer the same level of service as our neighboring library systems which ALL have dedicated outreach teams

Library Friends support the library's effort to bring equitable access to materials and services. We have pledged to help pay for outreach vehicle materials. We hope that through the creation of a dedicated outreach librarian position, the City will show its support for equitable access to library services.

Thank you.

8
4-13-24

Liliana Guadalupe

April 13

budget public hearing comments - English

Good morning! My name is Liliana Guadalupe, I am Salvadoran, I am in 11th grade at the International Academy at Alexandria City School. I'm here to talk to you a little about my family situation. These are some of my concerns. I recently started working in a store as a cashier, to help my parents with rent and food. Since the rent is expensive, I live with my parents and my brother in a one-bedroom apartment. Because of our low income, it is not enough to pay for an apartment with more bedrooms.

My family and other working class families are going through the same situation. That is why we are here today, to remind you that there are many low-income families here in the city, those who are here today and those who couldn't make it because they are out there struggling to pay the rent month after month.

I hope our voices will be heard and more funds will be dedicated to continue and expand the ARISE program.

Liliana Guadalupe

April 13

budget public hearing comments - Spanish

Buenos días! Mi nombre es Liliana Guadalupe, Soy salvadoreña, estoy estudiando el grado 11 del International Academy en Alexandria City School. Estoy aquí para hablarles un poco sobre mi situación familiar. Estas son algunas de mis preocupaciones. Hace poco tiempo empecé a trabajar en una tienda como cajera, para ayudar a mis padres con la renta o la comida. Ya que la renta esta cara, yo vivo con mis padres y mi hermano en un apartamento de un cuarto, porque sus ingresos bajos no alcanzan para pagar un apartamento de más recámaras.

Tanto mi familia, como otras familias de clase trabajadora estamos pasando por la misma situación. Por ese motivo estamos hoy aquí, para recordarles que tenemos muchas Familias de bajos recursos aquí en la ciudad, tanto las que estamos hoy aquí como las que están allá afuera luchando para poder pagar la renta mes con mes.

Esperó que nuestras voces sean escuchadas y dediquen más fondos para continuar y expandir el programa ARISE .

Maira Segura
Budget Public Hearing - Spanish
April 13, 2024

Buenos días alcalde, vice alcaldesa y miembros del consejo.

Mi nombre es Maira Segura, soy residente de la ciudad de Alexandria desde hace 5 años. Soy madre soltera y vivo con mi hijo de 11 años que es estudiante en las escuelas de la ciudad. Rento un apartamento de una recamara por Landmark y a pesar que nuestra renta es de ingresos al 60 por ciento anual- apenas logró alcanzar pagar la renta, las utilidades y mis gastos básicos. Y lo más triste es que no estamos viviendo en las mejores condiciones.

Siendo madre soltera tengo que trabajar el doble para poder darle un lugar donde vivir a mi hijo y por eso lucho todos los días trabajando duro para tener el dinero de la renta cada mes y no ser desalojados.

Les pido que en este presupuesto piensen en las familias que salimos muy de mañana todos los días a trabajar y regresamos a altas horas de la noche a casa para poder sobrevivir en la ciudad ya que la falta de vivienda para nosotros nos está forzando a ser desplazados de la ciudad.

Merecemos protecciones que ayuden a estabilizar a nuestras familias, y ustedes pueden ayudarnos haciendo lo siguiente:

- Dedicar fondos para continuar y expandir el programa ARISE
- Fondos para implementar el programa de cupones para vivienda,

Estos programas son una oportunidad para protegernos del desplazamiento obligado que estamos viviendo a causa de los aumentos de la renta, desarrollo y planes creados por la ciudad. Espero y no sigan ignorando las necesidades de nuestra comunidad, Gracias.

Maira Segura
Budget Public Hearing - English
April 13, 2024

Good morning mayor, vice mayor and members of the council.

My name is Maira Segura, I have been a resident of the city of Alexandria for 5 years. I am a single mother and I live with my 11-year-old son who is a student in ACPS. I rent a one-bedroom apartment near Landmark and even though our rent is 60 percent annual median income- I barely manage to pay the rent, utilities and my basic expenses. And the saddest thing is that we are not living in the best conditions.

Being a single mother, I have to work twice as hard to be able to give my son a place to live and that's why I fight every day working hard to have rent money every month and not be evicted.

I ask that in this budget you think about the families who leave early in the morning to work every day and return home late at night to be able to survive in the city since the lack of deeply committed housing is forcing us to be displaced from the city.

We deserve protections that help stabilize our families, and you can help us by:

- Dedicating funds to continue and expand the ARISE program and
- Funds to implement the housing voucher program,

These programs are an opportunity to protect ourselves from the forced displacement that we are experiencing due to increases in rent, development and plans created by the city. I hope you do not continue to ignore the needs of our community, thank you.

8
4-13-24

Maria Granados
Budget Public Hearing - *English*
April 13, 2024

With all due respect, I address you.

My name is Maria Granados, I am 59 years old and I immigrated to this great country 23 years ago from El Salvador. Since then I have only lived here in the city of Alexandria and am a member of Tenants and Workers United.

My jobs have been in cleaning houses and in restaurant kitchens. But 2 years ago, I had health complications that I could no longer work, due to surgery on my right knee. Until today, I cannot work full time as my health does not allow it. But we always struggle to pay the high cost of rent and our most basic needs.

I am here to tell you that you have a duty to protect our hardworking community. We need programs like ARISE. We want you to extend and dedicate more funds to give more families the opportunity to apply.

We are a low-income community, we work a lot and we have paid taxes and we adapted to this country that welcomed us because in my country there was a civil war and then the earthquake and well I had to leave my country with nothing in my hands.

We contribute to this community and we see Alexandria as our only home. I hope that you will take your responsibilities seriously as elected politicians who represent all of us regardless of our income, race or religion.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak and be heard.

Maria Granados
Budget Public Hearing - *Spanish*
April 13, 2024

Con el debido respeto, me dirijo a ustedes,

Mi nombre es Maria, tengo 59 años y inmigre a este gran país hace 23 años de El Salvador . Desde entonces solo he vivido aquí en la ciudad de Alexandria y soy miembro de Inquilinos y Trabajadores Unidos.

Mis trabajos han sido en limpieza de casa y en cocina de restaurante. Pero hace 2 años, tuve complicaciones de salud que ya no pude trabajar, debido a una cirugía en mi rodilla derecha. Hasta hoy, no puedo trabajar a tiempo completo ya que mi salud no me lo permite. Pero siempre los esforzamos para pagar el alto costo de la renta y nuestras necesidades más básicas

Estoy aquí para decirle a ustedes que tienen un deber para proteger nuestra comunidad trabajador. Necesitamos programas como el del ARISE. Queremos que ustedes extiendan y dediquen más fondos para darle la oportunidad a más familias para poder aplicar.

Somos una comunidad de bajos recursos, trabajamos mucho y hemos pagado impuestos y nos acoplamos a este país que nos recibió porque en mi país hubo una guerra civil y luego lo del terremoto y pues tuve que salir de mi país sin nada en mis manos. Contribuimos a esta comunidad y nosotros vemos Alexandria como nuestro único hogar. Espero que ustedes tomen sus responsabilidades serias como políticos electos que nos representan a todos sin importar nuestros ingresos, raza o religión.

Muchas gracias por darme la oportunidad de hablar y ser escuchada.

8
4-13-24

Walter Piche
April 13
Budget Public Hearing - English

Good Morning, Mayor, Vice Mayor and Council members,

My name is Walter Piche and I am in 9th grade at the International Academy at Alexandria City High School.

Today I am here in front of you to share a little about my story and how we young people of working class families are living right now in this city.

My mother is a single mother and we are three siblings. I am the oldest son. Every day, I see how my mother gets stressed because of the high cost of living. My mother has two jobs, during the day she works cleaning houses and in the evenings and weekends she has her own business selling fruits.

She has no day off, all to be able to pay the high cost of rent and to provide what is necessary for us. I am very proud of my mother but it is sad to see her go through a lot and work so much just for us to survive.

When I turn 15, I want to work to support my mother with expenses. I know that many boys my age who have better opportunities have other plans. My story is very common and many young people like me are experiencing the same thing in the city.

My wish is that you support us because there is not enough housing here for families like mine.

We need programs like ARISE and housing vouchers to be able to have a better quality of life and have a childhood and youth like many privileged families do. Thank you

Walter Piche
April 13
Budget Public Hearing - Spanish

Buenos Días, Alcalde, Vice Alcalde y Concejales,

Mi nombre es Walter Piche y estoy en 9 grado en el International Academy de Alexandria City High School.

Hoy estoy aquí enfrente de ustedes para compartir un poco sobre mi historia y como nosotros los jóvenes miembros de familias de la clase trabajadora estamos viviendo en estos momentos en esta ciudad.

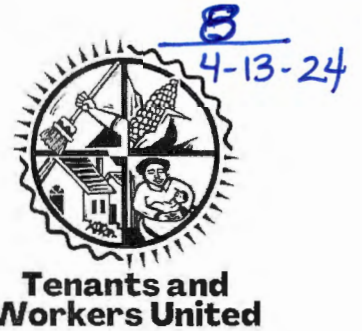
Mi mama es madre soltera y somos tres hermanos, yo soy el hijo mayor.

Cada día veo como mi mamá se estresa por el alto costo de la vida. Mi madre tiene dos trabajos, durante el día trabaja en limpieza de casas y por las tardes y fines de semana tiene su propio negocio vendiendo frutas.

No tiene día descanso, todo para poder pagar el alto costo de renta y para proveer lo necesario para nosotros. Estoy muy orgulloso de mi madre pero es triste verla pasar mucho trabajo solo para que sobrevivamos. Al cumplir los 15 años , quiero trabajar para apoyar a mi mama con los gastos. Se que muchos muchachos a mi edad que tienen mejores oportunidades tienen otros planes. Mi historia es muy común y muchos jóvenes como yo están viviendo lo mismo que en la ciudad.

Mi deseo es que ustedes nos apoyen porque aquí no hay suficiente vivienda como para familias como la mía.

Necesitamos programas como ARISE y los cupones de vivienda para poder tener una mejor calidad de vida y tener una niñez y juventud como muchas familias privilegiadas la tienen. Gracias



April 13, 2024

2025 Budget Public Comments

Good Morning Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Council Members,

My name is Ingris Moran, Lead Organizer for Tenants and Workers United, an almost 4-decade old community grassroots organization that has been in the city since.

For many years, you as our leaders have witnessed our communities being very vocal and clear on their needs to fund deeply committed affordable housing in order to preserve our working-class communities of color, many of whom only earn 40% of the area median income (AMI). Unfortunately, most of the city's past investment has been dedicated to prioritizing units at 60%-80% of the AMI, which is focused on workforce housing.

According to the American Community Survey, there are an estimated 10,200 renter households in our city that are cost-burdened with incomes up to 50k.

In the meantime, funds are delayed for many approved pipeline projects, we look up to you proactively to provide anti-displacement programs in order to stabilize our families in the FY 2025 budget in the meantime some deeply committed units are being built. Yet, we still do not see any new policy or funding approach. So while our families earn minimum wage and wait on the city to decide what actions they will take - how many more families will be sent to court as they are continuing to be rent-burdened?

Based on the city's, Office of Performance Analytics, Eviction Data, there has been:

- 956 Summons For Unlawful Detainer Filed January 1 - March 18, 2024
And;
- 409 Writs Of Eviction Issued January 1 – March 18, 2024

Eviction prevention \$ is only a bandaid to this crisis we have in the city. Just this past Wednesday, there were 68 families in court for unpaid rent - have you done court outreach? There are 329 families being sent to court just this month of April- we welcome you to visit the court, talk to these families, and ask them, why are they unable to pay.

While we appreciate the good intention of council members proposing in the add/delete to create a \$550k contingency fund to DCHS to bridge the completion of the ARISE pilot program - this is a great disappointment because our working-class communities may only get the bare minimum as we see no commitment to expand to more families and for future years.

We need the city to continue and expand the guaranteed income pilot program (ARISE). According to the City's budget memo, in order for it to expand it to a year for a total of 270 families, there needs to be an allocation in the budget of \$1.9 million dollars for the city to do the right thing and support our families. We need ARISE and other tools such as the council providing an opportunity for the creation and implementation of a locally funded voucher program to support families who earn 40% of the area median income (AMI) and below.

We remind you there are many families with very high incomes and families with very low incomes and many of those are our janitors who clean our schools, our city buildings, they are our child care providers and they work in our local restaurants and make Alexandria thrive - now it's your responsibility as an elected official to recognize these families and show you truly care for working class families. We hope you can take action now.

88
4-13-24

Statement of Catherine Clinger, Chair of the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission

April 13, 2024

Mr. Mayor, Members of the City Council, and Mr. Parajon, my name is Catherine Clinger and I serve as Chair of the City's Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today. The City Council established our Commission to advocate for policies and decisions that result in better outcomes for children, youth, and families in Alexandria. Given this mandate, the Commission urges you to support many of the items under consideration for addition to the FY2025 budget, even if to do so would require an increase in the tax rate.

First, we support the \$4 million increase in ACPS operating budget appropriations to provide ACPS staff with Market Rate Adjustments to their salaries. The Children and Youth Community Plan, which our Commission oversees, requires the City of Alexandria to ensure that students have the resources they need for academic success. What could be more important to a student's academic success than a dedicated teacher with years of experience? We join our City's teachers and staff in supporting salary adjustments, as it is our belief that their compensation should reflect the uniquely vital role that all school staff play in our children's well-being.

Second, Alexandria's Children and Youth Community Plan specifies that the City should provide youth with opportunities for leadership and civic engagement. Therefore, we urge you to support both the Alexandria Youth Ambassadors and the proposed stipend for youth members of our City's Boards and Commissions. Financial incentives for students involved in these activities will encourage all students – regardless of income – to participate in them and thereby gain the leadership and advocacy skills that will benefit not only these students but the future of our City as well.

Third, we support funding for a dedicated Outreach Library Assistant position. This library assistant position will promote equitable access to resources as well as bringing the library to underserved communities throughout our city. This will promote the academic success of all of Alexandria's children.

Finally, the Commission urges the City Council to create a contingency fund to promote pay competitiveness and retention of city mental health positions. Our Commission has made mental health programs a priority since the pandemic, and ensuring that Alexandria is able to recruit and retain mental health professionals is critical to these efforts.

Thank you very much for listening to our Commission's views.

Sincerely,

Catherine Clinger
Chair
Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission

April 12, 2024

Via email: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

Public Comment on FY 2025 Alexandria City Budget Add/Delete Proposals, April 13, 2024

Re: One-time funding for Affordable Housing projects +\$3,000,000; & Contingency funding for the ARISE program +\$550,000.

Dear Mayor, Vice-Mayor, and City Council Members,

The Legal Aid Justice Center¹ writes in support of our clients and community partners, including Tenants and Workers United, to ask that you approve the two proposed changes to the FY 2025 Alexandria City Budget: **One-time funding for Affordable Housing projects +\$3,000,000; & Contingency funding for the ARISE program +\$550,000.** We thank City Council for increasing the funding available for affordable housing and to alleviate the rental cost burden through these proposed changes. There is no silver bullet to make the housing system more equitable, but we need both immediate protections for current residents and structural shifts to preserve and produce deeply affordable housing.

Because of the severe housing cost burden,² increasing rents,³ and lack of deeply affordable housing in Alexandria, we hear regularly from low-income residents who are forced out of the City or make even greater sacrifices to stay.⁴ Interrupting displacement requires a multi-pronged approach: protecting current residents, preserving existing affordable housing, and producing more affordable housing.⁵ Without short-term actions to keep people in their homes, current residents are being forced out even as Alexandria makes medium and long-term changes to preserve and build deeply affordable housing.

We are concerned to see that the proposals changes do not include expanding the ARISE program to serve more families. We urge City Council to increase funding by \$1.9 million to benefit 100 additional families and keep the program operating sustainably.⁶ At a minimum, the City should approve the proposed \$550,000 increase to bridge the current program to the end of

¹ The Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) is a non-profit organization that provides free civil legal assistance and advocacy on behalf of low-income individuals and families across Virginia. We partner with communities and clients to achieve racial, social, and economic justice by dismantling systems that create and perpetuate poverty.

² 93% of renter households in Alexandria with incomes below \$50,000 are housing cost burdened, meaning they pay over 30% of their income on housing. <https://www.alexandriava.gov/performance-analytics/housing-opportunities-indicator-dashboard>.

³ Rents increased approximately 15.5% on average in Northern Virginia from 2019 to October 2023. <https://virginiarealtors.org/2023/10/23/pulse-check-on-rent-in-virginias-metro-markets/>. Rent increases in Alexandria continue to outpace many other local markets in Northern Virginia. <https://www.apartmentlist.com/rent-report/va/alexandria>.

⁴ For example: <https://www.alxnow.com/2023/09/06/alexandria-residents-cry-foul-over-drastic-rent-increases/>.

⁵ <https://localhousingsolutions.org/plan/developing-an-anti-displacement-strategy/>.

⁶ <https://www.alexandriava.gov/budget-memos-fy25/fy-25-budget-qa-020-can-you-provide-a-refresher-on-the-arise-current-pilot-how>.

FY 2025. Neighborhood stabilization strategies are vital because they have a direct and short-term impact on protecting current residents from displacement.⁷ Because many strategies, such as rent stabilization, are currently outside the City's authority, it is even more critical that Alexandria do everything within its authority to protect current residents. Income support programs, such as the ARISE program, help immediately to alleviate the constraints caused by high rent prices and give Alexandria's least affluent residents more choice about how to meet their needs.

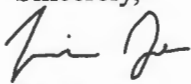
We continue to advocate for the creation of a locally funded voucher program to support very low-income families and prevent displacement. This program is an essential strategy to stabilize families in the short-term as the City continues to invest in more deeply affordable housing.

We urge the City to approve an increase of at least \$3,000,000 for funding for affordable housing projects in the Capital Improvements Pipeline.⁸ Because the market will not provide housing to meet very low-income people's needs, City investment is necessary. The City should prioritize this funding for projects that provide housing at 40% Area Median Income, to meet the deepest need.

We applaud this increased funding for affordable housing projects, but we are concerned that it is a one-time proposal. Meeting the housing needs of Alexandria's tenants will require a sustained and dedicated increase in funding. Fair wages, equitable education, and affordable housing are critical and interrelated needs, but a lack of additional sustained funding risks pitting housing against other needs in every budget cycle. To that end, we urge the City to create an increased dedicated funding stream as part of future budgets to raise substantial ongoing revenue for deeply affordable housing.

We urge the Council to approve these two proposals, and to pursue further funding increases that work together to alleviate the rent burden for some families in the short-term and increase the City's deeply affordable housing. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Larisa Zehr
Senior Staff Attorney
larisa@justice4all.org

⁷ <https://www.urbandisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/19RD018-Anti-Displacement-Strategy-Effectiveness.pdf> at 13.

⁸ <https://www.alexandriava.gov/budget-memos-fy25/fy-25-budget-qa-027-when-was-the-last-time-the-city-used-general-obligation-bonds>.

8
4-13-24

April 12, 2024
To: City Council
From: YIMBYs of Northern Virginia, Alexandria Chapter¹
Re: Increased Funding for Housing



Mayor Wilson, Vice Mayor Jackson, and Members of Council:

Our region faces a housing crisis rooted in a simple fact: as the DC region grew in population and added thousands of high-paying jobs over the past several decades, we failed to build enough housing to keep up with the ever-increasing demand for homes near these jobs. The impacts of our housing crisis are devastating, and land hardest on the most vulnerable Alexandrians. The solution to this crisis is simple: we must build more homes for the people who live here today and who will want to live here tomorrow.

But we must also mitigate harm today while we pursue this long-term solution. The budget plays a critical role in this by funding both dedicated affordable homes for families who want to remain a part of our community.

We were pleased to see Councilman McPike's add/delete proposal that would add \$3 million in additional funds for affordable housing projects in the City, and especially that the majority of you have signed on to this proposal as co-sponsors. In a year where funds are hard to come by and the City is seeking to address many priorities, we appreciate every additional dollar that can be directed toward addressing our housing crisis.

It's our understanding, however, that the \$3 million of additional funding will still be insufficient to begin work on the projects that have been approved by this Council but remain unstarted due to lack of funds.

We therefore request Council to amend this proposal to instead provide the full \$10 million in additional affordable housing funds for 2025 so work can begin on these projects.

There are hundreds of already-approved affordable homes that could be under construction today if not for lack of funding, including the projects at Elbert Avenue (approved 2023) and the Parc View Apartments (approved 2022). The approval of an additional \$10 million in 2025 will ensure that approved affordable housing projects can be built quickly rather than languishing while more of our neighbors get priced out of Alexandria.

¹ This written comment is the only official position of YIMBYs of Northern Virginia's Alexandria chapter. Leads and members may give individual comments on the budget that include, but are not limited to, the organization's housing priorities. YIMBYs of NoVA does not take any official position beyond what is written here.

During last year's consideration of Zoning for Housing, you heard from both supporters and opponents of that reform about the importance of affordable housing. The need to fund dedicated affordable homes may be the closest thing Alexandria has to a political consensus.

YIMBYs of NoVA has no position on how this money should be provided, whether by tax increases or offsets elsewhere in the budget. We are cognizant that this is a difficult budget year, when funds are scarce and Council is being asked to consider many other requests. We hope you will consider the fundamental role that housing plays in the lives of all Alexandrians, from teachers and students to first responders and the employees and customers in our many small businesses. Investments in keeping Alexandria affordable are investments in all of our community.

With these fiscal constraints in mind we would also remind Council of the **important and free regulatory** reforms the City could make to both improve housing affordability and generate additional tax revenue that can be spent on dedicated affordable homes, schools, staff salaries, transportation, or any of the City's many other priorities.

Housing could be made much more affordable if the city simply stopped mandating luxury accouterments like off-street parking for private vehicles. Mandated parking drives up construction costs, which gets passed on to us as higher rents and mortgage payments. If Alexandrians choose to live in homes with off street parking, as many do today and will continue to do in the future, they should of course be free to do so. But a government mandate that all homes include a minimum number of parking spaces is unnecessary and forces all households, even those who can't afford a car, to pay for private vehicle storage.

Removing costly parking mandates from the zoning code would make housing more affordable, and would cost \$0 in future city budgets. In fact, it will reduce the subsidy needed for future affordable housing projects.

The City could also improve the state of future budgets by getting more serious about transit-oriented development. Alexandria still places strict limits on how many people the City will allow to live near transit. Walksheds around many of our Metro stations and current & future transitways are still zoned for low density or industrial uses instead of the dense, vibrant, transit-supporting and revenue-producing neighborhoods they could be if we simply allowed them to grow.

The impacts of these restrictions are visibly obvious: anyone standing at Braddock Road Station, for example, can face east and see a City growing up around the station, resembling much of the region's best transit-oriented communities. Turn around and face west, however, and you see what looks like a sleepy suburb. In too many places we've approached transit with a split mentality, imposing strict caps on the growth of some neighborhoods while allowing abundant housing on "the other side of the tracks."

By limiting the growth on our most in-demand land, the City provides what is in effect a regulatory subsidy to low-density residential uses while actively preventing the types of high-density residential and commercial development that delivers huge tax windfalls for cities who allow growth to happen. Arlington County is a prime example of this - by allowing growth all around their metro lines they have over the years developed a strong baseline of commercial tax revenue that funds the County's priorities. Alexandria could have this too, if we'd only allow it.

Allowing growth around high-capacity transit stations would make housing more affordable, and would provide additional money for future city budgets.

We hope Council will take seriously its commitment to improving housing affordability across the board, both by funding today's needs for affordable homes and vouchers and by permitting the growth that will allow us to fund future needs as well.

About Organization: *YIMBYs (yes in my backyard) of Northern Virginia is a grassroots, all-volunteer organization working to make housing affordable to all by enabling the construction of more homes for more people. Attainable homes close to the amenities of daily life hold the promise of communities that are more affordable, socially connected, economically productive, and sustainable.*

www.yimbysofnova.org

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

8
4-13-24

From: cpaul votes <cpaul.votes@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 12, 2024 4:14 PM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov; Justin Wilson; Amy Jackson; John Chapman; Canek Aguirre; Alyia Gaskins; Sarah Bagley; Kirk McPike
Subject: [EXTERNAL][Citizen Comment][Budget] Support for Affordable Housing

Dear Council,

I am an Alexandria resident & homeowner.

CM McPike's \$3M "Add" budget amendment for affordable housing is a good proposal — but insufficient. I would support increasing this to \$10M so that already-approved projects can begin construction. I understand that this may require a higher property tax, which I would be willing to pay.

If council cannot agree on funding the full \$10M required for these projects, I would support whatever increase is feasible.

Best,
Charles Paul

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8
4-13-24

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

From: heinzen@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Archer Heinzen
<heinzen@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Friday, April 12, 2024 5:39 PM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Subject: [EXTERNAL]I am writing in support of increased allocation for affordable housing

[You don't often get email from heinzen@everyactioncustom.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Dear Alexandria City Council,

I am writing to call on the Alexandria City Council to increase the allocation to affordable housing in this fiscal year and commit to creating a new funding stream for sustained increased funds in future years. The current budget proposal does not do that and it neglects to allocate funding for two approved affordable housing projects comprising 466 units, leaving them in limbo as construction costs rise, and families wait. These projects are:

- Elbert Avenue (28 units of rental redevelopment and 63 new expansion), which was approved by City Council in February 2023.

- ParcView Apartments (149 rental preservation and 224 new construction), which was approved by City Council in February 2022.

Simply put, \$12 million a year for affordable housing is not enough during a crisis, be it FY 2025 or beyond. Now is when your public leadership and moral courage matter most.

Therefore, we call on you to:

1. Approve an additional at least \$10 million in the final 2025 Budget (above the \$12 M currently in the budget) to begin construction on approved projects. This is what is needed. Since you have tied your own hands in being able to deliver on this, we call on you to ensure at least the \$3M you included in the Add/Delete process gets fully funded for FY 2025.
2. Commit to creating a funding stream that will raise an additional \$20 million in ongoing revenue committed for affordable housing funds each year moving forward, so that approved projects do not wait years to move forward.

As a resident of Alexandria, I recognize that property taxes are the main source of revenue for the city. Therefore, if we want to increase funding for affordable housing, it means those of us who are fortunate enough to have homes will likely need to pay higher taxes. I'm in favor of this, especially if the extra revenue goes directly toward providing affordable housing for our neighbors who are in need.

Sincerely,
Archer Heinzen

901 Second St Alexandria, VA 22314-1347 heinzen@verizon.net _____

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YIMBYS OF
NOVA

8
4-13-24

13 April 2024

Mayor Wilson, Vice Mayor Jackson, and members of Council,

As the Alexandria leadership team for YIMBYS of Northern Virginia, we enthusiastically support the redevelopment of the Vulcan Materials Site at 701 S Van Dorn St and 698 Burnside Place. Alexandria desperately needs more homes to support everyone who works and goes to school in our region. This project will transform an industrial site that is no longer in use into 323 new homes, including condos, townhouses, and stacked townhouses, providing more opportunities to live in our city. The project will contribute over \$3.5 million to Alexandria's affordable housing fund, and the increased supply of homes will help keep older condo buildings in Landmark affordable for first-time homebuyers.

The project will also benefit the whole community with a new 4.4-acre public park in a location without many nearby parks. It will also include a new hotel where visitors to Landmark can generate tax revenue for Alexandria rather than Fairfax County.

We hope Alexandria will continue to welcome new homes of all types, all price points, and in all parts of our city to address our regional housing crisis and make our city better for everyone.

Phoebe Coy, Alex Goyette, Luca Gattoni-Celli, Peter Sutherland, Stephanie Elms, and Trip Hook
YIMBYS of Northern Virginia Alexandria leads

8
4-13-24

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

From: Stephanie Elms <stephanie.elms@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, April 12, 2024 8:54 PM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov; Justin Wilson; Amy Jackson; John Chapman; Canek Aguirre; Alyia Gaskins; Sarah Bagley; Kirk McPike
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Please continue your support of affordable housing funding

Some people who received this message don't often get email from stephanie.elms@gmail.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Hi. My name is Stephanie Elms and I live in Del Ray.

I appreciate the action that the council has taken towards making housing more affordable here in Alexandria. Zoning for Housing was a huge step in the right direction. I'm writing to ask that you prioritize funding the backlog of approved affordable housing projects. I was heartened to see Councilmember McPike's inclusion of 3 million for these projects and want to encourage you to increase that to 10 million in order to get those projects moving forward. I understand that there are a lot of priorities that you all need to consider and that this is a tighter year financially for the City. But I hope that it is possible to find a way to find funding to keep more folks from being priced out of living here and being able to take advantage of all the city has to offer.

Thank you for your consideration.

Stephanie Elms

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

8
4-13-24

DATE: April 12, 2024
TO: Mayor Justin Wilson
Members of City Council
City Manager James Parajon
FROM: John Hill, Chair
Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Committee
SUBJECT: Annual Report to City Council

Alexandria City Ordinance 5509 established the Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation Advisory Committee to “review recommendations for Program funding and, as appropriate, support funding requests” and “serve as liaison between City staff and the community regarding the Flood Action Alexandria Program”.

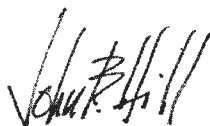
Attached is the annual report of the Advisory Committee. It presents an analysis of Alexandria’s proposed investment in stormwater flood mitigation as contained in the City’s proposed budget for FY 2025. The report was developed with input from concerned residents as voiced during our public meetings, presentations by City staff, and analysis by Committee members of the proposed FY 2025 budget and ten-year Capital Improvement Program.

The report concludes that Alexandria’s investments in stormwater infrastructure are directed to the most urgent flooding problems. Moreover, the level of funding in FY 2025 and proposed for future years will adequately support the project plans of the Flood Action Program. The report acknowledges the orderly progress the City has made to-date in its stormwater flood mitigation efforts.

Nonetheless, the Committee recognizes that the Flood Action Program is at a critical juncture in the way that it engages Alexandria residents. Over the past two years, the orderly completion of the smaller “spot improvement” projects gave residents tangible evidence of progress. However, we are now entering a period where progress will be less visible, as the design of large capacity-building projects takes years. Actual construction for the first large project will not begin until April 2026 – a full two years from now. And, unlike the smaller spot improvements, the large projects bring with them traffic disruption and noise.

The Committee strongly urges the City to incorporate a comprehensive public outreach program with the large capacity-building projects. Such an outreach program would engage the public in the design of stormwater solutions so residents better understand the reasons for, and impact of, the large projects that will disrupt their neighborhoods. In addition, the City should establish an easy-to-follow method of reporting progress so that public support does not wane in the long periods between the start of design and project completion.

Thank you for the opportunity to support Alexandria’s Flood Action Program. The Committee stands ready to assist the City in designing an outreach program and engaging the residents in the neighborhoods most impacted by the construction of the large capacity-building projects.



Annual Report
To
Alexandria City Council

April 15, 2024



Homes along Commonwealth Avenue, August 14, 2023

Stormwater Utility and Flood Mitigation

Advisory Group

Council Member John Chapman

Mr. John Hill, Chair

Ms. Katherine Waynick, Vice Chair

Mr. Brian Sands

Ms. Cheryl Leonard

Mr. Chris Ferrara

Ms. Christine Thuot

Mr. Dino Drudi

Mr. Howard "Skip" Maginniss

Ms. Janette Shew

Question 1: Is the City's investment in stormwater mitigation directed to the most urgent problems?

The Facts



On July 29, 2023, Alexandria received one inch of rain in 15 minutes. On August 14, 1.6 inches fell in 20 minutes*. These storms flooded the areas around the intersection of Glebe Road and Commonwealth Avenue and along Hooff's Run between Linden and Duke streets.

The majority of 311 assistance calls during the two storms came from homes along Hooff's Run. In addition, the flooding along Four Mile Run, at the intersection of Glebe Road and Commonwealth Avenue (seen at left) received considerable media attention.

Major capacity-building projects are well underway in these two areas. The Commonwealth/Ashby/Glebe project is nearing the completion of its 60% design; the Hooff's Run Culvert Bypass project is assessing multiple design alternatives. Both projects are fully funded for FY 2025 and their out-year costs are included in the 10-year Stormwater Capital Improvement Plan.

Opinion of the Committee

The Committee agrees that the Flood Action Program is starting with the most urgent flooding problems facing Alexandria. The CASSCA study of 2016 identified the Four Mile Run (East) and Hooff's Run watersheds as the city's most flood-prone areas. That was evident during the severe rainstorms of 2020 and 2021; the storms of last summer confirmed that yet again.

The Committee members from these watersheds acknowledged that the Flood Action Program is making visible progress in their neighborhoods. They cited the public meetings on the Commonwealth/Ashby/Glebe project in the Lynnhaven neighborhood. In Rosemont, residents approve of the considerable maintenance improvements to the existing culvert.

The Committee did, however, suggest that city engineers look beyond the CASSCA Study to identify the next set of large capacity-building projects. The Committee noted that the 2016 study focused solely on sewer pipe diameters and not actual flooding patterns. In identifying future projects, the City should evaluate areas that were not included in the CASSCA Study, such as the area around the Braddock Metro Station and in the Combined Sewer Area.

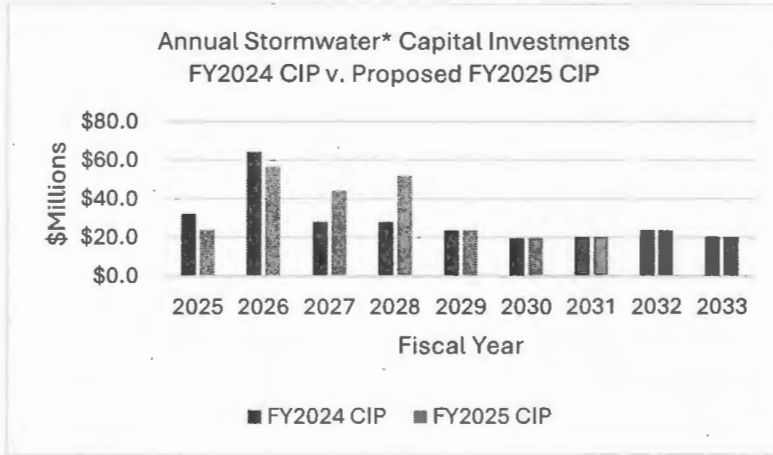
In addition, the impact of the most recent projects such as Commonwealth/Asby/Glebe, Hooff's Run, and the River Renew tunnel will invariably change how stormwater drains in Alexandria. The impact of the entire program should also be monitored to ensure that fixing the flooding in one area does not produce unintended consequences in other areas nearby.

*Rainfall measured at the Mt Vernon School weather station.

Question 2: Are the planned expenditures adequate to address the stormwater flooding problem?

The Facts

The proposed budget for FY 2025 includes an increase in Alexandria's investment in stormwater infrastructure over last year's ten-year Capital Improvement Program (CIP).



*includes Wet Weather projects from the Sanitary Sewer CIP

The CIP in the FY 2024 budget called for a total of \$262 million in stormwater capital projects for the period FY 2025 through FY 2033. The proposed CIP in the FY 2025 budget calls for a total of \$286 million over the same period.

This \$24 million increase is due to the inclusion of a new stormwater mitigation project at the intersection of Pitt and Gibbon in the Combined Sewer Area.

Opinion of the Committee

When the Flood Action Alexandria Program was launched in 2021, it proposed a ten-year \$260 million investment in stormwater infrastructure. The Committee acknowledges that the proposed budget for FY 2025, together with the previously planned yearly fee, continues to honor that commitment. In fact, the Committee applauds the addition of funding for the project at Pitt and Gibbon in the ten-year Sanitary Sewer CIP, as well as the City's use of federal funds from the American Rescue Plan for stormwater projects.

At this stage of the Flood Action program, the Committee believes that Alexandria is adequately funding the correct level of construction activity. The large projects, especially, are disruptive to the neighborhoods and traffic of Alexandria. More than two concurrent large projects may be more disruptive than Alexandria residents are willing to accommodate.

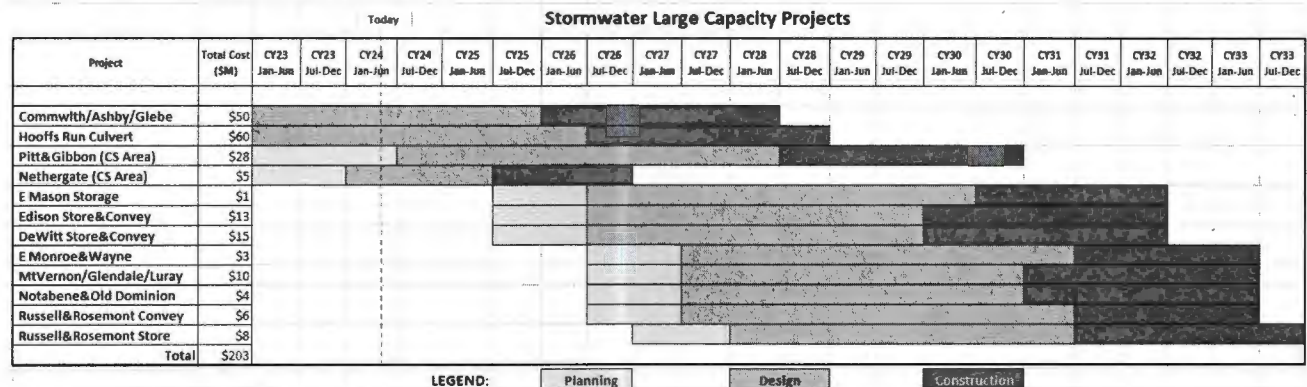
The Committee acknowledges, however, that the ten-year CIP is based on estimates of the future cost of large stormwater projects. As such, the Committee understands that the total cost of these projects may increase as designs are further developed and total construction costs are better understood.

Question 3: Is the City making sufficient progress in addressing the problem?

The Facts

The City has made considerable progress in addressing the backlog of smaller “spot improvement” projects. At the start of the Flood Action Program, twenty-seven spot improvements were identified. As of March 2024, eight of these have been completed and eleven are actively under design and construction.

Two of the longer-term large capacity projects are currently being designed. The Commonwealth/Ashby/Glebe project will reach its “60% design” milestone later this spring. The Hooff’s Run Bypass project will reach “30% design” later this summer. The two large projects in the combined sewer area, at the intersection of Pitt and Gibbon and at Nethergate, are in the planning stage, with design contracts to be awarded later this year.



Opinion of the Committee

The Committee recognizes that the Flood Action Program is at a critical juncture in the way that it engages Alexandria residents. The orderly completion of the smaller “spot improvement” projects over the past three years gave residents tangible evidence of progress. We are now entering a period where progress will be less visible.

The large capacity projects are slow-moving. Actual construction for the first large project will not begin until April 2026 – a full two years from now. And, unlike the smaller spot improvements, the large projects bring with them traffic disruption and noise – making community engagement essential.

The Committee strongly urges the City to incorporate a comprehensive public outreach program with the large capacity projects. Using the Commonwealth/Ashby/Glebe project as the prototype for best practice communication, the City should:

- Conduct widely publicized and multi-channel public engagement around the critical design reviews to inform residents of the reasons for, and impact of, the large projects that will disrupt their neighborhoods;
- Establish an easy-to-follow method of reporting progress so that public support does not wane in the long periods between the start of design and project completion.

The Committee stands ready to assist the City in designing an outreach program and engaging the residents in the neighborhoods most impacted by the construction of the large capacity projects.

8
4-13-24

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

From: revroberta@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Roberta Finkelstein
<revroberta@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 13, 2024 10:23 AM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I am writing in support of increased allocation for affordable housing

[You don't often get email from revroberta@everyactioncustom.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Dear Alexandria City Council,

I live in Del Ray. I am writing to call on the Alexandria City Council to increase the allocation to affordable housing in this fiscal year and commit to creating a new funding stream for sustained increased funds in future years. The current budget proposal does not do that and it neglects to allocate funding for two approved affordable housing projects comprising 466 units, leaving them in limbo as construction costs rise, and families wait. These projects are:

- Elbert Avenue (28 units of rental redevelopment and 63 new expansion), which was approved by City Council in February 2023.

- ParcView Apartments (149 rental preservation and 224 new construction), which was approved by City Council in February 2022.

Simply put, \$12 million a year for affordable housing is not enough during a crisis, be it FY 2025 or beyond. Now is when your public leadership and moral courage matter most.

Therefore, we call on you to:

1. Approve an additional at least \$10 million in the final 2025 Budget (above the \$12 M currently in the budget) to begin construction on approved projects. This is what is needed. Since you have tied your own hands in being able to deliver on this, we call on you to ensure at least the \$3M you included in the Add/Delete process gets fully funded for FY 2025.
2. Commit to creating a funding stream that will raise an additional \$20 million in ongoing revenue committed for affordable housing funds each year moving forward, so that approved projects do not wait years to move forward.

As a resident of Alexandria, I recognize that property taxes are the main source of revenue for the city. Therefore, if we want to increase funding for affordable housing, it means those of us who are fortunate enough to have homes will likely need to pay higher taxes. I'm in favor of this, especially if the extra revenue goes directly toward providing affordable housing for our neighbors who are in need.

Sincerely,

Roberta Finkelstein

13 W Uhler Ave Alexandria, VA 22301-1547 revroberta@gmail.com _____

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8
4-13-24

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

From: e.caroltalley@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Ethel Talley
<e.caroltalley@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Monday, April 15, 2024 3:08 PM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I am writing in support of increased allocation for affordable housing

[You don't often get email from e.caroltalley@everyactioncustom.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Dear Alexandria City Council,

I am writing to call on the Alexandria City Council to increase the allocation to affordable housing in this fiscal year and commit to creating a new funding stream for sustained increased funds in future years. The current budget proposal does not do that and it neglects to allocate funding for two approved affordable housing projects comprising 466 units, leaving them in limbo as construction costs rise, and families wait. These projects are:

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Sincerely,
Ethel Talley
522 S Alfred St Alexandria, VA 22314-4025 e.caroltalley@yahoo.com _____

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8
4-13-24

CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov

From: pkicak@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Pamela Kicak
<pkicak@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 17, 2024 10:07 AM
To: CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov
Subject: [EXTERNAL]I am writing in support of increased allocation for affordable housing

[You don't often get email from pkicak@everyactioncustom.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

Dear Alexandria City Council,

I am writing to call on the Alexandria City Council to increase the allocation to affordable housing in this fiscal year and commit to creating a new funding stream for sustained increased funds in future years. The current budget proposal does not do that and it neglects to allocate funding for two approved affordable housing projects comprising 466 units, leaving them in limbo as construction costs rise, and families wait. These projects are:

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As a resident of Alexandria, I recognize that property taxes are the main source of revenue for the city. Therefore, if we want to increase funding for affordable housing, it means those of us who are fortunate enough to have homes will likely need to pay higher taxes. I understand this, especially if the extra revenue goes directly toward providing affordable housing for our neighbors who are in need but I recognize that every homeowner can't necessarily afford higher taxes. I don't want to see people who have been here a long time forced out of their homes because of higher and higher appraisals. I have seen long time residents have to leave because although their income was higher than tax relief it was too high a burden. I would like the council to look outside the box for revenue streams.

Sincerely,
Pamela Kicak
1104 Cross Dr Alexandria, VA 22302-3103 pkicak@comcast.net _____

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8
4-13-24

Good afternoon, councilmembers.

I am speaking today as a lifelong Alexandria resident because there can never be enough voices in support of funding affordable housing in a city rapidly changing due to the rising tide of gentrification.

We have all heard, over and over, that a budget is a moral document: the choices we make about how a government redistributes funds are not merely practical, political choices, but moral ones with real consequences for the survival and livelihoods of its residents.

If this year's budget is a moral document, then I am concerned about what it says about our city's moral compass, and what we can tolerate.

Between March 2023 and February 2024, Alexandria saw 11% of its renters facing eviction: nearly double the rates in Arlington and Fairfax. 461 cases were filed against Alexandria tenants in February alone. As any resident will tell you, the rent is simply too high. I am part of the 78% of renters with income under \$75,000 who pays more than 30% of their income towards rent.

While I applaud the proposed one time allocation of an additional \$3 million towards projects already approved in the CIP pipeline, the city could be doing much more to finance the rehabilitation and development of affordable housing in Alexandria.

First, I am embarrassed when I hear city council approve plans for private developments with over a hundred unit and only a handful of committed affordable unit, many of which define affordable as accessible to those who make 60% of the Area Median Income, which we know is still unaffordable for so many of our residents. Why is our city not financing and incentivizing the production of affordable housing, both as set-asides in mixed-income developments and dedicated affordable developments, as it greenlights more and more luxury developments across the city?

While housing production is understandably expensive, the city could also innovate and find ways to help residents stay in their homes and neighborhoods despite increasing costs. Housing advocates have been before you multiple times these last few months to ask the city to continue funding and expanding the ARISE guaranteed income pilot, which at barely a year old is already making a real impact on the lives of some of the city's lowest income families. The community has also called for a locally funded voucher program, targeted towards families at 40% AMI and below, to allow families to cap their rental payments at an affordable percentage of their income.

We must also be bold in identifying revenue sources for affordable housing - rather than relying almost exclusively on a portion of the meals tax, we can and should increase the real property tax rate to reflect the growing inequality in our city. With very few exceptions, homeownership in this city is limited to those at higher incomes who are better prepared to absorb a few hundred dollars in extra expenses per year than low-income families living paycheck-to-paycheck.

When asked to describe Alexandria to an outsider, I have always described it as a tale of two cities: nearly unfathomable levels of wealth situated just blocks from families who can barely get by. Over my lifetime, however, even that narrative is hardly recognizable: from 2000 to 2022, Alexandria lost over 78% of its affordable housing stock, a change visible in the new cityscape. The council must decide whether its moral compass compels it to do something about it.

Personally, I am incredibly privileged to rent in one of the last market-rate affordable buildings in the city, Mason Gardens. I am also counting my days - should the owners of the property choose to sell to a developer, I'm sure our reasonable rents will skyrocket. Looking at the market for comparable units in Alexandria, I don't have a backup plan that will keep me in the city: properties like these simply no longer exist.