

# TimesCommunity.com

Progress report: Affordable housing  
By: Gerald E. Connolly  
03/07/2007

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of columns discussing the status of the Board of Supervisors' six-point agenda, adopted in 2004.

Providing affordable housing for those who serve our local economy is crucial for continuing our success here in Fairfax County. However, this is a great challenge in a region where an individual or family must earn \$22.25 an hour, the equivalent of \$46,280 annually or four times the minimum wage, to afford an average priced rental unit. Increasingly, our business community cites affordable housing as a significant impediment in the recruitment and retention of the workforce in Northern Virginia.

Between 1990 and 2000 the number of jobs in Fairfax County increased 40 percent, while the number of housing units increased less than 20 percent. Job growth continues to outpace residential growth, and because of this we now have a gap of 30,000 housing units locally.

Preserving our rapidly decreasing stock of affordable housing is the first step. Initially the Board of Supervisors set out to preserve 1,000 units that would have otherwise been lost to market rate or redevelopment during our term. I am pleased to report we have surpassed that goal a year ahead of schedule and successfully preserved 1,359 housing units and are still working to preserve more.

We also have taken significant strides toward providing affordable housing for our workforce. Currently only 46 percent of county employees reside in Fairfax. Through the development of innovative concepts, such as magnet and workforce housing, we are partnering with employers to offer training or apprenticeship opportunities for entry-level or critical, hard-to-fill positions.

This program began with 10 units for Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department recruits in 2004. It has since expanded to four properties with a total of 30 units. In addition, we have formed partnerships with the Fairfax County Redevelopment & Housing Authority, Fairfax County Public Schools, our police department, our Human Resources Department and Inova Health Systems. Future plans for magnet housing include the construction of a living/learning campus at the county government center.

Beginning in fiscal year 2006 the Board of Supervisors dedicated the value of one penny of the real estate tax rate to the preservation of affordable housing. The first year this amounted to \$17.9 million with another \$21.9 million this year. These funds were vital to the county's ability to collaborate with a variety of community partners to competitively compete with the private sector to acquire affordable units that would have otherwise been lost.

Providing housing options that are affordable also includes our homeless population. To assist residents in our very lowest of income levels, we will work with our nonprofit and faith-based partners to provide housing and services in order to return this population to productive lives as contributing members of society.

While the Board of Supervisors can declare success in its pledge to stem the loss of our existing affordable housing, our work is not complete. The continuation of these efforts combined with our initiative to construct and expand new workforce housing and address homelessness will move us closer to the goal of providing safe, affordable housing for all those who wish to call Fairfax County home.

Gerald E. Connolly (D) is chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.