

Community Information Exchange:

Putting a Falls Church Face on Affordable Housing

Presented by: Falls Church Housing Corporation and Homestretch, Inc.

and civic group supporters in the Falls Church community including

**Citizens for a Better City, Falls Church Chamber of Commerce, League of Women Voters, Village Preservation and Improvement Society
and the *Falls Church News Press***

Falls Church Housing Corporation and Homestretch, Inc. hosted an educational forum, **Community Information Exchange: *Putting a Falls Church Face on Affordable Housing*** on Thursday, April 3rd, 2008 at the Falls Church Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall.

The forum opened with an introduction made by City of Falls Church Mayor, Robin Gardner, and was followed by the keynote address delivered by Melissa Bondi, Arlington County Housing Commissioner and Housing Director for the Smarter Growth Coalition. Ms. Bondi detailed the smart growth concept of implementing more sensible land use and transportation policies that includes mixed use development and available, affordable housing for people in all income ranges.

Speaking on the topic of *Truth and Fiction About Affordable Housing* were Michelle Krockner, the Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance and Jeff Peterson, President of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society. Mr. Peterson underscored his organization's support for affordable housing in the City of Falls Church including the construction of 174 new affordable housing units in the Falls Church Housing Corporation's planned City Center South development.

Christopher Fay, the Executive Director of Homestretch, an organization that helps formerly homeless individuals and families transition to stable employment and housing, spoke in detail to the capacity crowd in attendance about how the kind of holistic assistance and job training Homestretch provides to it's clients benefits not just them, but the entire community. Mr. Fay also challenged some of the popularly held misconceptions about who Homestretch clients are and pointed out that most are employed in positions where they are already interacting with other residents in the community on a regular basis. As examples, Mr. Fay noted that you may have had contact with Homestretch clients if you purchased sundries at CVS, ordered a latte at Starbucks, dined at local restaurants, bought clothes or jewelry at Macy's, rented a car in the area, or gone through a security line at the airport. If you have had legal work done, your papers may have been prepared by a Homestretch client. If you have an aging parent or

relative at Sunrise or other facilities for aging adults, the tender care your beloved family member receives may come from a Homestretch client.

The Homestretch families are working at every conceivable job, and their children are enrolled in our schools and may be your child's homework partner. As for where Homestretch clients live, it just might be right next door. Homestretch has seventy five properties in and around Falls Church, all normal dwellings that would never broadcast, "a formerly homeless family lives here."

City of Falls Church Senior Housing Specialist, Dana Lewis, shared the statistics the City has been tracking since 2001 with regard to the steep loss in affordable housing units both in the rental and for sale markets over the last several years. The 2008 Area Median Income (AMI) is approximately \$99,000. As of this year, there are virtually no affordable rental or for sale housing units available in the City of Falls Church with the exception of the Winter Hill Apartments renting to senior and disabled households earning 30% of the AMI and the Fields Apartments available to households earning at least 60% of the AMI. However, both of these properties are filled to capacity and Winter Hill Apartments closed their waiting list six months ago and is no longer accepting any new applications.

Speaking on the topic of the corollary between affordable housing and staff retention in the City of Falls Church Public School system was former Mayor and current President of the Falls Church Education Foundation, Dan Gardner. Mr. Gardner addressed the increasing difficulty of attracting and retaining teachers and other school employees given the high cost of housing in our area. Echoing a similar theme was Garrett Rambler, owner of Vantage Fitness here in Falls Church. Mr. Rambler talked about the challenge he faces with his own employees and cited the fact that the majority of his employees live 15 miles or further from the gym. He also cited the specific costs associated with recruiting employees and the recurring expense incurred due to high turnover in entry level positions.

The final speaker of the evening was Carol Jackson, the Falls Church Housing Corporation's Executive Director. Ms. Jackson summed up the larger themes presented over the course of the evening including the significant and growing housing affordability gap, why we need to have more affordable housing options in our community, the clear need to have households at all income levels living relatively close to their places of employment, and further details about the planned 174 unit affordable housing development to be located on South Maple Ave across the street from the new City Center development. A question and answer session followed the presentations.

Further information about the City Center South Affordable Housing development and on the topic of affordable housing in general can be found by visiting the Falls Church Housing Corporation's website at: <http://www.handhousing.org/fallschurchhousing/ccs.html> .