

Remarks by Charles W. Rinker

in accepting the 3rd Annual Ellen M. Bozman Award for Affordable Housing,
December 11, 2011

- 1) Thank you to the AHS Board and staff and to Ann Rudd (who nominated me for this award). It is an honor to receive this award from AHS and in the name of Ellen Bozman, a tireless advocate for those who were left out and left behind in our community. AHS continues to be an important partner in the discussion about the need for quality affordable housing in Arlington—not only because it is ethically right but also because it makes good sense with respect to solving our transportation problems, our pollution problems, our need for various trade skills that are close enough for us to easily access, and our desire to have a vibrant and interesting community.
- 2) I hope that others of you here and many not here, who have worked on various affordable housing and economic justice initiatives that I am being honored for tonight, will consider yourselves a part of this honor, because surely you are. Many of you share with me the blessing of having our eyes opened to see the world from the bottom up; and of understanding that persistence and imagination are the hallmarks of social change.
- 3) Arlington County has come a long way since the mid-1970s, when I became involved in Arlington as a co-founder of AHC. That was a time when Arlington had virtually no affordable housing vehicles, nor the understanding of affordable housing as an essential component of a healthy community. The County spent little of its own funds on affordable housing, and had few staff whose job it was to enable affordable housing. Now affordable housing is a top priority for County government; and a large majority of Arlington residents recognize its importance. The road to this point was slow, sometimes lonely, and sometimes disappointing. With respect to affordable housing, the County has become a victim of our own success, with gentrification and high property costs making it very difficult to do the right thing for our existing economically distressed residents. Since the 1970s the disparity in both wealth and income (in our country and in our County) has grown exponentially, making it very difficult for households making less than 60% AMI to live in our County.
- 4) When Lora and I came to DC in 1966, I began working on affordable housing issues as one way to address the basic inequities in our society. In my first job in DC, I worked with low-income and minority tenants in an effort (called People United against Slum Housing) to empower them to address the deplorable housing conditions that they lived in. When we came to Arlington in 1969, I brought that passion with me. Though I have worked both professionally and as a volunteer in affordable housing development and finance for 40 years, my

concern for organizing and empowering tenants to participate in the decisions that affect their lives has always been a part of my work. I—with many of you—have been active in anti-displacement efforts since the 1970's. Let me take a moment to list them for you—at Colonial Village (against Mobil Oil in the late 1970s), at Lee Gardens (against the Artery Corporation in the 1980s), at the Buckingham Apts. (against Klingbeil and Hall and UBS in the 1980s through today), at the Taylor Square Apts. (in the 1990s), and at the Arna Valley Aps. (in 1999). We saved some units—and lost many units—in these properties. But without our advocacy, we would have lost even more units.

- 5) As many of you know, BRAVO (Buyers and Renters Arlington Voice) was organized to do tenant empowerment work following the displacement of 720 Arna Valley households from the County. It was an effort to establish an entity that could proactively work with tenants so that we could prevent or minimize future displacements. Since that time, BRAVO has empowered the tenant voice to be heard in several policy areas (such as code enforcement, relocation guidelines and by-right development policy) and in many properties (such as the Patrick Henry, Quebec, Columbia Heights, Taylor Place, Buckingham Village #3, and Ballston Place II Apartments).
- 6) Because I think that BRAVO's work of tenant empowerment and enabling greater tenant civic engagement is so important to Arlington, I am naming BRAVO as the recipient of the \$1,000 that AHS is offering to a charity of my choice. Tenants make up 57% of the population of Arlington County, but are under-represented and thereby under-served in every venue of our County. BRAVO works to ensure that tenants have a voice about their homes and in their communities; and there is no other organization in Arlington that does this job countywide. I hope that you all will support BRAVO and its mission in volunteering your time and giving your dollars in this season of giving and beyond.
- 7) Finally, I cannot leave the podium without mentioning two things for AHS, and those concerned about preserving the economic and cultural diversity of Arlington, to be concerned about. While Arlington has been successful in working with developers to preserve 6,200 committed affordable units, and has put into place several tools that help us preserve and develop affordable housing, the market pressures to gentrify our community are only increasing. In the last 10 years the County has lost 10,000 units of market rate affordable housing. We are losing the battle to secure enough affordable housing to meet the needs of our present residents, and to hold in place our celebrated economic and cultural diversity. Here are two important initiatives on which we need to work:

- a) First, we as a County need to commit massive amounts of money if we have any hope of preserving the affordable housing and the economic and cultural diversity that is left in the County, with much of it concentrated on Columbia Pike. Even with the County using form-based code and other zoning requirements, bonus density, transfer of development rights, etc. with owners and developers, it will cost in the vicinity of \$23 million per year (or about \$750 million over the next 30 years) to do the job. (For Columbia Pike alone, it will cost in the vicinity of \$510 million in subsidies over 30 years (or \$17 million per year.) To raise this kind of money, we need to be bolder and more creative than we have been.
- Perhaps we can engage County residents to invest in the affordable housing we need through a community development bank that we organize.
 - Perhaps we can raise some of the needed funds through County bond issues for housing (something for which AHS has been advocating).
 - Perhaps we can commit to set aside a portion (say 50%) of the increased real estate tax revenues generated from the increase in property values resulting from the development of the Columbia Pike streetcar system and other public expenditures along the Pike to fund affordable housing. If we spend \$261 million to build the streetcar system, but do nothing to use the future increased tax revenue for housing, we are just contributing to the gentrification of the Pike and to the displacement of its low and moderate income and minority residents.
- b) Second, with a homeownership rate as low as 43% in the County, we must do a better job in creating homeownership for low and moderate income households. Homeownership creates more income and wealth equality over time, creates more active participation in the community, and more stability in our neighborhoods. This too will require serious annual funding of the Moderate Income Home Purchase Assistance Program (MIPAP); and it will require the County and its nonprofit and for-profit developers to come up with programs that encourage and incentivize homeownership—because right now the only large subsidy that developers have to create affordable housing (the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program) is restricted to the creation of rental housing.
- 8) Again I thank AHS for this award and recognition. I look forward to continuing to engage in the community dialogue to find ways to preserve our community's diversity; and I ask you to continue the struggle that we are in, to live up to the vision that we have set for our County. As Nelson Mandela said, "It always seems impossible until it is done."