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Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington
Virginia Association of Mortgage Brokers
Virginia Housing Development Authority
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
Wesley Housing Development Corporation

The Alliance for Housing Solutions is a 501(c)(3) organization.

Our Tax ID number is 46-0512930.

June 30, 2016 via e-mail

The Honorable Libby Garvey, Chair
Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the County Board:

The Alliance for Housing Solutions is writing in response to the Board's request for input on the Blue Ribbon Panel Charge. We applaud the Board for voting to defer action on the Blue Ribbon Panel and requesting the community's input prior to moving forward.

In addition to the comments provided in our original letter on this topic from May (see attached letter), our principal concerns are as follows:

The panel should not make judgments regarding the County's policy priorities

The Charge includes the ability to "*Affirm [the Comprehensive Plan and other supporting documents] goals and objectives and/or consider policy areas that should be revisited.*"

This component of the Charge is high-level policy-making that we believe should not be in the hands of an unelected individuals. As the County's elected governing body, the County Board itself should hold the responsibility of affirming commitments to any of the County's goals and objectives. As the Charge itself notes, priorities are set every year by the County Board in the budget and CIP processes, with feedback from the community and from affected Advisory Commissions.

In addition, the plans currently in place have resulted from tremendous effort and time by County staff, Board Members, and Arlington residents. Going through a process to reconsider the goals and objectives already approved by the County Board should not be the responsibility of a small panel.

For example, we have been very pleased by the process and the outcome of the County's new Affordable Housing Master Plan, which was adopted by a 5-0 vote by the County Board in 2015. This involved a 3-year long community input process and an 18-member citizen working group. The group held 24 monthly working group meetings and over 40 committee meetings. Several public forums were also held to invite feedback from hundreds of residents. We sincerely hope that the resulting plan – and others like it – would not be open for reconsideration by the proposed Blue Ribbon Panel process.

The panel duplicates recent County-wide planning processes

The Community Facilities Study, which was completed in 2015 by a 23 member panel of Arlington residents, contained a set of recommendations for improving the coordination between the County and APS and a proposed new process for siting public facilities. These recommendations have yet to be acted upon by the County, and the review process for the report is currently underway. Implementing yet another panel with overlapping responsibilities before the conclusion of this ongoing process does not seem like a good use of panel members' time and efforts.

The County's Advisory Commissions should play a formal role

The County has a robust community input process in place using its appointed Commissions. In the event that the Blue Ribbon Panel moves forward, these Commissions should be given a more formal role in the process. For example, the panel would benefit from including representatives of key Advisory Commissions as panel members, as well as including periodic reviews of progress and draft recommendations by Commissions or their leadership.

Should the panel identify any concerns specifically related to a Commission's role, processes, or objectives, these issues should be referred to the associated Commissions for further review and recommendations prior to issuing the panel's final recommendations to the County Board.

Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely,

Eugene Hubbard
Chair

Michelle Winters
Executive Director