



**Virginians Organized for Interfaith
Community Engagement**
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARLINGTON, VA (Jan. 25, 2014) – All three Democrats vying for the seat of retiring County Board member Chris Zimmerman declared support last night for the plan proposed by VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement) to target county-owned sites for development of affordable housing for households with annual incomes of \$50,000 or less.

VOICE last month presented the Board with petitions signed by more than 10,375 people calling on the Board to use public land for affordable housing. Last night, it sponsored a forum aimed at gauging the candidates' commitment to pursuing public land for affordable housing, as well as support for other key affordable-housing goals.

Speaking to an overflow crowd of more than 80 people at the Arlington Mill Community Center – the lynchpin of a public-private partnership that resulted in 122 affordable-housing units on the same site – Peter Fallon, Alan Howze, and Cord Thomas all underlined the need for affordable housing in the county.

Howze called it “a critical issue for our community,” noting his involvement with the Alliance for Housing Solutions, while Thomas reminisced about the importance to him of being able to grow up in “inclusionary” housing in California for public servants like the teacher who raised him after he was orphaned. Fallon emphasized his “longstanding commitment to building and preserving affordable housing,” and pointed to his service on the Planning and Housing Commissions.

Only Thomas offered support for the VOICE timeline, which calls for breaking ground on the first of the affordable-housing developments by late 2015. VOICE contends the successful Arlington Mill project can serve as a template for future public-private partnerships to develop affordable housing on county land.

Fallon said time must be devoted to structuring the projects right to ensure that they are successful, but he added that the review process for affordable-housing developments must be accelerated. Howze noted that there are “multiple stakeholders” with an interest in using county land and warned that moving too fast to try to develop affordable housing could ultimately backfire.

VOICE leaders, however, vowed to press forward with the goal of developing the affordable housing quickly, noting that, using Arlington Mill as a model, the county can work on a faster timeline than the almost-a-decade process involved in construction of that project. They asked for a commitment from all three candidates

that the winner of the Democratic nomination return for a follow-up forum in March with the other candidates in the special election.

“The need is so great,” said the Rev. Timothy Malone of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, noting that there were more than 3,300 applications for the 122 Arlington Mill units. “I don’t think we can delay.”

Regina Richardson, an Arlington native and school system employee, said her daughter was number 576 on the Arlington Mill waiting list. Noting that she had made a big impact on children’s lives, she said, “I feel like my daughter and I ought to be able to live here.” Her voice breaking, she added, “It isn’t something you all need to study anymore. It’s something that needs to happen.”

Aisha Haji, a Somali immigrant who fled the civil war in her native country and now is a resident of Arlington, said the rent was so high on the studio apartment that she and her sister share that they had to bring in a roommate. She said she fears her plans to go to school and give back to the community will have to be put on hold because of the high rent she must pay to live in Arlington.

“We’ve had enough studies. We’ve had enough commissions. We’ve had enough platitudes. We need action now,” the Rev. Linda Olson Peebles of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington told the candidates.

Malone pointed out that the 10,000+ people who signed the VOICE petitions represented almost three-quarters of the total number of voters in the 2012 special election in which Libby Garvey was selected to serve on the Board. “I remind you that we will not go away,” he said to the candidates. “This is the voice of more than 10,000 people asking you for your support and commitment.”

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VOICE is a multi-faith, non-partisan community empowerment organization comprised of 50 groups representing approximately 125,000 families in Alexandria, and Arlington, Fairfax, and Prince William counties.