

Our View

Public housing residents provide seminar in activism

The public housing residents of James Bland and their Old Town neighbors have provided a valuable lesson to the public. Feeling unfairly treated by their housing authority after they were given inadequate notice to move from their homes late last year, they decided to do something about it. They organized — with the help of the interfaith organization VOICE — and went about achieving a solution pragmatically and effectively. Their example should be written up in the activist's handbook of how to affect change.

Development — or lack thereof — touches every aspect of life in Alexandria. It affects our commerce (think high-density residential, retail and office space near Eisenhower Avenue Metro Station), education (the new T.C. Williams) and public safety (Chatham Square's downward impact on crime around The Berg). It even drives much of the news reported on in the Times.

Most recently, though, the city's bold redevelopment plans exemplified the effects they have on human lives. Feeling disgust with their situation, residents sought out meetings with the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority and other decision-making entities; they staged an effective walkout of a public work session at City Hall. Rather than sit back and take what was handed to them by ARHA, they got message across and affected change themselves — working progressively with the same entity that apparently wronged them in the first place.

We've used this space to promote civic engagement often. Perhaps some readers believe activism can only go so far; that we don't live in a utopian society where the righteous always win. They're right. But activists have power to improve their situation. "Inactivists" have about as much power as a piece of seaweed, swaying whichever way the current happens to move that day.

The residents of the Bland development are an especially positive example of successful civic engagement because they diverge from a stereotype. Low-income and minority residents like those utilizing public housing in Alexandria historically are the least likely to vote, which denotes a lack of engagement. James Bland residents proved that history does not always repeat itself, while simultaneously providing a model for people of all income levels and backgrounds.

Opinion

"Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe."
- Thomas Jefferson



Your Views

Hughes is nonpartisan in name only

To the editor:

Regarding "Feds investigate Hughes," September 16, 2010:

Alexandria City Councilwoman Alicia Hughes, who is being investigated for alleged Hatch Act violations, appears to be an independent in name only.

She has served as community outreach chairperson for the Commonwealth Republican Women's Club, been the featured guest at a Republican fundraiser, and has opened Republican Eighth District Con-

gressional candidate Patrick Murray's campaign with a rousing, partisan speech.

Such history suggests that Hughes, for sake of convenience, was an independent for purposes of running for elected office. But once safely in office she has cavalierly abandoned any semblance and pretense of non-partisanship. *Facta non verba.*

In her September 2, 2010 speech opening Murray's campaign headquarters, the councilwoman asserted: "Now, I've said an awful lot of things over the course of the last year, but the one thing that has been consistent has been the need for us not to emerge as a fragmented Republican Party. The majority of any section of this party rep-

resents the minority of the voters in whatever District we have that we are looking for votes in." She continued, "So, you have a candidate [Murray] who is committed to the sole and core principles of the Republican Party."

The Hatch Act expressly prohibits a federal employee from actively participating in a political campaign or from actively campaigning for a candidate for partisan political office.

- Craig Taylor
Alexandria