

Ventures in Community Meeting

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

Franconia Government Center

44 attendees

Rev. Kameron Wilds from Rising Hope opened with a welcome and an introduction to Ventures in Community (VIC):

- VIC started in 1970, consists of faith-based organizations, community service groups, local nonprofit organizations, Fairfax County and state agency representatives and Individuals
- Geographic area is Region 1 (Route One corridor and Springfield)
- ViC is intentional about building community and network systems, by which they are able to assist those in our community, especially those on the margin, in ways that have various touch points including faith, nonprofit and government agencies

Matt Bensky from the Kingstowne Communion offered an opening prayer.

Rev. Wilds invited everyone to share community updates:

- Blood Drive on Monday, February 19 sponsored by Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: <https://rb.gy/ifm2h4>
- Koinonia shared they are in need of space, preferably discounted
- Jill Norcross from Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance announced free local budget advocacy training program on Thursday, Feb. 22 7 to 8:30 pm: <https://rb.gy/wkvqt1>
- Send updates to Diane Hill at Ventures in Community: dch7job@gmail.com

Attendees introduced themselves. Rev. Alyssa Densham who is the Pastor of [Provision Church](#) spoke about Provision who was the provider of today's lunch. Launched a year ago, Provision Church is a part of the United Methodist Church, offers a culinary entrepreneurship training program designed to help individuals access pathways of entrepreneurship that they have been traditionally excluded from because of generational poverty and systemic racism. Provision is a provider of community cafés which offers people welcome and a chef-curated meal. Provision also employs a social worker.

Attendees got lunch and networked a bit.

More remarks from Rev. Wilds:

- Our local leaders have always made themselves available to our faith communities & non-profits so that they can be better educated about what is happening in our communities, especially with people who live on the margins.
- VIC gathers every month to educate about something that is happening in the area. This month's meeting is focused on the Franconia Government Center (FGC), and also more broadly about what affordable housing looks like in our own backyard.
- Today is not a public hearing but an opportunity to gather together as people of faith, as local non-profit leaders, and as reps of various government agencies, to hear what is happening on the ground.

Remarks from Supervisor Rodney Lusk:

- Shared some of his background: parents got divorced when he was 10 and because of housing needs, he moved from Texas to Alexandria City to live with his grandparents, who provided a safe, loving home. His own experience has led him to be sensitive to those in need of housing.
- Ran on affordable housing in 2019 and 2023 as one of his most important issues
- When he came on board as Franconia District supervisor in 2020, there was talk of a new government center for Franconia, which prompted him to ask if the current center could be repurposed for affordable housing. There were already completed affordable housing projects that had been done really well, of market-rate quality, including many amenities and built with high quality materials. Examples include Residences at Government Center and Oakwood, a 150 unit Senior project (30-60% AMI) on Van Dorn
- Use of public land helps buy down the cost for building, which then allows the rental/sale cost to go down for future residents. The Board of Supervisors (BOS) is committed to looking for these types of opportunities.
- Typically housing projects have been structured as a public-private partnership, Examples include APAH (Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing) who have done several projects in Arlington as well as Oakwood, and SCG which built the Residences at Government Center.
- The BOS goal for affordable housing is 10K units in the next 10 years
- Decision made in March 2021 to convey FGC property to the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (FCRHA). This is typically the first step and allows the FCRHA to issue an RFP to find a private developer. The developer and FCRHA work together to create a project outline which is then shared with the community, and issues brought up by the community are worked through.
- In 2024, the County attorney looked at all decisions made by the BOS during COVID. Out of an abundance of caution, she advised that the March 2021 decision to transfer the Franconia Government Center land be re-validated, and so the land transfer was discussed at the 1/23/24 BOS meeting. More than 40 speakers showed up, most opposed to the land transfer.
- Based on the comments at the 1/23/24 meeting, the BOS voted to defer the transfer decision until March 5. However, some residents of Franconia can't attend on March 5 so this date will be changed. In the meantime, the broader community will have the opportunity to be part of a facilitated discussion around how this property can be used. One possibility is the property could have a co-located use, such as a community room, museum or something else that could exist alongside the affordable housing.
- One or two community meetings are envisioned. FCRHA is currently looking for a large venue. Once meeting(s) are held, the County will review the feedback received and will come back to the community to share viable options. Then a decision will be made how to proceed.
- Supervisor Lusk emphasized that the Franconia Government Center project is not housing for the poorest members of our community. This is housing for working residents, with a band of 40-80% of AMI, in order to get to an average of 60%. 60% for one person is about \$62K per year; for a household of 4, closer to \$90K.
- 20% of this affordable housing will provide housing for our public sector employees, including teachers, fire fighters, police officers, hospital workers. This is not exactly magnet housing but it is public sector housing. If built, 50% of all the public sector housing in Fairfax County could be in this one project.

Questions for Supervisor Lusk:

- How many units? Answer: 120 max, number could decrease depending on co-located uses that are suggested
- What are the key issues that can be resolved? Answer: Some may not be able to be resolved if you are strongly opposed. The goal is to have a frank discussion and then see what FCRHA comes back with after reviewing all suggestions.
- Would the housing authority have the flexibility to consider multiple or mixed uses or only put forward the single use of affordable housing? Answer: Multiple uses. For example, a non-profit partner or a small health clinic could be on the first floor of the housing. Supervisor Lusk reiterated that the typical procedure is to first validate the transfer of property to FCRHA, then hear from the community about uses for the property to get to a decision point about what is feasible and beneficial for the whole community. In this case the community discussions will take place first.
- Do the police or fire unions get involved? Answer: Supervisor Lusk has talked to captains in Franconia district, and they are supportive and excited that their recruits could have housing near where they work. To date, Supervisor Lusk has not seen employee unions get involved in these projects.
- An audience member suggested that during the community meeting(s), it would be helpful to have a general presentation and then allow for breakout sessions. These breakout sessions would be led by appropriate staff so that specific concerns can be addressed, like traffic, school enrollment, gas stations, etc.
- An audience member suggested a marketing campaign of success stories to help counter any fears people might have about an affordable housing project in their neighborhood. Answer: Supervisor Lusk says he has asked FCRHA to create a video that will put a human element to the project. He would also like to offer tours of nearby County housing projects.
- How can supporters help push this project along? Answer: Supervisor Lusk asked that supporters attend the upcoming community meetings. He would like as many different voices to be part of the discussion. That will help arrive at the best decision. Supervisor Lusk represents 130K people that live in the Franconia District: 22% are Hispanic, 19% are African American, and 15% are Asian. Every decision made has to represent the broader community, not just a subset. Supervisor Lusk needs help in reflecting the broader community in the public face at meetings.
- Was property transferred in March 2021? Answer: Technically it was but the County Attorney has asked for a validation of the original decision. Transfer to the FCRHA allows the department to initiate negotiations with contractors to explore an affordable housing project, but it does not guarantee that the end result will be affordable housing. Best options will be discussed with the community.
- Question asked about the terms 'low income' and 'affordable housing'? Answer: Lusk says this project is 'workforce housing' because residents who live in the housing are generally in the 60% AMI category.
- One attendee says there are other concerns besides low income: 1. Location to the gas stations and the risk of cancer 2. Size and density of this project as well as other proposed projects in Franconia and the impact these projects will have on the infrastructure (traffic, police and fire support, schools, etc.). Answer: Lusk says we will not put people in a precarious place. He is mindful of issues of infrastructure and has already started to address these. His office will be doing some more comprehensive, coordinated looks at transportation and will include the SSPAs in that. Lusk remarked that he requested the Kingstowne developer to do a much more expansive transportation analysis than what the developer was initially hired to do.

Rev Kameron thanked Supervisor Lusk for allowing Ventures in Community to gather at the Government Center. VIC Steering Committee will be glad to continue the conversation. Send questions and comments to VIC at **info@venturesincommunity.org**

VIC EMAIL: info@venturesincommunity.org

VIC WEBSITE: <https://www.VenturesInCommunity.org>

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