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*Protecting and restoring the lands and waters of the Virginia Piedmont,  
while building stronger, more sustainable communities.*

Concept Paper: Affordable Housing  
Town of Warrenton

The following is a response to the Request for Information (henceforth, "RFI") posted on the Town website August 11, 2023, whose stated purpose is to assist the town with how "Warrenton, a Town of 10,000 citizens on the edge of Northern Virginia, can begin to find solutions to many of the same housing issues nationwide. Affordable housing is essential for our citizens to thrive and prosper". (Town of Warrenton Request for Information on Affordable Housing, section 1.0)

The Piedmont Environmental Council (henceforth "PEC") concurs that providing for affordable housing involves a complex web of issues, and that housing affordability is crucial to make our communities function well. PEC has invested in multiple small and mid-sized communities in our region to revitalize neighborhoods by providing recreational access for residents and to improve people's access to affordable housing and we recognize the government's role as a partner, along with philanthropy and private investment, in making a range of housing options attainable. It seems prudent for the Town to consider a range of ways it may be supportive of this and other efforts to improve access to affordable housing in the Town of Warrenton via a broad spectrum of housing options, be they for the unhoused, temporary or transitional, income challenged, elderly, disabled, veterans, or other persons and groups for whom market-based solutions have not kept pace with demand.

Given the timeframe for the response to the RFI, our proposals are necessarily broad, but we hope they will be of service in stimulating discussion, of which we look forward to being a part.

We have organized our response into the format set forth in Section 4.0 of the Town's RFI . We note that for the purposes of all of our responses, we are assuming that the Town of Warrenton would not be the owner of any of the affordable solutions we propose; in most cases it could be, but we are assuming either private non-profit or private market-based ownership, and in most cases, either rental or owner-occupied solutions are interchangeable (except in the cases of housing for the unhoused, for temporary or transitional populations, for which there is unlikely a market response, either). However, as we propose multiple concepts, we have taken the liberty of organizing the responses sought for each concept (numbers 6-9 in the RFI), as responses to 5 A-H.

1. The Piedmont Environmental Council  
45 Horner Street  
Warrenton, VA 20188

2. John W. McCarthy, Senior Adviser and Director of Strategic Partnerships

3. PEC was formed in 1972 and we work to protect and restore the lands and waters of the Virginia Piedmont, while building stronger, more sustainable communities. We maintain offices in Charlottesville and Orange in addition to our headquarters in the Town of Warrenton. We have a staff of approximately 50 employees amongst whom are attorneys, land use planners, GIS mapping specialists and a variety of other disciplines that afford us insights into the issues set forth in the RFI

4. We have been proud to be a supporter of various Habitat for Humanity affiliates throughout our nine county service area, but in particular have been intentional collaborators with the Fauquier Habitat for Humanity on their Haiti Street Neighborhood Revitalization Project in community clean up projects, native planting projects involving landscaping around new homes, and in a variety of other areas. We also have worked with Windy Hill Foundation on a variety of affordable housing projects in Fauquier and Loudoun counties, and have collaborated with them and other organizations on housing studies. We have likewise been involved in pedestrian walkability studies in several communities in our area, most recently in Remington, which had as their focus the provision of safe connectivity between affordable housing and recreation opportunities

PEC has a staff member on the Virginia Statewide Community Land Trust which was created to maintain participating Habitat for Humanity affiliates' stewardship of affordable housing property.

5.

A. Donation to private, non-profit housing groups of suitable vacant town-owned properties

A.6 The donation of land could be responsive to a variety of affordable housing constituencies, but will most likely be of assistance to low-moderate income persons (80% AMI or less) but at some level, all target groups might benefit, depending upon the type of housing deemed appropriate for the donated land. The possibility exists that land in commercially zoned areas could include mixed use potential

A.7 For mixed use developments with low-moderate income reserved housing, both land subsidy (donation of land) and additional zoning density bonuses may be needed to induce market response

A.8 The implicit subsidy of land access jump-starts the process of development and acts as a subsidy for the creation of non-market based priced units. The opportunity exists for such a donation to also act as leverage for governmental or philanthropic support and a mixed use development would entail benefits from breaking up concentration of housing and integration into the fabric of the community

A.9 A combination of market and philanthropic support to develop units with potentially an alternate income stream from commercial/office mixed uses in addition to rental from units. In addition, donated property could be used as leverage for other grants and support

B. Preservation of existing private-non-profit owned affordable housing stock through the rehabilitation of existing units

B.6 A range of affordable housing constituencies would benefit by the ownership of such units in private, non-profit hands when conditioned on continued access by target populations

B.7 Access to capital. In addition, we have learned that neighborhood improvement efforts such as access to recreational opportunities and pedestrian access improvements can have the deleterious effect (to housing access) of increasing valuations of the units outside the price capacity of target populations. Private non-profit hands would help to forestall this loss of stock.

B.8 Preservation of existing stock rather than allowing gentrification. The market based response to depressed housing valuation often is its acquisition, improvement and conversion to rental or ownership by non-target populations.

B.9 Public (both the Town, County, State and Federal programmatic funds) as well as philanthropic donations to support rental or sale

C. Supported acquisition of existing affordable housing stock that is privately owned through low or no-interest loans to affordable housing groups capable of administering rehabilitation of such units

C.6 (same as B.6, above)

C.7 (same as B.7, above)

C.8 (same as B.8, above)

C.9 (same as B.9, above)

D. Creation of a Work Force Housing Fund

D.6 Likely most impactful for young professionals at upper end of low-moderate income ranges

D.7 Capital could accrue through general fund appropriations from the Town or through dedication of tax increment financing from improvements valuation on mixed use or other identified types of development. In addition, local employers could be incentivized to contribute (tax credits or other means) if fund were created to target local residents/employees

D.8 Increasing tie to local community for employees, limiting commute time and traffic loading by reduction of commuting, providing an on-boarding for continuum of housing options

D.9 Fund could be used for subsidy for rental or subsidized financing for acquisition

E. Explore zoning changes allowing ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units) by right in residential zoning categories

E.6 Most Target constituencies other than unhoused and temporary or transitional

E.7 Most particularly, zoning changes. The reality of many HOA restrictions may limit impact

E.8 Immediate opportunity to house upon property owner's need for same for family, and others; need to assess need for restriction against temporary rental occupancy (AirBnB, VRBO, etc.)

E.9 Private

F. Assess opportunity to allow adaptive reuse of existing structures and properties that could accommodate multi-family uses and facilitate through zoning either by-right or with minimal special permitting standards

F.6 upper end of low-moderate income is likeliest beneficiary, but more density would allow broader impact

F.7 Zoning provisions would need to accommodate

F.8 Largely preservative of existing built environment, conversion of existing development preservative of "greenfield" elsewhere, and is often already served by adequate infrastructure

F.9 Private, but density required might allow for creation of permanent (30 year) affordable stock through restrictions

G. Assess allowing multi-family uses by right in areas designated for "Live Work Play" in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan

G.6 Range of low-moderate income wage earners likely mixed in with market rate units

G.7 Zoning provisions would need to accommodate; potentially a density bonus if included

G.8 Would allow redevelopment and advancement of comp plan goals for areas needing reinvestment

G.9 Private and perhaps non-profit, and governmental subsidy

H. Implement cost saving energy efficiency standards and take advantage of federal and potential state funding (from GGRF's Solar for All program) to install solar on all new affordable housing construction.

H.6 All

H.7 Zoning and perhaps tax code revisions (exemptions for solar, etc.)

H.8 Improves affordability of all units and demographics by reducing utility costs

H.9 Public, Private, mixed-part of project financing