

## HOUSING ALBEMARLE – HOUSING POLICY UPDATE: PROJECT BACKGROUND

In April 2019, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission published the *Comprehensive Regional Housing Study and Needs Assessment* report. This study, which examined housing needs on both a county level and region-wide basis, identifies more than 10,000 Albemarle County households struggling with housing costs. Housing unaffordability in Albemarle County impacts both homeowner and renter households (20 percent and 42 percent of total households, respectively), with the households with incomes less than 50 percent of area median income experiencing the great housing cost burdens (67% of all very low- and extremely low-income households). With continued population growth in the county, the number of households paying more than the recommended 30 percent of income for housing costs is anticipated to increase 34 percent by the year 2040. To help meet current and future housing needs for county residents, staff recommended updating the county's Housing Policy.

The Planning Commission directed staff to begin work on updating the Housing Policy at the June 23, 2019 meeting. The update undertaken by staff involved a three-step process beginning with a series of community engagement activities to collect feedback on housing-related issues and aspirations, as well as on potential tools the County may use to meet current and future housing needs in Albemarle County. The information collected through these activities directly informed the second and third phases of the policy update process – creation of a comprehensive housing policy, as well as an implementation strategy. An overview of this process, with associated timelines, is outlined below:

- Community Engagement (September 2019 – November 2019)
  - Community meetings (October 2019) - complete
  - Focus Groups (October 2019 – November 2019) - complete
  - On-line (September 2019 – present & ongoing)
  - Stakeholder Committee (November 2019 – present)
  - Technical Committee (January 2020 – August 2020)
- Draft Policy Recommendations (December 2019 – March 2020)
- Draft Implementation Strategy (March 2020)

The community engagement process has completed, and staff is working with the Stakeholder and Technical Committees to draft the policy recommendations and recommended implementation plan. Following is a summary of work completed to date, including topics covered in the community meetings and focus group discussions, broad themes emerging from those discussions, and a discussion of the next steps in the process.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Staff conducted three community meetings in October 2019, organized around opportunities for learning about affordable housing in Albemarle County, listening to residents' concerns about housing in the county, and identifying solutions to support affordable housing in our neighborhoods. The Communications and Public Engagement Office disseminated meeting notices and general affordable housing information through the County's social media platforms to generate interest in the project. Discussion topics for each of these meetings are provided below:

### **Meeting 1: LEARN** (October 1, 2019)

- History of the County's Affordable Housing Policy.
- What we mean when we talk about affordable housing policy.
- The Regional Housing Partnership & the Regional Housing Strategy.
- Housing needs in our community.
- The Housing Policy Update process and timeline.



### **Meeting 2: LISTEN** (October 8, 2019)

- Housing in our community
  - What does home mean to you?
  - Three things you like most about housing in Albemarle County?
  - Three things you like least about housing in Albemarle County?
- Affordable housing
  - What does affordable housing mean to you?
  - Do you struggle, or do you know someone struggling, with housing costs/issues? How?
  - How does a lack of affordable housing impact you, your neighbors, your community, our county?
- Vision for housing
  - Working together, please design your own neighborhood. What types of housing will you provide? Who will live there? What amenities will be included?
  - What types of housing are needed in Albemarle County, and where?
  - Describe what a healthy housing system would look like in Albemarle County.
- Barriers to housing
  - What are potential barriers to affordable housing?
  - What are some of the reasons individuals and families in Albemarle County are struggling to afford housing?

- What are the potential barriers Albemarle County may face as we try to meet current and future housing demand?

### **Meeting 3: SOLUTIONS** (October 22, 2019)

- Does the county currently define 'affordable housing' adequately?
- Alternative definitions of 'affordable housing'?
- Do the county's current housing policy objectives address today's housing needs? What are we missing? What do we no longer need?
- Are our current housing strategies effective? What else should we be doing?

The presentation materials and summaries of the discussion topics, as well as feedback forms for each meeting were made available online for residents unable to attend the sessions.



In addition to the community meetings described above, staff worked with local nonprofit service providers to organize focus group sessions with nonprofit staff, and the individuals and households they serve. Staff completed a total of seven focus group sessions between November 1, and December 17, 2019. Each session began with staff introducing the project and discussing housing needs in Albemarle County. Focus group participants were then asked to discuss the same set of general topics:

- What, if any, housing related issues are you or someone you know struggling with?
- How does a lack of affordable housing affect you, your neighborhood, our county?
- What types of housing do we need in Albemarle County?
- What can Albemarle County do to address affordable housing needs?

Meeting and focus group participants represented a diverse cross-section of persons who live and/or work in Albemarle County, including residents from both urban and rural areas, seniors, renters and homeowners, developers and real estate professionals, local employers and nonprofit service providers.

Other engagement and data collection activities undertaken by staff include:

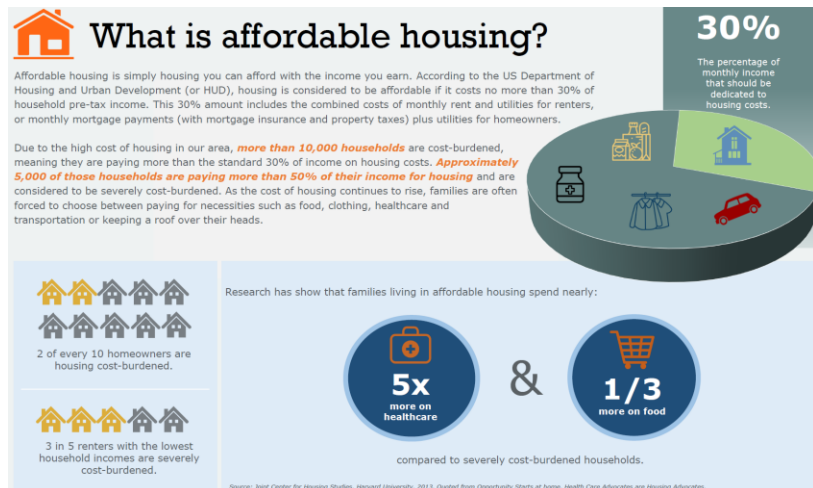
- Rio29 Form Based Code Public Event & Survey – August 2019
- Rivanna Roll Call – November 2019
- Office of Equity and Inclusion Roadshow Stop – November 2019
- Regional Housing Survey (*conducted by the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission*)
- Jack Jouett Middle School, Eighth Grade Student Project – November 2019 to January 2020

Community outreach activities have been supplemented by staff discussions with various county departments including: the Economic Development Office, Facilities and Environmental Services, the Office of Equity and Inclusion, the Office of Housing, and the Department of Social Services.

## WHAT WE HEARD: EMERGING THEMES

### Topic 1 – Housing in Our Community:

While home means many different things to different people, one thing became clear – home is more than just shelter. It is also a place where we all feel safe, and in which we share experiences and make memories with our friends and family. Home also provides residents with a sense of community.



Three positive aspects of housing in Albemarle County were identified. Residents liked the wide variety of housing types available; that housing often provides residents with good access to schools, services and community amenities; and that housing offers opportunities for multigenerational living.

Despite the positives associated with housing, several negative housing related issues were discussed. Top of the list was a lack of housing affordable to many county residents, including workforce housing and housing affordable for our very low-income neighbors. Residents also noted a lack of housing with accessibility features for residents experiencing mobility issues, including single-floor houses and home accessibility features such as wider doorways, no step entryways and walk-in showers. Residents were also concerned that there are few ways to protect older communities under pressure of gentrification.

### Topic 2 – Affordable Housing:

Three main themes related to affordable housing arose from the residents' conversations:

1. There is no single definition of affordable housing, what is considered to be affordable by some people is unaffordable for others. A definition of affordable housing needs to reflect community income and housing needs.

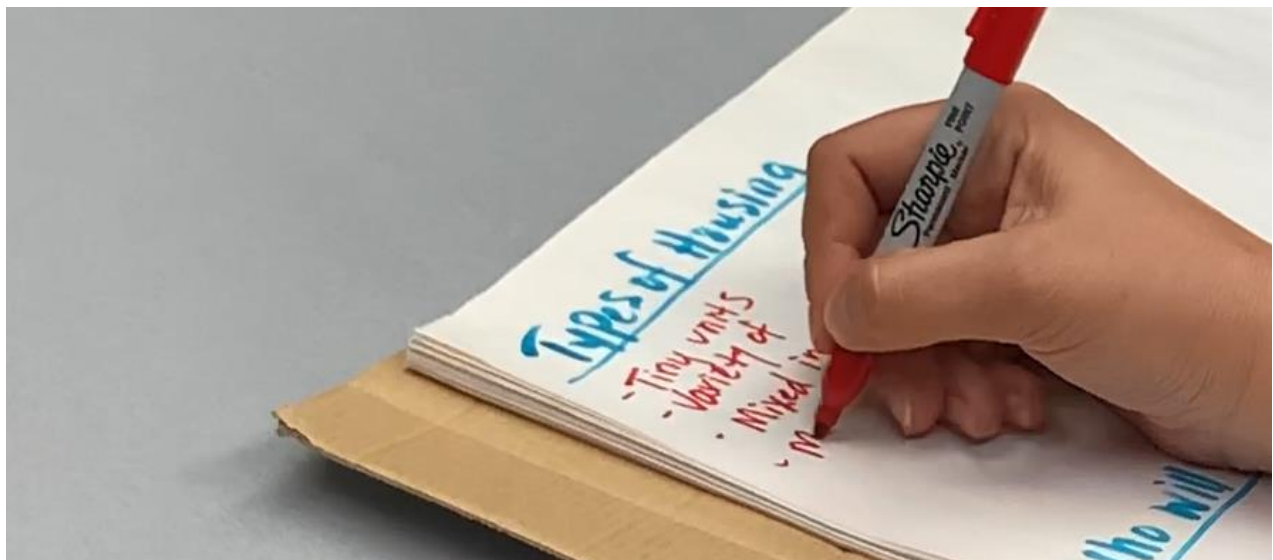
2. A lack of affordable housing has wide-ranging impacts. These impacts include: increasing homelessness for individuals and families, creating feelings of insecurity for many county residents (such as being unable to afford rent while experiencing an illness, a decrease in income or loss of a job), stifling economic development, and the displacement of rural families who can no longer afford the family home.
3. Housing provided at a range of affordability levels helps to support individuals and families as they move through the work- and life-cycles (e.g., young people leaving home, people pursuing careers in the arts, seniors living on fixed-incomes).

### Topic 3 – Vision for Housing:

We heard that housing is a building block for sustainable communities that are safe, includes homes for households of all ages and abilities who have a range of incomes, and fosters community interactions through shared spaces and a community identity.

Residents stressed that the county needs a dynamic housing market with a sufficient supply of housing to meet the changing needs and demands of the community. This should include a variety of housing types (e.g., tiny homes, manufactured homes, mixed-income/mixed-used communities) and tenures (e.g., rental and ownership opportunities, co-housing communities), located within close proximity to public transportation routes and job opportunities, to foster community diversity and family self-sufficiency.

Environmental and community sustainability issues were also highlighted. Residents discussed the need for homes to be energy-efficient, stressed that the County needs to provide workforce housing to support local employee recruitment and retention efforts, identified the need for an efficient public transportation system to discourage car



dependency, and highlighted the advantages of investing in the County's older neighborhoods and preserving the existing housing stock in addition to building new homes.

#### Topic 4 – Barriers to Housing:

Four barriers to affordable housing provision were raised and discussed:

1. Supply barriers, or barriers that inhibit the production and preservation of affordable housing, such as a lack of construction workers in our region and developers not building the types of housing local residents need.
2. Resource barriers – there is not enough money at the federal/state/local level to support affordable housing.
3. Policy and programmatic barriers, such as a zoning ordinance and Comprehensive Plan that work against each other, housing strategies that are not action-oriented, and the Dillon Rule that restricts the strategies local governments can utilize to meet local housing needs. The County lacks the programs and mechanisms necessary to meet affordable housing needs.
4. Community-based barriers including a lack of awareness of the affordable housing issue, a lack of knowledge about affordable housing in general, and NIMBYism – Not in My Backyard.

#### Topic 5 – Solutions:

Residents offered a range of possible solutions for addressing the County's housing challenges. These solutions ranged from creating a workforce housing program to offering a suite of developer incentives to encourage the provision of affordable housing. A complete reporting of all recommendations for solutions, as well as all comments received during community discussions, is provided as an appendix to this report.

### POLICY DEVELOPMENT: THE STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE

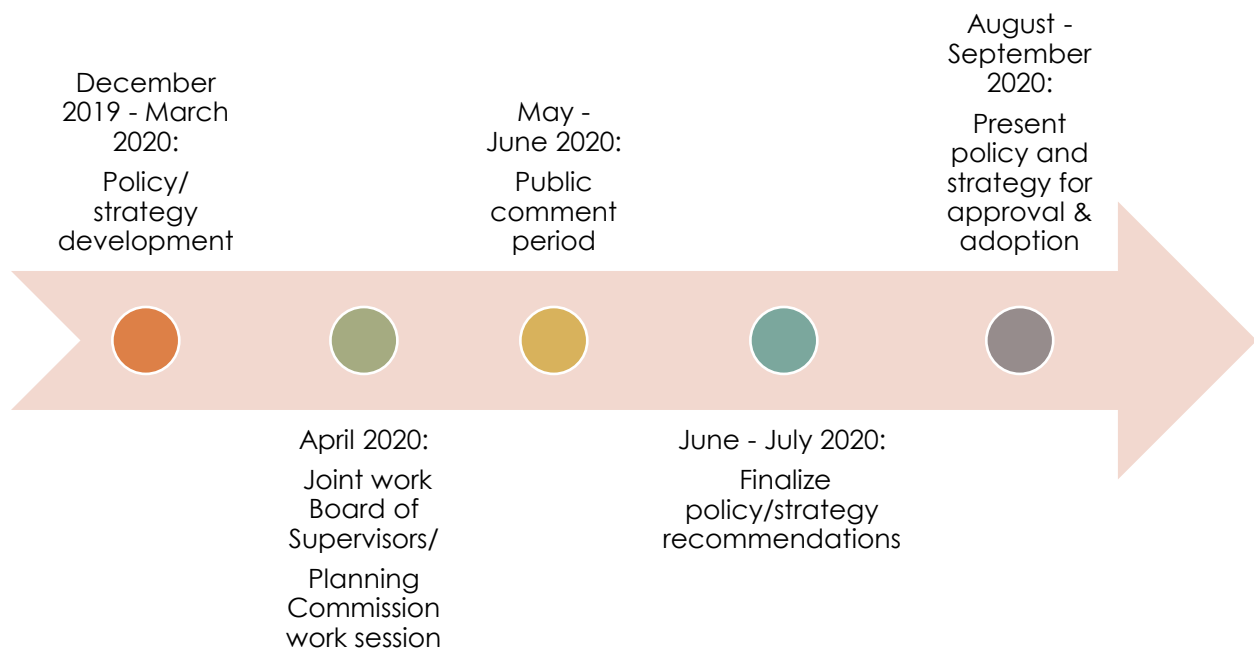
Staff is working with a nine-member a Stakeholder Committee comprised of individuals representing the following interests:

- the senior community;
- IMPACT;
- the homeless community;
- for-profit developers of multi-family housing;
- the Regional Housing Partnership;
- homeowners;
- local employers;
- low-income households; and
- the City of Charlottesville.



Members of the Stakeholder Committee have reviewed all comments received through the community engagement process, as well as housing policies adopted by other local governments in Virginia and throughout the United States. Through discussions, committee members are identifying broad housing policy goals and specific strategies the County can employ to achieve them. Committee members are also working on creating an implementation timeline for associated policy and program development, a series of metrics to track the County's progress towards achieving the proposed housing goals, and mechanisms for reporting that progress to county residents. The committee has been meeting monthly since October 2019.

## NEXT STEPS



Staff continues to work with the Stakeholder Committee to develop the draft policy recommendations and implementation strategies. Both draft documents are scheduled to be presented during a joint Board of Supervisors/Planning Commission work session in April 2020. At the completion of that work session, staff will work with the Stakeholder Committee to incorporate any comments received into the draft documents in preparation for the public comment period scheduled for mid-May through end of June 2020. Staff anticipates presenting the final recommendations for the housing policy and implementation plan to the Planning Commission and Board and Supervisors in August and September 2020.