

**FAIRFAX COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
HOUSING COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2008**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Frank A. de la Fe, Hunter Mill District
Earl L. Flanagan, Mount Vernon District
Rodney L. Lusk, Lee District
Timothy J. Sargeant, At-Large

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Walter L. Alcorn, At-Large
Suzanne F. Harsel, Braddock District
Nancy Hopkins, Dranesville District

OTHER COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

James Hart, At-Large
Kenneth Lawrence, Providence District

PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT:

Barbara J. Lippa, Executive Director, Planning Commission Office
Linda B. Rodeffer, Clerk, Planning Commission

REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING AUTHORITY COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Conrad Egan, Providence District, Chairman
Albert McAloon, Lee District
John Litzenberger, Sully District
Lee A. Rau, Hunter Mill District
John Kershenstein, Springfield District

STAFF PRESENT:

John Payne, Acting Deputy Director, Real Estate and Development, Department of
Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
Roberta Butler, Development Officer, DHCD
Donna Pesto, Zoning Administration Division (ZAD), Department of
Planning and Zoning (DPZ)
Michelle O'Hare, ZAD, DPZ
Heidi Merkel, Planning Division, DPZ
Michelle Brickner, Land Development Services (LDS), Department of Public Works
and Environmental Services (DPWES)
Audrey Clark, Building Plan Review Division, LDS, DPWES
Eta Davis, LDS, DPWES

Chairman Rodney L. Lusk called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. in the Board Conference Room, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Virginia 22035.

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Chairman Lusk said the committee would discuss proposed Policy Plan language encouraging universal design in the development of housing and draft proffer language offering features for purchase to all prospective homebuyers. He explained that on February 26, 2007, Braddock District Supervisor Sharon Bulova had presented a Board Matter referring this issue to the Planning Commission for consideration.

Heidi Merkel, Planning Division, Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ), explained that although Supervisor Bulova had addressed this issue due to concerns raised by a member of the development community, staff soon realized that it was an important issue for Fairfax County to consider at the policy level. She said the County needed to provide diverse housing options and the aging of the population created a need for housing accessible to both occupants and visitors. She noted that the Board of Supervisors had issued a *Fairfax 50+* report in October 2007, which included guidance about how Fairfax County could become a more aging friendly community. She said Prince William County had developed a handbook on the subject and that Loudoun County had amended their Comprehensive Plan to address this issue. Ms. Merkel said amending the Policy Plan was one way to make both the community at-large and the development community aware that the County was interested in expanding housing choices. (A copy of the proposed amendments is in the date file.)

Ms. Merkel said the following changes to the Policy Plan were being recommended:

- Add a definition to the Glossary:

“UNIVERSAL DESIGN: The design of products and environments to be usable by people of all ages and abilities, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.”

Ms. Merkel explained that the definition had been developed by the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, one of the academic centers looking at this issue.

- Add Policy b., to Objective 4 in the Land Use Section:

“Encourage universal design in the development of housing and communities to expand opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to live in areas near their employment, mass transit and/or desired services.”

- Add Policy k., to Objective 1 in the Housing Section:

“Encourage universal design in the development of affordable housing.”

- Modify Policy c., Objective 3 in the Housing Section:

Add the phrase “including universally designed units” after “...incorporating affordable housing units....”.

Responding to a question from Commissioner de la Fe, Ms. Merkel said the Building Code did not reference universal design.

In response to a question from Albert McAloon, Lee District Commissioner, Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RHA), Ms. Merkel said staff had decided not to include incentives for universal design. She said the goal at this time was to raise awareness of the community that the Policy Plan encouraged universal design.

Responding to a question from Chairman Lusk, Mr. McAloon said that the Department of Housing and Redevelopment had passed a resolution in March 2007 encouraging universal design for their affordable housing projects and extra points would be given to developers who exceeded the existing fairly modest requirements. He commented that as the population aged, universal design would become an issue that the development community would not be ready to address. Chairman Lusk commented that the demand for universal design would be consumer-driven.

Commissioner Sargeant asked if the language could be crafted to address the need for retrofitting the existing housing stock with universal design features since some people would not be able to afford to leave their current residences. He also said there was an opportunity to encourage energy efficiency by building smaller, more easily maintained homes, which would provide utility savings for residents who aged-in-place on fixed incomes.

Eta Davis, Land Development Services, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, said that an advocacy group, Build For All, and an ombudsman, recently hired by the Permits Branch, could help residents with remodeling. Ms. Merkel noted that the Board’s legislative agenda proposed to increase the livable homes tax credit which would help with adapting homes with universal design features. She also said that there were many elements to universal design that could not be appropriately addressed in the Policy Plan.

Commissioner Flanagan commented that incentives would encourage other objectives, such as green building and tree cover, in addition to universal design.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Flanagan, Ms. Merkel said the intent of the definition, insofar as housing was concerned, was to ensure that construction could accommodate universal design features in the future without major structural changes. She answered additional questions from him about mandatory criteria for universal design.

John Payne, Real Estate and Development, Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), agreed with Commissioner Flanagan’s comparison of universal design

and green building because both had an educational aspect and did not refer specifically to a definitive standard. He said as the public became aware of universal design and green building, the demand for products would rise and the cost would drop.

In response to a question from Chairman Lusk, John Litzenberger, Sully District Commissioner, RHA, said that the Housing Authority had been told by an organization representing disabled persons that in the design phase, incorporation of universal design features would cost about \$2,000, however, modification of a typical three-bedroom home in Fairfax County would cost \$25,000.

Donna Pesto, Zoning Administration Division, DPZ, stated that \$2,000 would pay for structural elements such as a wider hallway and doorway, space under a sink to accommodate wheelchairs, and a foundation for an elevator shaft. She said retrofitting a house with these features would be far more expensive and perhaps even preclusive. She explained that there was very little to offer in the way of incentives, noting that bonus density would not be appropriate. She said once universal design was addressed in the Policy Plan and promoted by advocacy groups, developers would offer optional universal design features to satisfy goals in the Comprehensive Plan and purchasers would become aware that they were available.

Chairman Lusk said in order to measure success, it would be necessary to keep track of universal design proffers and the response to them. Mr. McAloon said the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association (NVBIA) would probably be able to provide that data. Audrey Clark, LDS, DPWES, said that there was an existing Fairfax County inspection database online that might be able to be modified to capture optional universal design features. Chairman Lusk said that would be helpful and perhaps a date should be set for staff to report to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors on what information had been collected.

Commissioner Sargeant said data on how long people stayed in their homes would be useful as a statistical benchmark to determine the possible demand for universal design features. Chairman Lusk pointed out that people of all ages could benefit from universally designed homes, for example, those who had had serious accidents or suffered from serious illnesses and grown children who cared for elderly parents.

Mr. McAloon commented that from an economical point of view, universally designed features could increase the resale potential of homes.

Responding to a question from Chairman Lusk, Ms. Pesto explained that universal design should be adopted as a stand alone Board policy, similar to workforce housing, because it was not appropriate for inclusion in a Zoning Ordinance. She said that proposed policy would include a list of universal design features used by the State of California. (A copy of the draft proffer/plan note with the list of features is in the date file.)

Commissioner de la Fe remarked that at its September 27, 2007 meeting, the committee had been told that if an elevator were added to a home, other improvements would have to be made. Ms.

Clark said that statement had been made in error and was not true when retrofitting a single house.

Ms. Pesto asked the committee to give its approval to present the proposed Plan amendment and draft proffer language to industry representatives.

Commissioner Sargeant reiterated his request to consider adding language to encourage energy efficiency wherever possible to make it easier for people to be able to afford to stay in their homes.

Commissioner Sargeant MOVED THAT THE PROPOSED PLAN AMENDMENT AND PROFFER LANGUAGE REGARDING UNIVERSAL DESIGN BE PRESENTED TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BUILDING INDUSTRY BY STAFF.

Commissioner Flanagan seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

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Commissioner de la Fe MOVED THAT THE REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 27, 2008, BE APPROVED.

Commissioner Sargeant seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

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The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.
Rodney L. Lusk, Chairman

An audio recording of the meeting is available in the Planning Commission Office, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 330, Fairfax, Virginia 22035.

Minutes by: Linda B. Rodeffer

Approved: February 11, 2009

Linda B. Rodeffer, Clerk
Fairfax County Planning Commission