

March 21

Dear Mayor and Members of the Town Council:

We celebrate that we live in a community that cares about affordable housing and we applaud the development for a concrete strategic plan and measures of progress.

It's fair to put a \$10M bond before the voters this fall if clear justifiable goals are identified for spending this money.

We've come a long way from the days of relying only on public housing: we've hired new staff members, contributing town-owned land to housing projects, and committing the equivalent 1 cent on the tax rate which generates funds each year. These actions, in addition to the contributions to our housing providers, CASA, Community Trust, DHIC, Jackson Center and Empowerment have increased our capabilities.

Putting forward this bond is clearly complicated – involving an increase in the town tax rate and, depending on the amount of the bond, the potential to impact other projects that are necessary and important to the health of our entire community. These projects include construction of police and fire stations, road and sidewalk repairs and creation of additional recreation and cultural arts programming space to meet the needs of our growing town.

There are also several additional dimensions to the affordable housing picture that need to be considered here.

- The Town Council must insist that developers pay a fair contribution toward addressing the affordable housing crisis when new projects are approved as part of the development review process. New methods of review such as Form Base Code and Development agreements have created an uneven playing field. Letting one developer off the hook for meeting requirements has encouraged others to play the same game. We know for a fact that a number of developments are built in order to be flipped for large profits (Berkshire, Hanover proposal)
- The costs of property tax increases will be passed along to tenants, raising rents and making even non-luxury apartments out of reach for many.
- The town and affordable housing community should also be looking to our partners – including the University, neighboring towns and local faith communities, to help bear the burden and better leverage opportunities. We've often talked about it but we need to be moving forward together with a coordinated plan with the County.

- We must link affordable housing efforts with affordable transportation to effectively help our residents. Cutting bus routes, for example, would have a devastating impact on residents who rely on public transportation to get places. Providing space to connect with nature and to recreate has proven benefits to human health and well-being. Curtailing any of these essential services will hurt the very folks we are seeking to help.
- Finally, let's not forget how budgets are made. For instance, \$0.01 or \$0.02 per \$100 for affordable housing may seem reasonable, but when you add that to the \$0.02 the town says it will need to balance its current debt fund, the \$0.04-\$0.06 the county said would be needed to pay off the school construction bond issued a few years ago, and the \$0.02 GoTriangle wants the town and county (\$0.01 each) to levy, suddenly you are looking at a cumulative increase of \$0.07-\$0.12 per \$100.
- Again, folks can debate the merits of the individual bond issue for housing, but that debate shouldn't occur divorced all of the other potential tax rate increases circling around the county's, town's, and school district's property tax base. Thinking in isolation is what created many of our problems.

We would like to reiterate my appreciation to council for your work to put together a bond as one part of a larger Affordable Housing Plan for our community.

Julie McClintock, Molly McConnell, Charles Humble, Joan Guilkey, Debra Finn, and Del Snow.