

Final Report
of the
Task Force for a More
Livable City of Fairfax

June 8, 1999

Executive Summary

The Task Force for a More Livable City of Fairfax was appointed by the City Council to develop a “community consensus on the creation and implementation of a plan specifically in the areas of attracting the next generation of families to the City of Fairfax.” The Task Force was constituted to represent a broad cross section of neighborhoods and community interests. Councilman Lederer served as Chairman, and Councilman Greenfield served as Vice-Chairman of the Task Force.

As a result of current demographic trends, particularly the aging of the City’s population, there will likely be tremendous turnover in the City’s population over the next decade. In addition, most of the City’s neighborhoods are more than 30 years old and are beginning to exhibit technical and functional obsolescence. Finally, the City lacks a substantial component of upscale housing found in many of our “competing” jurisdictions. This combination of factors emphasizes the need to identify and implement a course of action that will ensure that the City remains a desirable place for families to locate and live in Northern Virginia.

The City has a diverse population, and the strategies identified by the Task Force are intended to benefit and improve the quality of life for all residents. While recognizing this, the Task Force is also aware of the general need for “move-up” housing within the City and provides strategies focused on upgrading the City’s housing stock through both renovation and redevelopment.

Also central to these recommendations is the improvement of the quality of life in existing neighborhoods, and the importance of civic associations in supporting and assuring community livability.

The Task Force’s recommendations were structured to fall within the following broad categories:

- **Supporting Neighborhoods and Addressing Neighborhood Issues**
These recommendations involve strategies to work with civic associations and use existing tools to improve the quality of life within City neighborhoods.
- **Encouraging Investment in Neighborhoods**
These recommendations include new programs to encourage investments in homes and develop a framework to support and promote this effort.
- **City Efforts to Set the Stage**
These recommendations include strategies to ensure that the City has the appropriate amenities to address the needs of current and future residents.

Conclusion:

The Task Force views its efforts as essential to the City's future, and believes that the recommendations contained in the report should be considered important investments in the City's future (a complete listing of the Task Force's recommendations is appended to the report for reference). The Task Force strongly believes that the City of Fairfax is a unique community within the region, but that jurisdictions will have to "compete" for the next generation of families. The City must be ready for the changes ahead with an improved housing stock and supporting services and amenities, and should enthusiastically support efforts to improve and enhance its livability.

The Task Force has worked to provide a comprehensive set of recommendations for the City Council to consider. Due to the extent of these recommendations, the Task Force suggests that it continue to meet on a quarterly basis to assist the City in developing and refining these programs and monitoring their progress. Implementation of these recommendations will require a substantial amount of additional work such as developing refined ordinances, coordinating outreach and developing programs in partnership with community associations, and developing and refining details related to neighborhood investment/reinvestment programs.

Introduction

On July 14, 1998, the City Council adopted a resolution establishing the “Livable City of Fairfax Task Force” for the purpose of “developing a community consensus on the creation and implementation of a plan specifically in the areas of attracting the next generation of families to the City of Fairfax.” In forming the Task Force, the City Council noted a high priority in “identifying key components to attracting the next generation of families to the City,” and sought to establish an implementation plan to “revisit” and address the 1993 recommendations of the Fairfax 2020 Commission. The Task Force used the 2020 Commission report and the City’s Comprehensive Plan as a starting point to develop a strategy for making the City more competitive in attracting and retaining the next generation of families in the City. This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Task Force.

Membership and Meetings

The City Council appointed members of the Task Force to represent the broad range of interests and input necessary to develop a comprehensive strategy for accomplishing its mission. The Task Force consisted of the following members:

Robert F. Lederer	City Council/Chairman
Jeffrey C. Greenfield	City Council/Vice Chairman
Jeanne Agee	Commission on the Arts
Charles Baldwin	Cambridge Station Community/CCA
Juanita Dickerson	Warren Woods/Joyce Heights Community
Trish Hartford	Fairview Community
Norv Hensley	Planning Commission/Breckinridge Community
Dale Lestina	2020 Commission Chairman
David Meyer	Old Lee Hills Community
Janice Miller	School Board/Providence Community
Penelope Rood	School Board/Great Oaks Community
John Rusert	PRAB/Mosby Woods Community
Andy Werthman	Southeast Fairfax Community
Bob Sisson	City Manager
David Hudson	Director of Community Development and Planning

David Hudson, the City’s Director of Community Development and Planning (CDP) provided the principal staff support for the Task Force. Brian Lubkeman, Deputy City Attorney, Sue Cotellessa, Planning Division Chief (CDP), Andrew Wilson, Director of Code Administration, Doug Scott, Chief of Police, John Veneziano, Director of Public Works, and Heidi Waugh, Planner responsible for the Home Pride Program (CDP) also provided substantial assistance.

The Case for Action

The Task Force takes great pride in the varied composition of its many residential neighborhoods and would like to retain their diversity and embrace all of the City's residents. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the Task Force was created to look to the future and address the challenges of attracting and retaining the next generation of families in the City of Fairfax. With these factors as a backdrop, the Task Force worked to develop strategies that will improve the quality of life for all of its residents.

Fairfax is an attractive, community-spirited city known for its small town atmosphere and endowed with an excellent location within a prosperous region and a superior economy. So why do we need to change anything? Because the City is changing in a profound way. Consider the following:

- **The City's neighborhoods are aging.**
The homes in many of the City's neighborhoods are "functionally obsolete" by today's standards. Most of the City's neighborhoods were developed more than 30 years ago. In large part, homes in these neighborhoods lack "curb appeal" and do not reflect the requirements and desires of today's homebuyers.
- **The makeup of the City's population has shifted away from families with children.**
Although the total population has remained relatively stable, the demographic composition of the City has changed substantially with fewer children and more seniors.
- **Family incomes in the City are not keeping pace with the region.**
While the City has an unemployment rate among the lowest in Virginia, family incomes are lagging behind those of the region.
- **Schools in the City are perceived as undesirable.**
Test scores at the City's public schools fall below Fairfax County averages. This hinders efforts to attract and retain families with children in the City.
- **There is little vacant land available for development.**
To be able to provide housing that meets the requirements of today's homebuyers, the City cannot rely on a substantial amount of new housing in new subdivisions. The City must focus on the more difficult approach of improving the existing housing and redeveloping residential areas if housing with modern features sought by homeowners is to be widely available in the City.
- **Turnover will occur in the majority of homes in the City over the next decade.**
As a result of the City's increasing senior population, coupled with the expected amount of migration, most of the homes in the City will be sold over the next ten years. This turnover could either result in continued and worsening obsolescence of

the housing stock, or reinvestment and improvement in the housing stock. Immediate and aggressive action is necessary to ensure that the reinvestment option occurs.

While the Task Force (which is composed of City residents) independently identified these factors, they are consistent with the impressions of the “outside” community. It is interesting to note that in October of last year, the City hosted a meeting with public school officials and real estate agents to discuss the connection between the quality of public schools and the desirability of City homes in the real estate market. The real estate professionals observed that the City is at a competitive disadvantage in attracting potential homebuyers primarily due to the City schools’ low test scores. The agents also offered the following perceptions about the City and many of its neighborhoods:

- much of the housing stock is older and functionally obsolete (lacks modern features and amenities),
- there is a lack of community amenities compared with competing areas; and
- there is a general lack of “curb appeal” in many City neighborhoods.

This negative perception of the City must be addressed in an aggressive manner. The City should recognize that it must compete with nearby cities, towns, and counties for the families seeking homes in the region. To be successful, the City of Fairfax cannot be perceived as having inferior schools, inferior housing, or inferior services and facilities. The most significant challenge for the City is to successfully adapt to changing population and market preferences to meet the expectations of its present and future citizens for the highest possible quality of life in the decades to come. This can only be accomplished through improvements in schools and high-profile reinvestment in neighborhoods and public facilities. It will require aggressive leadership from the City Council and School Board with a firm commitment to revitalization of the City’s neighborhoods. We must begin now.

Trends in Population and Housing

The factors presented below reflect significant trends in population and housing in the City and region (consisting of the Counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William, and the Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park). These are critical to understanding the focus of the Task Force’s work.

- Married persons in the City’s population dropped from 67% in 1970 to 52% in 1990. This is a consistent trend within the region.
- The median age of the population is increasing steadily; the City has the third highest median age in Northern Virginia, behind Arlington and Fairfax Counties.
- The City’s average household size decreased from 3.53 persons to 2.6 persons from 1970-1990, consistent with the region.

- The City lags well behind Fairfax County (31.8%), Loudoun County (35.5%), Manassas City (36.9%), Manassas Park (38.1%), and Prince William County (42.6%) in married-couple households with children with 22.4%.
- In 1960, the City had among the highest number of children as a percentage of total population among Northern Virginia jurisdictions, only fractionally behind Fairfax and Prince William Counties. The City has now fallen to sixth among all Northern Virginia jurisdictions, only slightly higher than Arlington and Alexandria.
- A study prepared by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia showed the City lagging behind all Northern Virginia jurisdictions except Manassas Park in median adjusted gross income for married couples in 1996.
- The City has the third highest percentage of population living below the poverty level among the Northern Virginia jurisdictions (behind Arlington and Alexandria), nearly double the percentages for Fairfax County, Prince William County, and Loudoun County.

These population data point to the increasing age of the City's population and related need to encourage settlement of young families with children. Income factors highlight several trends, including an apparent divergence in income levels between young families or senior citizens on fixed incomes and an increasing percentage of non-married couple households.

Future population growth and the nature of household composition will be dependent on density, housing styles, and housing values produced by new development and redevelopment, as well as on maintenance and improvement of the City's existing housing stock. Significant trends in the City's housing patterns are highlighted below.

- More than 70% of the City's housing was built between 1950 and 1969; this is the highest percentage of housing in this age group for any Northern Virginia jurisdiction and compares to 33% for the region as a whole.
- The City has the highest percentage of multifamily units with 10-19 units per structure (garden-style units) in Northern Virginia, nearly double the regional average.
- The City ranked fifth among the nine Northern Virginia jurisdictions in median housing value in the 1990 census. Among the close-in jurisdictions (Alexandria, Arlington, City of Fairfax, Fairfax County, and Falls Church), the City had the highest percentage of homes valued under \$200,000 at 63% (compared with 43% for Fairfax County, which had the next highest percentage). Moreover, the City had the lowest percentage of homes valued at greater than \$250,000 at 13% (compared with 35% for Fairfax County, which had the next lowest percentage).

These trends demonstrate that the City does not have a well-diversified housing stock, particularly in terms of age and style. Further, overall housing value in the City is below the regional average. While recent and planned residential construction in the City has been predominantly upscale single-family residential, an increase in median housing value will be largely dependent on redevelopment and significant housing improvement in existing neighborhoods.

A review of average sale prices for a selection of City subdivisions (those with several sales and few unusual sales to skew results) from 1995-1998 is presented below (shaded selections showed decrease in value over three year period):

Subdivision	1995 Average Sales Price	1998 Average Sales Price
Ardmore	\$106,671	\$104,077
Chancery Square	\$264,147	\$267,866
Country Club Hills	\$168,000	\$188,511
Comstock	\$147,135	\$147,842
Crestmont TH	\$240,879	\$266,078
Fairview	\$152,700	\$146,889
Foxcroft Colony	\$59,215	\$52,578
Great Oaks	\$227,000	\$256,161
Green Acres	\$171,300	\$177,423
Lyndhurst Condos	\$74,690	\$61,310
Maple Hill	\$158,087	\$164,155
Mosby Woods	\$202,700	\$207,163
Mosby Wds Garden Condo	\$70,167	\$59,623
Mosby Wds TH Condo	\$95,334	\$89,990
Westmore	\$135,597	\$137,992

Decreased housing values are evident in the City's aging condominium units and in older neighborhoods with homes that are relatively small by today's standards. Some of the City's older neighborhoods with sound housing units have maintained their value or showed only marginal increases.

Task Force Methodology

With the previously discussed information as a backdrop, the Task Force began to establish an agenda and explore issues. The Task Force kicked off its efforts with an organizational meeting with overviews from Chairman Lederer (City Council perspective), School Superintendent George Stepp (Schools perspective) and City Manager Robert Sisson (Staff perspective). Subsequently, the Task Force took two separate bus tours to become more familiar with the character and condition of the City's neighborhoods. An overall agenda was then developed to serve as a guide for the Task Force discussions that would ensue. The Task Force met approximately every two weeks, and all meetings were open to the public.

Generally, the Task Force approached its mission by reviewing existing neighborhood conditions, developing a list of issues, searching for existing “models,” researching enabling legislation, and developing strategies and recommendations.

The following methods were used by the Task Force to gain information and perspective:

- Interviews were conducted with the planning, code enforcement, housing, and attorney’s offices of other localities, both in the region and throughout the country.
- Local bankers, realtors, and builders were contacted to provide insight and suggestions.
- Research was conducted on programs addressing similar issues from localities across the country.
- Senator Woods and Delegate Rust addressed the Task Force and provided their perspectives on the issues.
- The State and City codes were reviewed to ensure that that the City is using all of the available tools to address the issues.
- Area residential redevelopment activity was examined in an effort to identify appropriate models.

Immediately following the bus tours of the City’s neighborhoods, the individual Task Force members articulated a list of community issues that should be addressed. From this list of issues, the overall agenda for the Task Force was developed.

As the Task Force began its work, it discovered that the City was already using most of the traditional methods available to address these issues, and that there are few existing “models” from which the City could draw to develop a more creative and effective approach. The Task Force was encouraged to view these issues from a non-traditional perspective, as more aggressive approaches will be required to effect substantial improvement. It recognized that in attracting the next generation of families, the City is competing with the rest of the region, much of which has newer (and in some cases, better) recreational and educational facilities, amenities and an abundance of housing that reflects contemporary lifestyles. The Task Force noted that attracting families and neighborhood investment is more sensitive to quality of housing, public facilities (including schools), and services than to low property tax rates.

The Task Force first sought to identify, in a general sense, the type of family the City should “target” to attract in order to focus its discussions and recommendations. The Task Force identified the following characteristics in the “next generation of families” in the City:

- *Good Neighbors*
- *Active in Community – Exhibit Community Pride*
- *Maintain Their Homes*
- *Invest in Improvements to Their Homes*
- *School-Aged Children*

Supporting Neighborhoods and Addressing Neighborhood Issues

Civic Associations

Active and effective community associations are an important component in the quality of life of a community. Civic associations need to be well informed and well equipped to be able to gauge neighborhood needs, identify possible solutions, and promote the interests of the community.

To become a major force in improving and maintaining the livability of the community, the Task Force believes that associations should:

- Promote and foster community and neighborliness,
- Monitor the condition of neighborhoods (properties, traffic, etc.),
- Distribute and promote community maintenance/appearance standards and expectations,
- Communicate with the City in an appropriate and effective manner.

The Task Force reviewed programs from across the country in which the local jurisdictions offered support to community associations and neighborhood groups through grants. The purposes of these grants ranged from support for the organization and operations of associations (membership recruitment, newsletters, etc.) to neighborhood capital improvements such as parks, landscaping, community signage, and streetlights.

After reviewing and discussing the options, the Task Force recommends that the City establish a grant program to be used by community associations for organization, outreach, and operation of the association, preparation of newsletters and informational materials, web site development, sponsoring neighborhood events, and similar functions. The funds available to each association could be modest (up to \$1,000 - \$1,500 per association), and would require application by the association indicating how the grant will be used.

The Task Force further recommends that the City make available, on a reasonable basis, its photocopy facilities to assist associations with the reproduction of newsletters, flyers, and similar printed materials.

Finally, the Task Force recommends that, working through the Council of Civic Associations, a "Neighborhood Leadership Institute" be established for neighborhood leaders to learn the most appropriate and effective ways to address community problems and enhance understanding of processes. The City would provide substantial assistance and support in developing and implementing the Institute. The Institute would provide training on:

- working with the City to identify and solve problems,
- recruiting and retaining community association participation,
- improving communication with membership (newsletter design/software, web site design, etc.)
- identifying the appropriate contacts (departments and individuals) within the City to address neighborhood concerns,
- understanding and participating in the City's budget process (operating and capital),
- understanding and participating in comprehensive planning and zoning processes.

City Ordinances

The Task Force examined the City ordinances regulating conditions of overcrowding (particularly building code occupancy limits and zoning restrictions), and provided recommendations in the areas where there was a reasonable degree of confidence that the City could legitimately address these issues.

Rental Properties

Currently, the City requires a Rental Occupancy Permit for absentee owners to rent their property. The Task Force recommends that the Rental Occupancy Ordinance be expanded to apply to the rental of portions of owner-occupied homes. This would subject these homes to permitting requirements, inspections to ensure compliance with Codes and safety standards, and payment of a fee (currently \$75). In addition, the Task Force recommends that the Rental Occupancy Permit fee be raised to the highest reasonable limit. The Task Force believes that the purchase of a home as an investment property and the rental of rooms to derive income are businesses and should be treated as such.

Excessive Numbers of Cars

A recurring discussion in the Task Force deliberations involved homes with an excessive number of cars parked on the street and on lawns. The City Council forwarded a proposed ordinance to the Task Force for review and recommendation prohibiting parking on lawns and limiting the impervious area on lots in neighborhoods. The Task Force recommends adoption of that ordinance, with minor revisions to improve clarity (see attachment).

The Code of Virginia authorizes localities to provide for the issuance of permits for motor vehicle parking on public streets, to set rates for the permits, and to set the term of validity for the permits. The City has established parking districts to address the parking of "non-resident" vehicles associated with schools and offices in neighborhoods. In addition, the City limits parking adjacent to fire hydrants and proximate to street intersections, and prohibits the unauthorized blocking of driveways.

The Task Force recommends that the City adopt an ordinance to provide for parking districts on certain streets. These districts would be established only at the request of the

neighborhood. More than one-half of the homeowners of the affected areas would be required to petition the City for such a district. The applicable community association should also endorse the request. Application of such districts on neighborhood streets would require action by City Council.

A predetermined number (two or three) on-street parking permits would be issued to each home at no cost (or a minimal cost to cover the cost of printing the stickers). An additional number of stickers would be available to each home, to which a fee would be applied (e.g., \$50 for the first, \$100 for the second). The number of permits allowed per household could vary from district to district, and should be related to specific characteristics of the area including width of street, number of driveways, and width of lots.

These provisions would apply to areas with public streets only. Subdivisions with private streets already have a mechanism for controlling on-street parking.

Enforcement of Laws/Ordinances

Enforcement of the City's laws and ordinances is accomplished through several City departments, including Police, Fire (Code Administration), Community Development and Planning (Zoning) and Public Works. In addition, an interdepartmental task force was constituted last year to address blighted properties as well as other properties with multiple code violations. While some of the enforcement is accomplished on a proactive basis, there is insufficient staffing to actively patrol all of the City's neighborhoods for violations of the building and zoning codes. Much of this enforcement is accomplished through response to complaints.

In a presentation to the Task Force by the Police Chief, he indicated that, as a result of some reorganization within the department, additional time would be available for neighborhood patrol by City police to enforce traffic violations. The Task Force endorses this effort and suggests that the progress should be monitored. The City should be prepared to enhance the level of staffing for police presence in residential areas if current staffing levels prove to be insufficient.

In addition, the Task Force recommends that a more structured relationship between civic associations and City Hall be established to improve awareness of violations. Community association representatives could volunteer to periodically monitor their neighborhoods (or the entire City) for potential violations of City Code, and communicate their findings to a designated staff person for appropriate action. These citizen task forces could be especially beneficial on weekends and holidays, when the City's enforcement staff presence is limited.

Cut-through Traffic

The Task Force received a briefing from the Public Works director in which cut-through “problem areas” in the City were discussed. The Task Force reviewed the traffic calming techniques that have been employed in the City and elsewhere, as well as traffic restrictions used by other Northern Virginia localities to control traffic through neighborhoods.

The Task Force believes that a long-term solution to cut-through traffic in neighborhoods will only be achieved by examining options that limit the volume of such traffic, such as turn restrictions and cul-de-sacs, rather than decreasing its speed. The Task Force recognizes that current efforts to address cut-through traffic are focused on traffic calming techniques. The Task Force recommends that a formal group be established composed of representatives from community associations of the neighborhoods affected most substantially by the problems of cut-through traffic. This group would examine conditions specific to individual neighborhoods and recommend solutions to address these problems.

The Task Force emphasized the importance of keeping traffic moving on the major roads within and adjacent to the City, as opposed to through neighborhoods, to minimize the incentive for traffic to cut through residential areas. This should be accomplished through a variety of methods such as control of turning movements, enhancement of traffic light synchronization, and road improvements.

Encouraging Investment in Neighborhoods

Home Pride/Neighborhood Renaissance

The Home Pride program performs a useful service by providing resources to homeowners, publicizing available programs, and organizing and implementing the Spring Tour of Homes. About one in every three of the staff hours allocated for the Home Pride effort is dedicated to the Tour of Homes. In reviewing this program, the Task Force reached a consensus that the “return” on this effort has not resulted in appreciable residential reinvestment in the City and that effort would be better expended elsewhere in support of reinvestment. As a result, the Task Force recommends that the Tour of Homes be organized and executed either by volunteers, or by area businesses associated with the real estate industry (agents, lenders, developers, etc.). In addition, the Home Pride Program should be reconstituted as the City of Fairfax Neighborhood Renaissance Program, and should concentrate on providing essential resources to homeowners and promoting the City’s neighborhoods. The additional resources resulting from eliminating the Tour of Homes as a staff responsibility (approximately 5 hours/week) would be invested in this effort. A particular focus of this program should be in developing a World Wide Web site to serve as an essential clearinghouse for the City’s neighborhood renaissance efforts. This would include:

- an on-line description of programs available,
- a listing of “certified” contractors with links,
- sources of discounted materials with links,
- tax abatement information and applications,
- descriptions of the various permitting processes (with “tips” for navigating them) and on-line applications,
- photographic examples of renovations that have occurred in the City (perhaps a virtual tour of renovated houses),
- schematic architectural plans for additions
- a “chat room” for residents to share their renovation experiences and provide contractor or vendor recommendations (or cautions),
- on-line help.

These efforts will demystify the renovation/home improvement process and serve as a “support group” for residents undergoing the process, or considering it. This facet of the program would be accomplished with existing staff (with the elimination of the Tour of Homes responsibility) within the Community Development and Planning Department.

The Task Force strongly recommends that the City hire a Home Improvement Specialist to serve as an ombudsman to assist residents in the implementation of residential renovations. The Task Force believes that although reinvestment in neighborhoods is one of the most critical issues facing the City, few resources are currently allotted specifically to this effort. The addition of such a staff position would provide expertise and assistance to City homeowners, giving them a knowledgeable “inside” advocate dedicated solely to

helping them. It would represent a serious commitment on the part of the City, commensurate with the significance of this issue.

Specifically, the Home Improvement Specialist would assist homeowners in:

- design/construction details of additions/improvements,
- finding and selecting qualified professionals (designers, contractors, tradesmen) and providing general tips on how to structure and enter into home improvement contracts,
- expediting and securing City approvals.

This staff person, in coordination with the Home Pride/Neighborhood Renaissance staff person, would be responsible for implementing the Task Force recommendations adopted by the City Council pertaining to residential reinvestment.

Finally, the Task Force recommends that the City seek enabling legislation that will allow a more aggressive tax abatement effort. Currently, state law permits partial exemption from taxation of real estate for substantial improvements to homes older than 15 years. The Task Force believes that a more aggressive program would increase the incentive for homeowners to reinvest in their properties.

Loan Programs

The Task Force devoted considerable attention to discussing revolving loan funds to make money available to residents at lower interest rates than they would be able to obtain privately. After reviewing the available options, the Task Force developed the following recommendations.

The cornerstone of the Task Force's recommendations to the City Council is to establish an aggressive construction loan program, in partnership with one or more area banks, providing funds to be made available to City homeowners for qualifying home improvements. This program should have the following characteristics:

- Working with an area bank or banks, the City would deposit funds in exchange for the bank offering low cost construction loans to homeowners for qualifying projects.
- Loans would be offered to City homeowners and contract owners at a low interest rate (in the range of 0% to 2%) for the duration of the construction project (6-12 months). Interest (if any) would be charged as funds are disbursed (on a draw basis).
- The loans would be administered by the bank(s).
- Upon completion of the project, the construction loan would be paid by the homeowner, or replaced with permanent financing made available through the bank. This would now become feasible as a result of the increase in the value of the home (used as collateral) resulting from the new construction. The construction loan serves

as bridge financing to support improvements that increase the value of a home beyond its original base collateral value. The City should also consider the feasibility of “buying down” the interest rate on permanent loans for projects constructed under this program.

- Funds could be used for demolition and new construction, as well as renovations, remodeling, or additions. The proposed construction project must be designed to increase the value of the home and would focus primarily on kitchens, baths, and other additions and improvements that will make the home more attractive in the housing market. Loans will not be made for houses that do not meet minimum exterior appearance standards following construction.
- A minimum and maximum loan amount should be established.

The program should be part of the City’s package for banking services, which is “bid out” periodically. The City is currently beginning the selection process for banking services. After a prescribed period, for example three years, the City will evaluate the effectiveness of the program and determine if it should be continued.

This recommendation was developed with the following constraints imposed by Virginia state law in mind:

- The City cannot act as a banker and is required to invest with minimal risk.
- The City’s Constitutional Officers are authorized to invest funds. The City’s Treasurer is willing to work with an exploratory team to meet with local lending institutions to enable a lending program.
- City deposits/investments in financial institutions are constrained by Public Depository Act (bank must be member of approved Virginia pool).

City Ordinances to Support Reinvestment

Through its experience in working with homeowners in the Home Pride Program, the City has a good indication of the types of improvements that are most often sought by homeowners. The City’s zoning regulations have been examined in light of this experience and some observations and recommendations are provided below.

The majority of the City’s neighborhoods are zoned R-1, R-2, or R-3. Current minimum setbacks in these districts are:

	Front	Side	Rear
R-1	35’	15’	25’
R-2	35’	15’	25’
R-3	25’	12’	25’

Many residents of older neighborhoods would like to construct additions, but cannot meet the setbacks (particularly the side), as their existing homes are located at or near the minimum required setbacks. As a result, residents of older neighborhoods have approached the City to enclose existing carports and construct porches and other additions, but cannot because of the setback requirements.

As each of these improvements would add value, not only to homes, but also to neighborhoods, special exceptions are available through the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). Although the BZA has a consistent record of approving appropriate additions to homes, homeowners are often intimidated or inconvenienced by the special exception hearing process, which discourages them from pursuing these improvements.

As a result, the Task Force recommends that the R-1, R-2, and R-3 zoning district regulations be revised to support reinvestment goals as follows:

1. Allow an administrative reduction of 50% of the required side yard for one-story, attached structures in the R-1, R-2 and R-3 zoning districts, and a 25% reduction for two-story, attached structures.
2. Allow encroachment of 10 feet into the required front yard for open porches in the R-1 and R-2 zoning districts, and a 7 foot encroachment in the R-3 district.
3. Allow existing carports to be enclosed without additional zoning action.

The proposed improvements must comply with all building code requirements. Criteria and procedures should be adopted for each of these actions. This might include compliance with the Community Appearance Plan to ensure that the addition is compatible with the architecture of the house and the character of the neighborhood (this implies that the City would adopt a Residential Component to the CAP). Procedures should include the opportunity for neighbors and community associations to review and comment on the proposed improvements.

Architectural Services

Most neighborhoods in the City are distinguishable and somewhat unique because of the cohesiveness of design of the original subdivisions. If reinvestment is to occur in the City's neighborhoods on a large scale, then it will be important to ensure that the design of additions and other major improvements retain a consistent quality that complements the original building designs. The Task Force recommends that the City engage the services of design professionals who are uniquely qualified to execute designs of additions/improvements in this complementary manner.

To accomplish this, the City should engage an architect(s) to develop stock plans for improvements to homes in specific neighborhoods (those over 25 years old with houses having similar layouts) to incorporate features that most home buyers are seeking today. These plans would be made available to current or potential residents at little or no charge. The plans would include "packages" of improvements such as: master bedroom with bathroom addition, bathroom and kitchen remodels/additions, family room

additions, attached or detached garage additions, and landscape plans. In addition, a “senior specific” design could be developed, targeted at design concerns of seniors who wish to renovate.

The “market” cost for these plans would be approximately \$4,000 - \$10,000 per set, but the architect would likely reduce the cost, as the City could offer recognition (and hence future business to the architect) through publicizing the program and the designer.

The benefits of the program would include:

- Providing tangible examples and actively promoting consistent quality design for renovations,
- Ensuring that neighborhood standards are maintained and enhanced,
- “Incentivizing” home owners by eliminating/reducing design fees,
- Dovetailing with efforts to develop partnerships with developers/contractors,
- Improving property to respond to unique patterns of existing neighborhood (e.g., lot configuration).

Finally, the City should develop a program to formally recognize and publicize outstanding residential improvements and renovations of existing homes in the City.

Partnerships to Support Reinvestment by Homeowners

Given that the total amount of land available for development is finite, and the “closer in” suburban areas have now largely been developed, the Task Force expects that the development community will have to expend efforts in the future on improving or redeveloping existing neighborhoods. The City should encourage and prepare for this anticipated interest on the part of the development community as follows:

- The City has already begun to actively solicit and encourage home builders to establish a presence in City neighborhoods, with the expectation that such a presence will result in quality home improvements available to residents at a reduced price. This value will be achieved from the economies of scale in constructing similar improvements on a large scale in similar homes. The Task Force endorses this effort. Special emphasis should be given to encouraging “model homes” in specified neighborhoods to provide visible examples of the improvements that can be achieved with the existing housing stock.
- Working with the civic associations or neighborhood groups, the City could preapprove building plans (or expedite plans on a walk-through basis with assistance from Home Improvement Specialist) and a palette of setback exceptions that would otherwise inhibit the effort.
- The City should consider waiving application and review fees for “targeted” improvements.

City Purchases/Renovations of Houses

The most direct manner in which the City may contribute to the reversal of neighborhood decline is through the purchase, rehabilitation, and resale of “distressed” homes, as they become available for sale. Such a program would involve the City purchase of property if it exhibits signs of deterioration or has been used as a rental property or for group housing in the immediate past.

Rehabilitation of the property would elevate the condition of the home at least to neighborhood standards, and would involve some degree of modernizing (kitchen design, HVAC systems, roofs, windows, etc.). The City would then place the home on the open market for sale, thus intervening in the cycle of deterioration of investment property and raising the value of homes in the neighborhood. Deed restrictions could be placed on the property upon sale, perhaps limiting the future use of the property as a rental or group home. Much of the City’s investment would be directly recovered when the home is sold on the open market, or recovered over time through increased property valuation of the individual home and the neighborhood as a whole.

Although the Task Force recognizes the costs associated with the acquisition, rehabilitation, and disposition of real estate, it believes that this is the most direct and effective way to intervene where “problem” properties are having a negative impact on neighborhood values. Such a program would provide substantial benefits including:

- Direct intervention in the cycle of declining property values,
- Most of the cost of acquisition and rehabilitation would be recovered through resale,
- Could result in additional homeowner rehabilitation in the neighborhood.

The Task Force further recommends that a demonstration project be initiated immediately to reflect the City’s commitment in this area. The majority of the costs of any such projects will be recouped upon the sale of the property. Once the City has demonstrated leadership in this effort to protect property values and quality of life in neighborhoods, it is anticipated that residents and homebuilders will have the confidence to emulate these improvements elsewhere.

Reinvestment in Multi-Family Communities

As stated previously, the City has the highest percentage of garden-type apartments among the Northern Virginia jurisdictions. With few exceptions, the apartment developments in the City were constructed in the 1950s and early 1960s, and many are in need of renovation or redevelopment.

The Task Force recommends that the City expand the residential property tax abatement program to include multi-family units to provide an incentive to upgrade these developments.

In addition, the Task Force recommends that the City support the conversion of rental apartments to condominiums or "seniors only" housing. Conversion to condominiums will foster pride of homeownership within these areas while conversion to "seniors only" housing will fill a void in the City's housing market.

Redevelopment by the Private Commercial Sector

The supply of vacant property available for residential development within the City is limited, and the Comprehensive Plan appropriately designates those few areas for future residential development. However, there is an increasing opportunity for redevelopment within existing neighborhoods in the City. This redevelopment takes the form of individual homes within neighborhoods being razed and replaced by new homes, as well as larger portions of neighborhoods being redeveloped.

Both of these forms of redevelopment are currently occurring in the City. Individual lot redevelopment is occurring on a limited basis in neighborhoods throughout the City. Neighborhood consolidation and redevelopment is occurring along the western portion of School Street where the City Council recently approved a planned residential development composed of 91 single-family homes on approximately 20 acres. Construction of this development is expected to commence this Fall.

The Task Force strongly recommends that single-family detached homes with traditional setbacks and lot sizes be encouraged at every reasonable opportunity as development and redevelopment occur in the City. The Task Force further recommends that, if the Green Acres and Westmore Elementary School sites come into the control of the City, strong consideration should be given on a priority basis to the redevelopment of these sites as upscale single-family detached housing.

The Task Force reviewed the ongoing redevelopment of residential areas in the eastern portion of the Town of Vienna, as it provides an appropriate model for individual lot and small area redevelopment. Essentially, a few developers/builders have been purchasing property in this modest neighborhood (where house prices are as low as \$150,000), demolishing the existing houses, and constructing homes valued at more than \$450,000. This is a popular option for homebuyers (the builders have a several-month backlog of work) because it allows them to purchase a new home with modern amenities yet retain the benefits of an established neighborhood (trees, location, etc.).

Town officials were contacted to learn what incentives have been provided by the Town of Vienna to facilitate this redevelopment. Surprisingly, the Town is offering no incentives— it is completely a private initiative. According to the builder and the Town official contacted, this activity is taking place because "people want to live in Vienna." The location and quality of schools, facilities, and services were noted as reasons. Interestingly, while those factors were important, the Town's tax rate was unimportant to buyers. The property tax rate is 50% higher in Vienna than in the City of Fairfax, where substantially less of this type of redevelopment is occurring.

The Task Force suggests that the City should encourage developers, at every opportunity, to become active in a manner that will replicate the redevelopment occurring in Vienna. The Task Force views redevelopment of this nature as a positive trend that should be actively facilitated in the City.

City Efforts to Set the Stage

Community Amenities

Together with the quality of schools and homes, homebuyers consider the number and quality of community amenities as essential criteria in deciding where to purchase. Recent surveys indicate that homebuyers are seeking natural open space, walking and biking paths, and community recreation centers as the most important amenities in making buying decisions.

The Task Force evaluated the range and quality of community amenities offered in the City, and recommended that the quantity and quality of community facilities be made available that will make the City an attractive location for homebuyers. The Task Force recommends that the City consider all reasonable options to develop and enhance community amenities. The City should:

- Address the shortage of ballfields by evaluating and considering possible locations for additional fields such as Providence Park, the “Stafford” property, Ratcliffe Park, the Blenheim grounds, Van Dyck Park, the John C. Wood Center, and the existing County property yards located in the City. The Task Force further supports regional efforts including the construction of ballfields at the GMU property at Braddock and Shirley Gate Roads.
- Evaluate the feasibility of establishing a community recreation/cultural center with an olympic/competition swimming pool at the John C. Wood Center.
- Study the feasibility of developing a covered amphitheater.
- Improve the availability of parking near the Fairfax City Regional Library.
- Consider developing a centralized child care center combined with a senior day care center. In such a center, seniors in the community could offer their time to work with children. Consideration should be given to developing the center as a “comprehensive” facility, in association with a pediatrician, and including pre-school and over night child care. This could be a separate, stand-alone facility, or located on a school site.

In addition, the Task Force recognizes that some of the neighborhood/community pools have deteriorated in appearance and face financial challenges. The Task Force supports, in principle, City assistance to help in the operation and maintenance of neighborhood pools. This assistance should include providing water at a reduced or no fee, City collection of trash at the pools, and maintenance of service drives and parking areas. This assistance should be limited to swimming pools that are not operated for profit and have open memberships for all City residents. It may be necessary at some point in the future, if requested by the applicable community association, for the City to consider accepting ownership of neighborhood/community pools if the operations and upkeep becomes infeasible.

The Task Force viewed an attractive, pedestrian friendly Old Town Fairfax as a substantial amenity that would attract new residents to the City. Therefore, the Task Force supports the revitalization and redevelopment of Old Town Fairfax, and further supports the implementation of a plan that will facilitate safe and convenient pedestrian activity.

Lastly, the Task Force recommends that the City sponsor at least two festivals each year, aimed toward City residents. The Task Force noted that although the City already sponsors several successful, highly visible events having a regional draw, festivals for City residents would serve to build a greater sense of community. They would include live bands as well as food and drink vendors. One of the festivals would be held in Old Town, and one in Van Dyck Park. CUE buses would provide transportation for City residents to and from each neighborhood.

Schools

The Task Force recognizes the importance of maintaining a “partnership” relationship between the City Council and the School Board to create the most effective educational environment for our school children. Because the City School Board is responsible for the public schools within the City, the Task Force did not address schools in a comprehensive manner. However, the Task Force recognizes that the quality of schools is a very important factor for a family in selecting a neighborhood in which to purchase a home. Further, test scores are the most visible and frequently used indicators by potential homeowners for schools.

As a result, the Task Force recommends that the School Board work with Fairfax County Public Schools to pursue every reasonable option that will enhance the educational content within our school system, and employ creative and aggressive means to increase student performance. The Task Force encourages consideration of dress codes/school uniforms, implementation of reduced class sizes, year-round schools, assignment of class composition by ability, and extended school days. The Task Force further recommends that the City examine and consider additional opportunities to provide programs in City schools that are unique within the Fairfax County Public School system, drawing from proven programs that have been implemented across the country that have resulted in increased student performance.

Conclusion

The Task Force would like to commend the City Council for its creativity and commitment over the past few years regarding the redevelopment and revitalization of the City's business community. It is now time to demonstrate that same degree of creativity and commitment to the revitalization of our residential areas.

Given the lack of applicable "models" to use in developing a preemptive reinvestment program, the Task Force suspects that the City will be one of the first communities to come to grips with this issue in a comprehensive manner. As a result, our recommendations are bold, but untested and may require "recalibration" along the way. Many of the recommendations may be used by themselves, or in combination to complement each other. For instance, architectural services may be used with the construction loan program and the tax abatement program, made possible by the relaxation of setbacks with assistance from the Home Improvement Specialist.

The Task Force recognizes that some of the recommended programs will require public financial support. As the City disposes of excess property, it is strongly recommended that the proceeds be earmarked for residential reinvestment. The Task Force believes that this would be more than a mere expenditure of funds, but rather a way for the City to invest in its future.

The City has tremendous assets, and should make a substantial effort to inform and, in a sense, market these assets to area builders, real estate agents, and the homebuying community. Once these assets are communicated and the reinvestments become publicized, the Task Force is confident that substantial and sustained improvements will occur in the City's neighborhoods.

Some of the programs discussed in this report can be pursued without appreciable impact on the City purse. Some other initiatives will entail funding. However, if the City is to address the very serious problems that impede the goal of attracting the next generation of families who are the key to our future civic health and progress, we must be prepared to face the costs that will be incurred. It is clear that our reputation of having the lowest tax burden in Northern Virginia - alone - is not the magnet that is needed to make the City competitive in local residential and business markets. To upgrade aging housing stock, to build new upscale housing, to improve the levels of performance of our City schools, and to build the public facilities the market demands, we must be prepared to invest public funds even if this means some increase in our current real estate taxes. To do otherwise will be short sighted and will ultimately result in further degradation of the problems discussed in this report.

Finally, the Task Force recommends that it continue to meet, on a quarterly basis, to monitor the recommendations that are adopted by the City Council. The Task Force will initiate and sustain a dialogue with citizen groups, real estate agents, bankers, and the development community that will be essential to our revitalization efforts.

In conclusion time to act is now! As stated in the opening section of this report, the City Council must partner with the School Board and provide the aggressive leadership to protect the residential communities in the City of Fairfax for future generations. Success will require a firm commitment to revitalization of the City's neighborhoods. This report must be treated with the highest priority if we are going to successfully address the challenges that lay ahead.

Attachments

1. Recommendations of the Task Force for a More Livable City of Fairfax
2. Resolution Establishing an Advisory Task Force to the City Council for a More "Livable" City Of Fairfax.

**Recommendations of the
Task Force for a More Livable
City of Fairfax**

1.0.0 Supporting Neighborhoods and Addressing Neighborhood Issues

1.1.0 Civic Associations

- 1.1.1 Establish a grant program for community associations for organization, operation and outreach.
- 1.1.2 Make available equipment (photocopy) to assist civic associations in reproduction of printed materials.
- 1.1.3 Establish a Neighborhood Leadership Institute.

1.2.0 City Ordinances

- 1.2.1 Expand rental occupancy permit requirements to apply to rental portions of owner-occupied homes.
- 1.2.2 Increase ROP fees to highest reasonable limit.
- 1.2.3 Adopt "parking on lawns" ordinance.
- 1.2.4 Adopt an ordinance to expand residential parking districts, at the petition of neighborhoods, to limit number of cars parked on specified streets.
- 1.2.5 Endorse and monitor Police Chief's efforts to increase police presence in neighborhoods.
- 1.2.6 Develop a structured relationship between civic associations and the City for volunteer monitoring of neighborhoods, particularly on weekends/holidays.

1.3.0 Cut-Through Traffic

- 1.3.1 Establish formal group composed of representatives of community associations to examine conditions specific to individual neighborhoods and recommend solutions (focus would be to restrict volume of cut-through traffic, not slow it down).

2.0.0 Encouraging Investment in Neighborhoods

2.1.0 Home Pride/Neighborhood Renaissance

- 2.1.1 Tour of Homes component of the Home Pride Program be organized and executed by volunteers or by the real estate sector, as opposed to staff.
- 2.1.2 Reconstitute Home Pride as the Fairfax Neighborhood Renaissance, and focus on providing essential resources to homeowners – particularly development of an extensive WWW presence with a comprehensive collection of resources pertaining to home renovation/neighborhood revitalization.

- 2.1.3 Hire a Home Improvement Specialist as an advocate/assistant/ombudsman to assist homeowners with design, construction, contracts, and permitting.
- 2.1.4 Seek more aggressive tax abatement legislation.

2.2.0 Loan Programs

- 2.2.1 Using the leverage the City has through its banking services contracts, the work with a bank (or several banks) to establish a low/no interest loan program for home improvements and renovations.

2.3.0 City Ordinances to Support Reinvestment

- 2.3.1 Allow administrative reductions for certain setbacks in the single-family residential districts to facilitate home additions.
- 2.3.2 Allow existing carports to be enclosed.
- 2.3.3 Adopt a Residential Component of the Community Appearance Plan to provide general guidance for home additions and neighborhood improvement.

2.4.0 Architectural Services

- 2.4.1 Engage the services of one or more architects to develop “stock” plans for improvements to homes in certain neighborhoods.
- 2.4.2 Establish a program to recognize outstanding residential improvements and renovations.

2.5.0 Partnerships to Support Reinvestment by Homeowners

- 2.5.1 Support the current effort to solicit and encourage builders to establish a presence in neighborhoods.
- 2.5.2 Preapprove/expedite “stock” building plans and setback exceptions.
- 2.5.3 Consider waiving certain application and review fees for targeted improvements.

2.6.0 City Purchase/Renovation of Homes

- 2.6.1 Purchase, rehabilitate and resale distressed homes meeting specified criteria.
- 2.6.2 Immediately initiate a demonstration project.

2.7.0 Reinvestment in Multi-Family Communities

- 2.7.1 Expand the residential tax abatement program to provide incentives to upgrade existing apartment and condo developments.
- 2.7.2 Support conversion of multi-family rental projects to condo or senior-only projects.

2.8.0 Redevelopment by the Private Commercial Sector

- 2.8.1 Encourage single-family detached homes with traditional setbacks and lot sizes at every reasonable opportunity as development and redevelopment occurs.
- 2.8.2 If Green Acres and Westmore Elementary Schools come into control of the City, strong consideration on a priority basis should be given to redevelopment as upscale single-family detached neighborhoods.
- 2.8.3 Encourage builders to initiate or participate in residential redevelopment projects in the City.

3.0.0 City Efforts to Set the Stage

3.1.0 Community Amenities

- 3.1.1 Address the shortage of ballfields by evaluating and considering possible locations for additional fields, and support regional efforts including ballfields at the GMU property at Braddock and Shirley Gate Roads.
- 3.1.2 Evaluate the feasibility of establishing a community recreational/cultural center with an olympic/competition pool at the John C. Wood Center.
- 3.1.3 Study the feasibility of developing a covered amphitheater.
- 3.1.4 Improve the availability of parking at the Fairfax City Regional Library.
- 3.1.5 Consider developing a centralized child care center combined with a senior day care center.
- 3.1.6 Support City assistance in the operation and maintenance of neighborhood pools with open memberships.
- 3.1.7 Support revitalization and redevelopment of Old Town Fairfax, and the implementation of a plan that will facilitate safe and convenient pedestrian activity.
- 3.1.8 Sponsor at least two festivals each year for City residents.

3.2.0 Schools

- 3.2.1 Work with Fairfax County Public Schools to pursue every reasonable option that will enhance the educational content within the City school system, and employ creative and aggressive means to increase student performance.
- 3.2.2 Examine and consider additional opportunities to provide programs in City schools that are unique within the Fairfax County Public School system.

RESOLUTION NO. R-98-47

**ESTABLISHING AN ADVISORY TASK FORCE TO THE CITY COUNCIL
FOR A MORE "LIVABLE" CITY OF FAIRFAX**

WHEREAS, it has been several years since the completion of the Fairfax 2020 Commission and implementation plan is needed to address certain aspects of the plan; and

WHEREAS, the City Council places a high priority to identifying key components to attracting the next generation to families of the City of Fairfax; and

WHEREAS, any implementation plan should be done under the guidance of the City Council; and

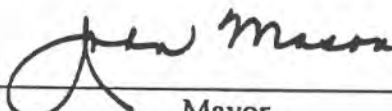
WHEREAS, a community's goals and needs evolve over time;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that a Livable City of Fairfax task force is hereby established for the purpose of developing a community consensus on the creation and implementation of a plan specifically in the areas of attracting the next generation of families to the City of Fairfax.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that said task force shall be comprised of the following representatives: Two members of Council (one of which shall serve as Chairman); Two members of the City of Fairfax School Board; One representative of PRAB; One representative from the Commission on the Arts; One representative of FPYC; Four representatives from the Council of Civic Associations; and the Chair of the Fairfax 2020 Commission. Appointments to the task force will be determined by the City Council.

BE IT STILL FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force shall submit a report to the City Council by March 1, 1999. Upon submittal of the report, the task force shall be disbanded.

Adopted this 14th day of July, 1998.



Mayor

ATTEST:



City Clerk