



Coalition for Smarter Growth
DC • MD • VA

January 27, 2021

Fairfax County Planning Commission
12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 552
Fairfax, VA 2203
Sent via: plancom@fairfaxcounty.gov

***RE: Testimony in Support of Comprehensive Plan Amendment (PA 2020-CW-2CP);
Housing Element and Workforce Dwelling Unit Policy***

Dear Planning Commissioners:

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG), the leading organization in the DC region advocating for walkable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities. CSG appreciates Fairfax County's efforts to revise and update its Workforce Dwelling Unity (WDU) policy and writes to convey our support of the proposed changes, including both the countywide and Tysons Corner recommendations.

Providing affordable housing near transit and jobs is essential to ensuring an inclusive and economically prosperous Fairfax County where employees are able to live near their work, helping to reduce long commutes through the county, and contributing to a diverse and vibrant community.

Fairfax County's WDU policy together with its Affordable Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance are important inclusionary zoning tools for providing housing that is affordable for low and moderate-income households. The WDU policies were adopted in 2007 and 2010 to provide affordable housing in high-rise building and transit oriented development areas in the County targeting households earning between 80 and 120 percent of AMI. The WDU policy was intended to complement the ADU ordinance, which excludes high rise construction. However, there have been challenges with realizing the full benefit of WDUs.

CSG supports removing units serving households at 100% and 120% of the area median income from the WDU policy. These units, which make up 66% of the current WDU requirement, have proven challenging to lease because the rents are comparable to market-rate units. There's no need for renters to utilize the WDU since market rate apartments do not require the additional steps of annual income certification. This means that only 33% of committed WDU units were actually realized.

The new proposed requirements serving income levels at 60%, 70%, and 80% AMI will better target income levels where there is a greater need for affordable housing. While the total percentage of units required is less than the current policy, lowering the income levels actually results in a net gain of affordable units.

VA Tech's Center for Housing Research was a technical consultant to the task force, providing a cost analysis that helped to strike the appropriate balance between meeting County housing goals without creating an excessive burden on developers. This balance acknowledges the cost realities for labor, materials, and land acquisition in development, especially in those higher density areas of the county with access to transit.

The proposed changes to the WDU policy reflect the current market, maintain a strong inclusionary zoning policy, and would improve housing opportunities for low and moderate-income households in employment centers and transit-oriented development areas of the County.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sonya Breehey
Northern Virginia Advocacy Manager