Elimination of Moderate Cost Rental Apartments

By John Reeder and Don Rouse

Although 2007 may well be the year when the U.S. housing bubble and frenzy stopped, it was also a year when another 500 to 1,000 moderate cost apartments in our community of Arlington were eliminated. Hundreds of empty million dollar houses and luxury condos remain unsold, but developers keep bulldozing the older apartments that house moderate income people in Arlington. Arlington like the rest of the United State is faced with a paradox: thousands of empty luxury homes and condominiums, meaning a loss of 13,000 units in 7 years. In 2007, the average rent in Arlington rose 6 percent over 2006 to about $1,600 per month.

The latest Arlington complexes to fall victim to the bulldozer were Chesterfield House (100 units), Colonies of Arlington (400 units), Windsor Towers, and Stratford Apartments, according to the Winter 2007 newsletter of the BRAVO Tenants Organization (www.bravotenants.org).

During 2006-07, about 300 units at Buckingham Village (continued on page 2)

Arlington Greens Press County for Expanded Recycling

By Joshua Ruebner

On a warm Sunday October morning, members of the Arlington Green Party went to several public parks in Arlington County to rescue recyclables from the trashcans. Visiting just four of the County’s 148 parks, Green Party members were astounded by how quickly they were able to fill up eight large 13-gallon trash bags with recyclables pulled from the garbage.

Based on the amount of recyclables picked up from these parks, the Arlington Green Party calculated that 3,700 cubic gallons of plastic and metal recyclable containers are being thrown away every day in Arlington’s parks. This rate of waste translates into the equivalent of approximately five million one-liter plastic bottles going needlessly into landfills each year.

According to the Container Recycling Institute, it takes 2,600 barrels of oil to produce 5 million one-liter plastic bottles, which adds about 295 metric tons of CO2 emissions to the atmosphere, according to the National Center for Policy Analysis. Recycling plastic (continued on page 2)
Petitioning for Green Presidential Candidate

Petitioning is underway for the Green Party of Virginia (GPVA) 2008 presidential candidate. Ten-thousand valid signatures are needed by August 22nd to get the GPVA presidential nominee on the ballot in time for the November 4, 2008 election. Petitioners are needed in every congressional district in the state.

To help out contact:

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Recycling (continued from page 1)

bottles saves 80% of the original energy costs of producing it, meaning that if Arlington recycled from its parks, then it could save about 235 metric tons of CO2 emissions each year. Armed with these alarming statistics (and the actual trash bags filled with the recyclables), members of the Arlington Green Party used the public comment period at the Arlington County Board meeting on October 13 to press the County to expand recycling opportunities in 2008 when the County’s current recycling contract is due to be renewed. Members of the Arlington Green Party are urging the County to institute a comprehensive recycling program for Arlington’s parks and schools, switch to a pay-as-you-throw trash disposal pricing system to reduce household waste and to encourage recycling and composting, and broaden curbside residential recycling to include additional plastics.

County Board Chair Paul Ferguson responded positively to the Green Party’s recycling initiative. Following the Green Party’s presentation, Mr. Ferguson said that he was certain County recycling efforts will be expanded next year and that County staff is currently looking into pay-as-you-throw trash disposal pricing.

The Arlington Green Party has decided to make the expansion of recycling one of its top two advocacy goals in 2008. It has already launched informal discussions with other environmentally-friendly Arlington-based organizations to explore joint opportunities for advocating for more recycling.

Apartments (continued from page 1)

were emptied and destroyed, and another 200 units likely to be eliminated in the near future. One can drive by North George Mason Drive and Henderson Road in Arlington and see the million-dollar townhouses being built on the land where nearly 90 apartments provided shelter to grandmothers, government workers, immigrants, families, and handicapped persons for nearly 70 years. Who will buy these million dollar townhouses in today’s glutted real estate market?

The Arlington County Government’s answer to developers’ elimination of moderate rental apartments may be summarized by the acronym MANASSAS (Move Your Ass Outa’ Here). The county government solution is to move tenants, humanely and with relocation assistance, to Prince William County’s City of Manassas.

The role of the Arlington County Government has been to facilitate the exodus of moderate income tenants by insuring that developers’ plans to demolish and gentrify are met with open arms. County officials claim that they are saving a few hundred units for people making over $50,000 yearly (for example in Buckingham Apartments), but in fact the county government refuses to use its considerable powers to halt the developers.

The County’s goal to preserve 400 units annually has not been met for years, and in any case, is totally inadequate to address the 13,000 units that disappeared in the past seven years. Meanwhile in 2006-07, the County cut $6 million in spending under the LPACAP program that would have gone to group homes and nonprofits to house vulnerable elders, and mentally and physically challenged, as well as some of the 450 homeless living on the streets in Arlington.

For this reason, the Green Party has endorsed the creation of a housing authority that will have the power and the financial means with which to halt development and demolition of the few remaining apartment complexes.

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Thank You Speakers

By Don Rouse

The Arlington Green Party regularly invites active community members to speak at our monthly meetings. Thank you to all our recent guest speakers!

Christian Dorsey, Executive Director of the Bonder and Amanda Johnson Community Development Corporation, spoke to us about the imperative of providing housing for middle and lower income people in our area, and what is needed to help bring that about.

Daniel Hayes, president of the Arlington Gay and Lesbian Alliance, addressed what is being done, and what may be done, to promote human/civil rights for the LGBT community as well as all citizens in Arlington.

Arlington Church Calls For $10m For Homeless

By Dana Thomson and John Reeder

The Green Party in Arlington has long been involved with affordable housing. John Reeder, a housing activist and member of the Green Party was interviewed about his work with a local church to expand affordable housing in Arlington.

According to the latest count of homeless individuals in Arlington in January 2007, there were 272 in county-funded and nonprofit organization shelters, but there were 190 individuals who were living in the open. There are additionally many invisible homeless or near homeless people in Arlington who need safe, affordable, and decent permanent shelter.

“Homelessness in Arlington is fueled by over-priced housing and mental illness,” states Reeder. In a letter this month, Arlington church Queen of Peace is calling on the county government to commit $10 million in funding toward emergency and transitional housing, counseling, and food assistance for the homeless.

Hunger in Arlington has been growing despite efforts of community groups and churches to donate canned and dry goods. The Arlington Food Assistance Center feeds 700 people monthly, and despite thousands of pounds of donations, its supplies are inadequate to handle the need.

Reeder explained that in 2006-07, the Arlington County Board cut $6 million in mental health programs aimed at creating permanent group homes and modified apartments for the mentally disabled, including the elderly, as well direct mental health programs for homeless people struggling with mentally illness. The cuts included up to 400 apartments for adults in group homes, 50 apartments in the Oak Springs apartments for elderly mentally ill, prescription drug assistance for the mentally ill, and counseling and social services.

Queen of Peace proposes the County Board restore the $6 million and provide an additional $3 million to Arlington homeless shelters and another $1 million to the Arlington food bank, AFAC. The letter insists, “the $10 million will be the first step in creating permanent housing and emergency homeless shelter for the many neglected in our community, and insuring that people have minimum food to live.”

The Arlington County Board is holding a public hearing on March 25th over its 2009 budget and plans to spend $1.1 billion for all county programs including public schools, fire, police, parks and recreation, and assistance to vulnerable and low income people in Arlington. The Arlington Green Party encourages you to attend the public hearing and support this request for $10 million to support the homeless, mentally ill, and elderly.
Arlington and Beyond: Virginians up in Arms about Dominion’s Proposed Wise County Coal Fired Plant

By Audrey Clement

On January 8, 2008 the State Corporation Commission (SCC) held a public hearing to consider Dominion Virginia Power's request to build a coal fired plant in Wise County, Virginia. At a cost to ratepayers of more than $1.6 billion including a 13.6 percent guaranteed profit for Dominion, this behemoth will spew forth 5.6 million tons of CO2 pollution annually.

Even if Dominion had demonstrated the need for this plant, opponents, including Sierra Club, Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN) and Virginia Conservation Network (VCN), claim that coal, as the most polluting source of electricity production, is not the way to go. Furthermore, the plant is going to be fueled by coal obtained from mountain top removal (MTF) strip mining operations. By some estimates MTF has already laid waste to twenty-five percent of the terrain of Wise County, Virginia.

Opponents also object to Dominion’s promise to explore the use of carbon capture technology at the plant, arguing that the utility plans to pass the R&D cost of the unproven technology onto ratepayers.

Nevertheless all of the officials who testified at the hearing supported the plant, including two Democrats out of three elected officials from the area. State Senator Phillip Puckett (D-S38) says the plant will bring 600-700 construction jobs and will be an economic win-win, because the state's recently enacted energy legislation requires it to use Virginia coal. Delegate Daniel Bowling (D-H03), an engineering professor, agreed with Puckett. He argued that if Dominion doesn't build the plant, West Virginia will meet Virginia's increasing energy demand from five additional coal fired plants now in the works and send their pollution here. Delegate Terry Kilgore (R-H01) argued that the plant will burn wood and waste coal from the "gob piles" of old strip mining operations, tons of which leach harmful acid into the soil and streams of Appalachia. Thus it will actually help to clean up the environment.

All the local officials who testified at the hearing want the plant too, because the area suffers from high unemployment, youth are leaving in droves, and the plant will create seventy-five permanent new jobs. But most of the common citizens who testified were opposed, citing the devastating health and environmental effects of the existing coal fired plants and the MTF operations that feed them.

Wise County resident Matthew Sutherland declared tearfully: "I live there. I've been hearing a lot of if's then's and maybe's. There are a lot of people who couldn't come today because they were sick. They asked me to come and speak for them... My family has been here 300 years. We have a birth right to these lands... I lost my mom and dad two years ago to black lung disease. We got a lifetime of pollution... This project amounts to a conspiracy to murder our children. This isn't about people. This is about money."

Sutherland's sentiments were echoed by Dudley Wilson of Scott County, who lives near the Clinch River downstream from the existing Carbo plant and is afflicted by atmospheric inversions which cause pollution to move downwind from the plant. He thinks Dominion’s plan is cynical. It doesn’t conserve. "Dominion had all the lights [in its building] on when I came in to Richmond last night... The plant will strip coal at an accelerated level. This is not in the inter-
est of ninety-nine percent of the public. This represents the continued abuse of the Appalachian region.”

RuthAnn Cooper, a Castlewood, Va. minister’s wife, predicted that the plant will bring more black lung disease, at will employment and desolate hills. “Heritage isn’t coal. Heritage is people.” She said: “I feel like a voice crying in the wilderness. My husband says: ‘If you do not answer to your constituents, you will answer to God.’”

Mark Hamilton of Scott County said he looked up the word “dominion” in the dictionary. “It means control, rule and domination. . . . “This plant will take one million gallons a day out of the Clinch River. Please stop the assault on Clinch River [known as a hot spot for ecological diversity]. Is it really okay for just one corporation to bid on a job? I find it very suspicious, and I frankly smell a rat.”

But Michael J. Quillen, CEO of Alpha Natural Resources, a coal operator in neighboring Washington County, looking dapper and lean in a three piece suit, answered all these objections saying that his company is a leading producer of coal in Virginia. Alpha provides fifteen hundred jobs, earns $100 million per year, and purchases $50 million per year in equipment and supplies. Quillen wants Alpha, which supplies coal to Dominion, to increase production by twenty percent to close the gap between in state demand and out of state imports. He vetoed the idea of eliminating coal fired plants, saying “We could eliminate traffic deaths, but giving up driving isn’t a solution.”

Quillen was countered by Cathy Selvedge, who lives in Wise, two miles south of the proposed plant. “Mr. Kiser [mayor of St. Paul, Va.] said 90% of the economic impact will be in St. Paul. We’re flat broke. Why are our streets not paved with gold if coal were the solution? . . . The initial estimate for this plant was $800 million. It has doubled to $1.6 billion. Burning gob piles will deliver toxic soup to our lungs. This will seal the fate of Wise County. Every time another mountain is buried forgoes another opportunity and seals our fate to poverty. Dominion has no solution other than pretty words, much like lipstick on a pig. These dinosaurs of coal plants are falling like dominos. Let’s not make Virginia one of the winners in a race to the bottom. What man has wrought, man must work to correct. Virginia must set her sail on a new energy policy. There are many opportunities to turn this ship around. You can’t replace the beauty of lush mountains that have been sacrificial lambs. But one man with courage can be a majority. I call upon that man to be Governor Kaine.”

Given the powerful alliance between the coal and power industries in southwest Virginia, the Wise County coal fired plant is probably a done deal at the SCC. But the hearing proved that grassroots opposition is strong, and environmental groups see the plant as a bellwether for halting the construction of new power plants in the region.

Regardless of how the SCC rules, there is likely to be a protracted court battle over its decision, and CCAN promises to lead the fight against the plant.
Yes, I would like to get involved with the Arlington Courthouse Greens. I'm interested in:

- Attending monthly meetings
- Receiving email and newsletter updates
- Organizing events
- Working on Green Party campaigns
- Joining the Green Party of Virginia and making a contribution*

Name: ________________________________________________________________________________
Address: ______________________________________________________________________________
City, State, Zip: ________________________________________________________________________
Phone: ________________________________________________________________________________
Email: ________________________________________________________________________________

Please return to: Arlington Green Party, c/o Kirit Mookerjee, 1201 N. Kensington St. #9, Arlington, VA 22205

* Federal law requires the Arlington Green Party to collect the name, address, occupation and employer from donors contributing more than $100 per year. Please include this information with your check. You must be at least 18 years of age in order to contribute. Contributions to the Arlington Green Party are not tax deductible.