

AHA request

Arlington Housing Authority: Request for ARPA funding

SUMMARY: Because of the current needs of Arlington's public housing (which serves over 1000 of our lowest income residents), the Arlington Housing Authority makes the following requests for ARPA funding:

CAPITAL FUNDING

1. REPLACEMENT WINDOWS for the 179 buildings units housing low-income families.
COST: over 4 million dollars
2. REPLACEMENT VAN for trips to medical appointments, grocery stores, and community events.
COST \$35,000.
3. WATERSAVING DISHWASHERS FOR DISABLED TENANTS demonstration project
COST \$12,000.
4. RAIN BARRELS AND RAISED GARDEN BEDS FOR SENIOR AND DISABLED TENANTS for community gardens.
COST Rain Barrels \$2000. Raised garden beds \$3000.

SERVICES

PART-TIME RESIDENTIAL SERVICE ADVISOR 18 hours a week \$30,000. Supplies and other related expenses. \$10,000.

Background:

The Arlington Housing Authority is the town's largest provider of affordable housing with 1096 tenants, 194 of them are children. Moreover, as public housing, it serves the lowest income population of those in need of housing. Last year, the average AHA rent charged was \$480. a month compared to the affordable housing described on the DPCD website which cited \$1000. Per month.

Public housing was built, first to meet the needs of Depression- era homeless people and of returning veterans after WW II, and then second, to meet the increasing need for affordable housing in the 1950s and 1960s. However, government funding for additional public housing and for maintenance/modernization began to dry up in the 1970s.

In a change in public policy, the government began subsidized the private sector to create new affordable housing. Consequently, less financing was available to maintain and modernize the existing public housing.

A retreat from supporting public housing (despite its commitment to the lowest income members of the population) has meant that public housing authorities now struggle to finance the necessary maintenance and modernization of buildings, already 40 to 70 years old.

The irony is that private developers of affordable housing in 30 years will require the same need for financing of capital improvements that public housing faces at this time.

The current challenge for public housing managers is to seek funding from various sources to cover major capital projects and stem further deterioration of the buildings that houses a growing low-income population. Only after the current emergency maintenance/modernization needs are met, can public housing create more much needed public housing.

Current needs for capital financing

1. Replacement of the windows in Menotomy Manor

There exists a critical need for the replacement of the all windows in the 179 family apartments at Menotomy Manor. No overall repairs on the original windows (installed in 1950,1952) have been done since the 1970s. While the records on these repairs are scant, the current situation of the windows suggests these 1970's repairs were superficial.

Residents complain that on a cold, windy day while sitting in their living rooms they feel as if they were sitting outside. Their attempts to block these drafts have proved futile since the windows are reported to leak "everywhere." I have noticed electric heaters in the apartments I have visited because I was told by the residents that on many days the heating system cannot heat the apartment adequately because of the drafts. An estimate for replacing the windows was over 4 million dollars.

Benefits of replacing the windows:

---These windows will reduce the cost of heating and cooling as much as 30 percent and maybe even more, considering the current poorly fitting windows.

---The low-income families in the 179 apartments pay their own heating costs and would realize a consider savings from more energy efficient windows.

---The more energy efficient windows will eliminate the cold drafts in winter and the escape of cool air from residents' cooling devices in the summer.

---Arlington Housing Authority residents who live in these 179 apartments have reported that more energy efficient windows are a high priority for them.

---Installing more energy efficient windows in these 179 apartments will support the town's initiatives to reduce carbon and reverse climate change. Old, leaky windows increase the carbon footprint and thus contribute to climate change.

---Installing more energy efficient windows supports the town's goal of valuing diversity in as it greatly improves the lives of a population of the low- income tenants in which 48 percent self-identify as non-white.

2. Replacement of the AHA van

Over a year ago, the AHA van broke down and is beyond repair. It has been a great loss to our residents who have depended on it to buy groceries, attend medical appointments, and participate in community programs.

At a recent AHA Board meeting at Drake Village testimonials revealed that the COA bus, a possible alternative, was inadequate to the needs of the over 7 senior and disabled residents. One of the residents, (who is properly licensed and drove the AHA bus is eager to do so again), listed a number of ways the AHA bus met the needs of AHA residents that the COA bus did not. One frequent complaint was the long wait both to make a reservation and to board the COA bus.

The other advantages of the AHA bus is that the AHA bus allows more time for shopping, more flexibility in choice of destination, and lower cost to the tenants (AHA has low-income tenants). For a ride to Market Basket and back, a senior would have to pay six dollars for each COA trip. To eat healthy, fresh vegetables which have a limited shelf life, a senior would have shop at least twice a week. The cost for travel then would be twelve dollars a week from the resident's food budget. The AHA bus in the past charged two dollars a ride.

Benefits of replacing the van:

- Many seniors do no longer drive and need the van service to access food and to attend medical appointments.
- Seniors benefit emotionally and medically from the social interaction and physical activities offered in the community.
- The van will reduce the need for parking spaces which are now in very short supply at all the residences and the parking spaces could be put to better use.
- The van will encourage seniors who no longer want to drive or should no longer be driving to give up their cars.
- Fewer cars will assist Arlington in its efforts to reduce carbon emissions.
- The AHA van furnishes a low- cost way to access fresh food from a supermarket and attend doctors' appointments.
- An electric van, if possible, would also support the town's efforts to reduce carbon emissions.
- Furnishes a job to an AHA tenant who is qualified to drive the van.
- The senior tenants cite the replacement of the van as one of their greatest needs.

3. Water-saving portable dishwashers for physically disabled AHA residents

A number of physically disabled AHA residents approached the AHA Board with a request for these new portable, water-saving dishwashers which would allow them to take care of their own needs and be more self-sufficient.

The purchase of twenty water-saving dishwashers would be a demonstration project in that it is a relatively, self-contained small-scale capital investment to try out an innovation. It aims at trying out in practice how a specific problem (how to facilitate an activity that physically disabled tenants find difficult and arduous) can be addressed in a new way.

These dishwashers can either be on wheels or sit on countertops. The counter top dishwasher, suitable for one person, use only 2 gallons of water while the portable dishwashers use only 3 gallons a load. Handwashing uses about 27 gallons of water.

Benefits of portable dishwashers

--- These dishwashers will enable those physically disabled AHA residents to clean, wash, and dry dishes with a minimum of physical movements and stamina.

--- The dishwashers save water, which will decrease the water bill to the housing authority and the overall water use to the town. These dishwashers use up to only 12 percent of the water used by handwashing the same number of dishes.

--- The water-saving portable dishwashers cost between \$400 (counter dishwasher). And \$800 (portable dishwasher), depending on the model. Twenty dishwashers (ten of each) would benefit twenty of our disabled residents and offer an opportunity to assess the benefits for future purchases.

--- The dishwashers will allow higher temperature water and thus reduce bacteria to immune suppressant tenants.

4. AHA Community Gardens

Community gardens in public housing have been flourishing all over the United States. For example, New York City supports over 700 public housing community gardens.

The benefits of community gardens researchers have determined include: giving residents access to fresh, healthy food, improving physical and mental health, and building community.

At AHA, the few gardens this year range from decorative ones with many different types of flowers and shrubs to vegetable gardens featuring fresh tomatoes, corn, cucumbers, peppers, to "hybrid" gardens where residents combine their favorite vegetables and flowers in the same plot.

The greatest development of community gardening occurred at Menotomy Manor (family housing). Although a few residents did plants flowers and vegetables in front of their buildings

in the past, they were not formally allowed. This year, residents are not only allowed gardens but are actively encouraged, and the number and size of gardens have increased. There are already plans for more gardens next year and a volunteer has created a webpage.

Gardening is not only popular at Menotomy Manor. At Winslow Towers, a senior residence, two women are known as “the flower ladies.” They plant and care for flowers surrounding the building, but there are no accessible gardens for tenants. At Cusack Terrace and Chestnut Manor, both senior residences, the tenants raise flowering plants and vegetables on the terraces, but there are also no accessible gardens. At Drake Village, also a senior residence, the tenants working with the property manager wrote (and were awarded) a one-time grant for constructing a raised accessible garden high enough to allow seniors and those in wheel chairs to garden.

These beginnings of Arlington Housing Authority community gardens emanate directly from the interest and enthusiasm of the residents for gardening.

However, lack of funding does not allow many of the residents to realize the full benefit from community gardening, benefits which go beyond the activity of raising flowers and vegetables. As one resident opined: “My garden gives me happiness and a community.”

Among the funding needs for the community gardens are:

--- Raised gardens in three of the senior building complexes that will be high enough so seniors and those in wheel chairs can garden.

--- Rain barrels for the gardens and for the installation of these rain barrels to rain spouts. They would furnish water for the gardens and reduce watering costs.

5. Part-time Resident Service Advisor for 18 hours a week

A great need exists for an additional Residential Service Advisor to connect AHA residents with public benefits, services, and programs, community and other government services to improve their lives.

Many AHA residents are eligible and in need of specific services but are unaware of their existence. Medical insurance, for example, has a complex array of programs and requirements which residents have difficult accessing without assistance. Moreover, the recent pandemic (which required of residents both face masks and vaccinations) revealed a gap in outreach services which could be filled by an additional resident Service Advisor.

The policy of deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals and the epidemic of drug use has resulted in many public housing tenants to be in need of medical and social services.

The state agency, DHCD, realizing the need for services of Residential Services Advisors for public housing residents last year made limited funding available to local housing authorities.

Arlington was awarded funding for a Residential Service Advisor for 18 hours a week, much less than it requested. While helpful, it does not meet the needs of the over one thousand AHA residents.

The AHA would like to expand these services by asking for funding for additional 18 hours of a Resident Service Advisor to be able meet the needs of all of its residents. One could specialize in family needs at the family buildings and the other advisor in senior and disabled people's needs in the four other smaller buildings.

The benefits of the Residential Service Advisor are among the following:

- Residents suffering from untreated mental issues could be made aware of available services.
- Children with school difficulties could be referred to agencies specializing in these difficulties and done in consultation with the public schools.
- The advisor could organize a specialist in public health issues, such as hoarding, to visit the buildings and work with various residents.
- The advisor could offer short-term crisis counselling until a referral could be made and accepted.
- The advisor could organize support groups among the tenants who need to overcome isolation and are in general in need of social support.
- Assistance in managing budgets and health insurance could be done on an individual and group basis.