



LEARNING TOGETHER TO
LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS AS OURSELVES

Casa Chirilagua
4109 Mount Vernon Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22305

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Planning Commission
City of Alexandria
301 King St.
Alexandria, VA 22314

To the Members of the Planning Commission of the City of Alexandria,

Casa Chirilagua is submitting this letter to express our deep concerns regarding the currently proposed in the Draft Arlandria Chirilagua Plan. This neighborhood is an incredible asset to the City of Alexandria. The changes that are coming to our city through Amazon's H2Q, the Virginia Tech Campus, and the proposals of new developers will negatively affect thousands of Latino families living in the Arlandria Chirilagua neighborhood if the recommendations of this plan are not adjusted to be more equitable and to prioritize the needs of current residents rather than future ones and developers. Our concerns are outlined below:

According to the existing rights for developers, the City of Alexandria already allows for housing developments to designate 8% of units towards affordable housing. Department of Planning and Zoning's Draft Arlandria Chirilagua Plan proposes for new housing developments to designate an additional 10% of units towards affordable housing should a housing development build beyond the current height limit. First, the affordable housing units in the allotted height are reserved for tenants who make 60% of the AMI level. Seventy percent of families who currently reside in Arlandria Chirilagua, the demographic we work closely with, do not make 60% of the AMI. For these families to afford to live in any new housing units, they would have to be made available at 30% to 40% AMI. While the units added beyond the allotted height would have 10% of units being deeply affordable at 50% to 40% AMI, this translates to an exceptionally low number of units for a large number of residents that would need access to them.

Secondly, a 10% trade-off of deeply affordable housing units for 90% of units to be offered at market rate will increase Arlandria Chirilagua's AMI and is not an equitable trade-off. How does only offering 10% of 'deeply affordable housing' at 40% to 50% AMI align with the City of Alexandria's initiative: ALL Alexandria - Achieving Racial and Social Equity *"Working toward a world where we are all embraced for who we are, and are able to thrive to reach our highest potential. Removing barriers to full participation and belonging in life and culture. Equity means promoting just and fair inclusion throughout our city, and creating the conditions in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential."*? This plan does not align with Alexandria's commitment to equity. The prioritization of the needs of current residents, not potential developers, or future residents, needs to be the explicit goal and purpose of this plan.



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Thirdly, allowing for the construction of taller buildings in a small and diverse neighborhood such as Arlandria Chirilagua will negatively impact the fabric and landscape of the community. If any new development is approved it would be better (however still not affordable to many in our community members) for the City to allow for builders to “build by rights”, restricting builders from constructing taller buildings and designating their required 8% of units as ‘affordable’ housing. We recommend including in the plan a restriction of taller buildings and having no net loss of affordable units at and below 40% AMI. If Alexandria is dedicated to preserving diverse communities such as Arlandria Chirilagua, it behooves the city to restrict development companies from constructing taller buildings and offering truly affordable housing at and below 40% AMI.

If the plan goes through as is, the Arlandria Chirilagua neighborhood will be an ideal location not only for new development but for the redevelopment of current residence buildings. There are few protections that would prevent current residents from eventually being priced out of their homes should properties like Presidential Greens or Eaton Square choose to redevelop. The plan should include specific guidelines and conditions under which property holders would be allowed to redevelop in the neighborhood. Items such as caps on rent increases, written prioritization of improved units for existing tenants, and written commitments on maintenance and upkeep should be requirements if existing properties are to be redeveloped. The plan should additionally include no net loss of affordable housing units, an increase in units at and below 40% AMI, and funding streams that current residents would have access to, should they require a subsidy to make the rent on the new home.

Planning meetings have also mentioned efforts to help increase homeownership amongst neighbors in Arlandria Chirilagua through tools such as finance classes, home ownership workshops, and more. The plan should include these tangible, specific examples backed by committed funding and explicit goals of how the city will support current residents of Arlandria Chirilagua to access new and redeveloped housing. Without the commitment of funding and written goals drafted alongside community members, these promises to support home ownership fall flat and lack accountability structures.

Casa Chirilagua has been building relationships with families for almost 15 years. Many of the families whom we’ve known and who have contributed to our community as leaders have since moved away due to displacement and gentrification and now reside in places such as Oxon Hill, Md. Arlandria Chirilagua isn’t simply a diverse community which the City of Alexandria needs to preserve, it is a community whose residents have incredible assets. Some of these assets include resilience, ingenuity, leadership, and entrepreneurship. Imagine how much more impactful Alexandria can be if instead of displacing residents who have powerful assets it chooses to invest in communities like Arlandria Chirilagua who have much to offer. The City of Alexandria will be at a significant loss if families and individuals continue to be displaced through the approval of the current Draft Arlandria Chirilagua Plan.

On behalf of the community and staff of Casa Chirilagua,

Adriana Gómez Schellhaas
Executive Director, Casa Chirilagua