

# Greene eyes growth

**By Megan Rowe**

*Daily Progress*

**April 27, 2006**

A proposed planned unit development could bring 600 new residents to the Stanardsville area.

If built, the 300- to 350-unit development, tentatively named Little Ledge, would be within walking distance of the town, where the most recent population estimate counted about 495 people.

The proposed 281-acre community stalled before the Greene County Planning Commission last week, but Nick Hahn, the county's former planning director who now works for Little Ledge LLC, said he plans to get more information about water, sewer and transportation issues and go before the commission again in June.

"This is common, particularly of projects of this size," Planning Commission Chairman Gary Lowe said. "Before you can make an informed decision, you've got to have the information in front of you."

Most of the units would be detached single-family houses that would sell for \$300,000 to \$400,000 each, Hahn said. There would also be a small number of townhouses, he added.

"I would not say anything less than [\$300,000]," Hahn said. "At the end of the day, I think it's more likely that it will be [\$400,000]."

The community would be built on privately owned property off of Spotswood Trail, Judges Road and Ford Avenue.

The county has preliminarily approved about 1,000 new lots since December, but most of those are in Ruckersville, Zoning Administrator Bart Svoboda said.

"From what they talk about, it's going to be the kind of family setting and income levels that have disposable income that would support businesses

coming to town,” said Don Pamerter, president of the Stanardsville Area Revitalization Program. “Because of its taxes, it comes closer to paying for the services it uses.”

Pamerter and Lowe said Little Ledge could help the town’s revitalization by helping fund grants. The revitalization program is aimed at improving the town’s safety and “walkability,” Pamerter said. The program also is geared to repair aging storefronts and bring in more specialty shops.

Hahn said Little Ledge would also have a “hospitality centerpiece,” which could be a hotel or a resort. “We haven’t narrowed that down,” he said. “That’s going to be based on market and appropriateness. ... [Little Ledge] tries to capitalize on something that hasn’t really occurred much in Greene, and that’s capitalizing on tourism.”

Stanardsville resident and Dollar General employee Tammy Sheler was dismayed that the housing wouldn’t be more affordable. “Hardworking people can’t afford \$325,000 homes,” she said. “I know I can’t.”

Greene County houses sold for a median price of \$271,250 in the first three months of this year, according to the Charlottesville Area Association of Realtors.

Greene County Economic Development Authority Director Dennis Jarvis acknowledged that affordable housing is needed but said communities like Little Ledge are in high demand. “That Northern Virginia swell is slowly making its way down 29,” he said.

Sheler said that the development would “make business boom through here. ... We get a lot of business now, but any increase in business is good.” Hahn also sees the proposed development as an opportunity to help the town’s aging water and sewer systems.

“We’ll know more about that in 30 days. Thirty to 60 days, really,” Hahn said. “It’s an existing problem in the town, and we think that this development can be part of the solution to it.”

Hahn said Little Ledge might build an oversized water tank on its property that the town or county could hook up to.

“Overall, if done correctly, I think it’s going to be a real [benefit] for Stanardsville and the Stanardsville area,” Lowe said. “That type of project, with that type of residents, it’s going to bring customers right here to Stanardsville.”

# Breaking Ground on New Homeless Shelter

Katherine Hanley Family Shelter will house single mothers, young children.

**By Bonnie Hobbs**  
*Connection Newspapers*  
**April 27, 2006**

At the Sunday, April 23 groundbreaking for the family shelter that will bear her name, Katherine K. "Kate" Hanley spoke of one of her fondest wishes.

"My dream is that someday, a young girl and her mother will be leaving the shelter, and the girl will ask her mother, 'Who was Katherine Hanley?'" said Hanley. "And her mother will answer, 'I don't have any idea, but she must have been someone who was part of a community that cared.'"

The 100 or so people attending the ceremony then rose and gave her a standing ovation. Hanley is the new secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia and a former chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

Acknowledging the county's three other homeless shelters — Robert Mondloch, Embrey Rucker and Eleanor Kennedy — she said each was named "for these role models and community builders, and I have a lot of work to do before I'm their equal. It's an incredible honor to have this shelter named after me. It will be a place where people can live in safety and harmony and with optimism for their children's future."

This new shelter will serve the western part of the county, providing temporary housing mainly for women and young children. The \$6.6 million facility is being constructed between the Hampton Forest and Stringfellow Road intersections on Route 29. By summer 2007, it will open its doors to 20 families (no more than 60 people at a time).

Adults staying there will be expected to go to work or prepare for and seek employment. Children will attend local schools or be in day care.

Transportation will be provided, and clients will receive case management, job training and other social services.

Currently, the wait to get into a county shelter is "between three and four months," said Belinda Busher, spokesperson for the county's Department of Family Services. So, said Kathy Froyd, also with that entity, "We're delighted [another shelter's being built]. This is an important part of our ending-homelessness effort."

Springfield District Planning Commissioner Pete Murphy called Sunday a "great day — the first in a series of great days. Today we're going to break ground; the next time we gather here, we'll be cutting a ribbon. And we're more than pleased to have this in the Springfield District. This home will provide a new beginning for families who need some assistance from the county and from their fellow man."

Jane Kornblut, chairman of the ad hoc committee of the Council on Homelessness, hopes that — in the future — this shelter would only be needed for emergencies because homelessness would no longer be a problem here and people would have "moved on to permanent homes."

But for now, she said, "It'll help homeless people out here stay in their own communities. You don't want to displace people from their community, particularly if they have children in school."

ALSO ATTENDING the groundbreaking were County Executive Tony Griffin, Board of Supervisors Chairman Gerry Connolly (D-At-large), Supervisors Elaine McConnell (R-Springfield), Penny Gross (D-Mason), Sharon Bulova (D-Braddock) and Linda Smyth (D-Providence), Dels. Ken Plum (D-36) and Dave Marsden (D-41), Planning Commissioners Jim Hart (At-large) and Ron Koch (Sully), county Fire Chief Michael Neuhard and police Capt. Amy Lubas, commander of the Fair Oaks District Station.

Taking the podium first, McConnell acknowledged all the people who "worked so hard to make this day happen." Among them were the members of Girl Scout Troop 4404, which meets at the Sully District Governmental Center, and which collected 1,500 books for the children who'll be in the new shelter.

Their leader, Robin Lynn of Centreville's Sully Station II community, said the girls did it for their silver award and hope to have a "long-term relationship" with the shelter, including activities such as story hours there.

They're still collecting new books, and anyone wishing to contribute may e-mail Lynn at robinl@nextel.blackberry.net. "The kids will be able to take the books with them when they leave the shelter," she said. "So we'll continually need to replenish them."

McConnell also thanked the Junior League, which has volunteered to decorate some of the rooms in the shelter; the neighbors who supported its location in their neighborhood — including Equity Homes, building the adjacent residential community; and the West Group, which proffered \$1 million.

"This facility will be an asset to this part of the county and a benefit to the mothers and young children who'll use it," said McConnell. Connolly said this shelter's been a long time coming. "This board made homelessness one of its priorities," he said. "We recently had a homelessness summit, and we want to end homelessness here within 10 years."

He said Fairfax County currently has 2,077 homeless people; 55 percent of them are in families and 724 are children. And 40 percent of the adults are employed.

Connolly said the county's Homeless Oversight Committee first recommended a fourth shelter in March 2000. It would be for temporary stays while staff worked to find the occupants permanent, affordable housing so they could get back on their feet and become productive.

"Someone who was a champion of this cause was Kate Hanley," said Connolly. "And the board later passed a unanimous resolution to name the shelter after her."

Hanley said that, although the board knew for quite some time that another shelter was needed, things didn't crystallize until spring 2002. At the time, the members were listening to citizens' and groups' funding priorities during county budget hearings.

"A lady came forward and said, 'These things are all important, but all of us here have a home to go to when this meeting is finished,'" said Hanley. "'Just imagine if you had nowhere to go and you had to sleep in your car, or shuttle from place to place and have your children change schools all the time.'"

Most people can find a job in Fairfax County, said Hanley, but it's much tougher finding an affordable home. "The community had been giving us advice [about this problem] for years, and it was time to finally take it," she said. So she made some calls and learned that the county's Housing Trust Fund contained some undesignated, unallocated funds.

"So I proposed we take \$1 million from it, plus the \$1 million West Group proffer and start a fourth shelter," she said. "The board [later] added to it and kept doing that."

Hanley then thanked the supervisors, Griffin and the faith community for their support, as well as McConnell "who inherited this project when the area was redistricted," and Supervisor Cathy Hudgins (D-Hunter Mill), chairman of the Board's housing subcommittee, "who supported using Housing Trust Fund dollars for it." She also thanked Connolly for explaining the project to the West Group "in terms they understood."

The supervisors presented Hanley with a photo plaque showing what the completed shelter will look like, and then Hanley and the other dignitaries grabbed shovels and scooped up the rich, brown dirt to officially kick off construction.

Also present was Jim Brigl, the new CEO of FACETS (Fairfax Area Christian Emergency & Transitional Services Inc.). For almost 18 years, FACETS has worked with homeless and low-income people in public housing, providing case management and referrals.

"We have 80 faith partners who provide almost 40,000 hot meals a year to homeless people in Fairfax County — people living in motels, in the woods and on the streets," he said. "And this winter, we led the effort with the county and 25 churches to provide shelter for homeless singles."

FACETS also works with families on the waiting list for shelters, helping them find schools for their children and jobs for themselves so they can become independent. That's why the new Kate Hanley Shelter will be such a valuable addition for them.

"This will give them an opportunity to move to a single place with a lot of services, instead of being disrupted and having to move from place to place," said Brigl.

## **\$3.2 Billion Spending Plan Approved**

Taxes will go up, the car decal tax will be nixed and the Board of Supervisors will enjoy a pay raise.

**By Brian McNeill**

*The Connection Newspapers*

**April 26, 2006**

In an effort to curtail steadily climbing property taxes, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted Monday to cut the county's real estate tax rate by 11 cents.

As part of next year's \$3.2 billion county budget, the new property tax rate of 89 cents per \$100 of a home's assessed value is the lowest in Fairfax County's history.

"We've struck another blow for tax relief for all our citizens," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Gerry Connolly (D).

The typical Fairfax County homeowner will still pay more in property taxes than last year. Thanks to double-digit assessment jumps across the county, the average homeowner will pay \$4,812 in property taxes this year — an increase of \$328.

The new tax rate is 4 cents lower than originally proposed by Fairfax County Executive Tony Griffin, reducing Griffin's budget request in January by \$120.4 million.

The Board also voted unanimously Monday to eliminate the county's car decal and its accompanying \$25 fee, resulting in an average annual savings of \$58 per household.

In order to afford the property tax rate reduction and elimination of the car decal tax, the Board of Supervisors decided to delay or cut funding for several components of Griffin's original budget request. Included among these cuts were \$7.5 million for bus shelter and bus stop enhancements, \$12.6 million for renovations at the Fairfax County court house, \$500,000 for signs welcoming visitors to the county and \$8 million for land acquisition for parks.

THE SUPERVISORS narrowly rejected Monday a proposal by Supervisor Michael Frey (R-Sully) to give 8,000 Fairfax County government employees a 1 percent cost-of-living adjustment at a cost of \$5.5 million, opting instead to spend \$750,000 to study the county's "Pay for Performance" system, which compensates workers based on evaluations.

"It might make some people feel good [to give all employees a 1 percent pay raise], but I don't know that the taxpayer would appreciate this approach," said Connolly.

Last month, hundreds of county employees filled the Fairfax County Government Center's auditorium during public hearings on the budget, many complaining that the compensation system is inequitable. The average pay raise for Fairfax County workers this year is 4.3 percent.

Shortly after denying the 1 percent across-the-board pay raise for Fairfax County government employees, the Board of Supervisors voted to give itself a 27 percent pay raise.

Under the motion approved Monday, the Board of Supervisors' pay will increase for the first time since 1998, rising from \$59,000 to \$75,000 starting Jan. 1, 2008.

OVERALL, the county's \$3.2 billion spending plan marks an increase of \$192.6 million, or 6.37 percent, over the previous year's budget. Roughly \$106 million, or 55 percent, of the budget growth is headed to the Fairfax County school system.

School Board Chairman Ilryong Moon (at large) applauded the Board of Supervisors for agreeing to send the school system an additional \$8 million to increase teacher pay and another \$8 million to help meet its academic achievement goals under the federal No Child Left Behind law.

"I'm happy they recognized we needed both pieces to be fully funded for us to move forward," Moon said.

The budget creates 156 new positions with the county's government, including 49 new workers with the police department and 40 new jobs with the fire department.

Preservation of affordable housing is again a major initiative in the county's spending plan. For the second year in a row, the Board voted to dedicate a penny of the property tax rate toward the county's Penny for Affordable Housing Fund. This year, a penny of the real estate tax is equal to \$21.9 million.

Supervisors turned down multiple requests from citizens and activists to dedicate a second penny toward the preservation of affordable housing.

Supervisor Sharon Bulova (D-Braddock) said doubling the funding was not realistic, but the county will probably allocate more funding for affordable housing preservation during quarterly budget reviews.

"While housing advocates requested a second cent be dedicated for this purpose, doing so would make tax relief — which also affects the affordability of housing — more difficult," Bulova said.

Next year's budget also dedicates a full penny of the real estate tax rate toward stormwater management projects.

THIS YEAR may be the beginning of the end for the massive home assessment increases, as Northern Virginia's real estate is beginning to cool off.

Supervisor Dana Kauffman (D-Lee) said the Board of Supervisors did not cut the real estate tax rate any deeper because of fears it would not sustain tax revenue in a weaker market.

"We cut the tax rate as deeply as we prudently could," he said. "We don't want to find ourselves in the position of having to raise taxes, should economic times soften."

But some residents are not satisfied with the 11-cent tax rate reduction, saying any tax increase is overly burdensome for homeowners.

"The problem is that these taxes keep going up year after year after year," said Jim Parmelee, a Republican activist who led an anti-tax protest outside the government center last month. "And what makes it worse is that these people who have continuously raised our taxes apparently want us to thank them for not raising taxes even further."

# City of Falls Church Tax Rate Set at \$1.01, Despite 2¢ Cut, Now Highest in N. Virginia

New Affordable Housing Funds in Next Budget

By **Nicholas F. Benton**  
*Falls-Church News Press*  
April 27 - May 3, 2006

It was all over but the shouting by the time the Falls Church City Council convened Monday to cast its final vote on the next fiscal year's budget. Only two citizens took advantage of the last opportunity to comment, and the Council rolled effortlessly through the agreements it had earlier reached to approve a \$67 million annual budget with a two-cent cut in the real estate tax rate to \$1.01 per \$100 assessed valuation. The vote was unanimous.

But even though the new tax rate marks a fourth straight year of cuts from a high of \$1.13, it has not matched the explosive rise in real estate values in the City over the last four years and is now considerably higher than the rate charged by any other jurisdiction in Northern Virginia.

Fairfax County's proposed rate is now at 93 cents, and with a 10 cent reduction voted Monday, Alexandria's is now at 81.5 cents. Arlington is at 81.8 cents, Loudoun at 89 cents, the City of Fairfax at 81 cents and Prince William County at 80.7 cents.

No one on the seven-member Falls Church City Council, however, felt it feasible to cut the rate below the \$1.01 mark, despite a 16% average increase in residential real estate values in the past year.

Almost two months of a careful "scrubbing" of the budget by the Council, the School Board and the City staff left them all without further options to cut the budget, short of slicing deeply into essential programs.

A major deterrent preventing a further reduction in the tax rate by the City was a stiff drop in the revenue stream from the City-owned water system. Used to extracting \$4.6 million annually as a "return on investment" from

operating the giant system that serves 120,000 Northern Virginia customers, the vast majority outside the City in Tysons Corner, McLean and Langley, the City takes only \$1.6 million this year.

That's because the reserves in the system have dropped dangerously low, City Manager Dan McKeever reported earlier this year, and even with a reduction in the annual take, the water system will require the floating of a \$1.5 million bond to cover its share of a costly clean-up project mandated for the Potomac River.

Drawing \$3 million less annually from the water fund translates into almost 10 cents on the residential tax rate, and some critics have asked why the City Council is unwilling to raise the rate it charges its customers for water to maintain the historic "return on investment" level. They argue that the City is effectively subsidizing its customers at the expense of Falls Church taxpayers.

But with so many customers in neighboring Fairfax County, the City is reluctant to raise its rates too quickly or by too much without creating a political firestorm. Under the Council's adopted plan, the water rate will not change from its current \$3.03 per 1,000 gallons rate.

Compared to the 10 cents difference the water revenues make in the new budget, the 10.48% increase in the school board's budget is small potatoes, especially the portion over the seven percent the school board had earlier promised it would hold to.

But the need to maintain the competitiveness of the City schools led to higher than expected salary increases, with state-mandated school contributions to the Virginia Retirement Fund also coming in much higher than in the past.

The Council had little difficulty accepting the school board's full request, noting that the outstanding reputation of the City's schools adds a 15-25% premium on the value of real estate here. Were that reputation to erode, the resulting decline in real estate values could be catastrophic for the City's operating budget.

Another major component of the FY06-07 budget, which kicks in on July 1, was the need to address the affordable housing crisis in the City. All 754 of

the City's currently affordable dwelling units are at risk of either being bulldozed for new development, or of being converted into high-priced condos.

The Council continued its annual \$75,000 to the Falls Church Housing Corporation, dedicated \$150,000 to hire its own staff professional and conduct a study on how best to retain or develop new affordable housing in the City, and voted \$2.15 million of its capital improvement plan (CIP) budget dedicated to acquiring or retaining affordable housing.

# 'Like a Needle in a Haystack'

Finding affordable and accessible housing remains more elusive than ever.

**By Jason Hartke**

*The Connection Newspapers*

**May 3, 2006**

When Stephanie Somers, 41, got word three weeks ago that she received an affordable housing voucher she said she felt like she was on “cloud nine,” her voice softening. “I had all that weight lifted off,” she said.

A week after hearing the good news about the voucher, Somers was grounded once again. “Don’t you know it, they call me back the very next week and said they ran out of funds,” said Somers. Loudoun County had withdrawn her voucher. “I’m back on the list, waiting again,” she said, calling the whole process “disheartening” and “maddening” but happy at least that she retained her place on the waiting list.

Somers, who lingered on a waiting list for three years, has endured what she calls “hurdle after hurdle” trying to find an affordable place to live. But for Somers, a Sterling resident, finding affordability was just half of the equation.

Twenty years ago, she discovered she had rheumatoid arthritis.

“It progressed slowly,” she said, sitting in an apartment she and her 72-year-old mother have trouble affording. Six years ago, the pain from the arthritis was too much, and she began using a wheelchair. And now Somers, 5 foot 8 inches and 100 pounds, who has seen her leg muscles atrophy, walks only for therapy not mobility, making everyday tasks seem like an obstacle course. Navigating narrow doorways, short distances to the grocery store or pharmacy, and through inclement weather can be daunting.

Somers needed to find accessible housing.

THERE ARE NO easy answers for people in Somers’ position, said Doris Ray, an affordable housing advocate.

In Fairfax County, according to disability services, one in eight people have some type of disability and one in four people on the waiting list for affordable housing have a family member with a disability living with them.

Ray, who helped found and now works with ENDependence Center of Northern Virginia (ECNV), a non-profit that works to give people with disabilities more independence, says finding affordable housing alone is a difficult task. But finding housing that is both affordable and accessible “is kind of like searching for a needle in a haystack,” said Ray.

Each locality screens applicants for eligibility under the Department of Housing and Urban Development rules. The local jurisdiction then applies local preferences and ranking to determine waiting list position. When an applicant's name comes to the top of the list, approved applicants are given a voucher, which entitles them to look for housing in the private market.

While helping numerous people look for affordable and accessible housing the past 12 years through her work with the ENDependence Center, Ray says people with disabilities, who are often “underemployed,” are often stuck in a Catch-22.

“A lot of affordable housing for low-income people is in older buildings, and frequently it’s those places that are going to accept [federal housing] vouchers,” said Ray. So if someone finds affordable housing, which is often at one of the older complexes, it rarely meets accessibility requirements.

“Therefore, a lot of people live in marginally accessible situations, which has been the trend forever,” said Ray.

Over and over again, she’s seen people with disabilities compromise accessibility for affordability, or worse. “I know several people who have ended up homeless because they couldn’t find affordable and accessible housing.”

LOCAL JURISDICTIONS have battled to preserve affordable housing, but face powerful market forces.

“Fairfax County is taking monumental, proactive steps to address this need with initiatives like the Affordable Housing Preservation Initiative and the purchase of Crescent Apartments in Reston, but the need for more affordable

housing units for families, individuals, the disabled and our elderly residents still remains,” said Kristina Norvell, director of Public Affairs, Fairfax County Department of Housing and Community Development.

With housing prices soaring the past several years, the housing crunch has hit more and more people. In 2005, the average home in Arlington and Fairfax counties eclipsed \$500,000. According to government officials throughout Northern Virginia, the average earning police officer, firefighter and public school teacher cannot afford to buy a home.

In Loudoun County two years ago, a family needed to earn \$44,650 — half the median income — to afford to buy or rent a home. At the time, one in six county residents earned less than that, according to the economic development office. Last month, the average single-family detached home in Loudoun cost \$573,632, the most recent period for which figures were available. The average price of a condominium was \$321,970.

For Fairfax County in March, a single-family home on average fetched \$585,503, the average condo \$318,231, according to the Metropolitan Residential Listing Service.

In Arlington County, to afford the rent of a one-bedroom apartment, a family would need to make \$41,600. To afford a two-bedroom apartment, a family would need to make \$47,840, according to the county.

BUT LOW-INCOME people continue to be hit the hardest, especially with the trend to convert apartments into condominiums, which creates even higher demand for the older apartment housing stock. “And typically, the older the housing stock, the more affordable it is, but the less accessible it is. And that’s where we have the mismatch,” said Jeannie Cummins, president of the Coalition for Housing Opportunities In the Community for Everyone (CHOICE), a private, nonprofit created in 2002.

In addition, while there is an obvious shortage of accessible housing for low-income people with disabilities, said Cummins, others are beginning to notice the shortage as well. Baby boomers, for instance, are finding that accessibility in their homes is a growing priority as they try to age in place.

Toward this end, CHOICE has also worked to influence a change in common practices in new construction, endorsing universal design. “There is

a misconception out there that building accessible housing [with universal design] is more expensive than regular housing,” said Cummins, adding that the use of universal design would prevent many future problems.

ACCESSIBLE HOUSING advocates also say that the enforcement of fair housing laws is inconsistent at best. “Some new buildings aren’t being built to code,” said Cummins. She then pointed out the settlement in last year’s Equal Rights Center and American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) lawsuit against Archstone-Smith.

The company, one of the nation's largest residential apartment developers, settled charges last June that its properties were not accessible to the people with physical disabilities and agreed to survey and, if needed, retrofit thousands of apartments in 71 buildings across the country, including Archstone Reston Landing and Arlington Courthouse Place, according to the AAPD Web page.

At the time, it was estimated that roughly 12,000 apartments would need to be surveyed and that modifications would exceed \$20 million. Archstone-Smith also agreed to pay \$1.4 million to the three disability organizations that filed the lawsuit — the Equal Rights Center, the American Association of People with Disabilities and the United Spinal Association.

# Housing market still strong for now

Economist sees little risk of bubble bursting in United States, locally

**BY CAROL HAZARD**

*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

**May 7, 2006**

More houses across the country are for sale than ever before.

Mortgage interest rates are rising.

Inflation is inching up, meaning everything -- including housing is getting more expensive.

Still, "a housing market bubble bursting nationwide is highly unlikely," said Lawrence Yun, senior forecast economist for the National Association of Realtors.

The chance of one in the Richmond area is even more remote, he said during a recent visit to Richmond. Yun spoke at a Real Estate Research Forum sponsored by the Virginia Association of Realtors.

"Housing prices are still relatively affordable in the Richmond area," he said.

The economist said he is "very comfortable" forecasting a 10 percent rise in prices here this year. "I would not be surprised if home prices in Richmond grow by 15 percent."

Wes Atiyeh, president of the Richmond Association of Realtors, said that might be optimistic. "My guess is we are just under 10 percent price appreciation." He agrees that no bursting bubble is in sight for this area.

Richmond, like much of the state, benefits from a strong job market and migration into the area.

"Virginia is in the top 10 markets in the country, with more people attracted to it than leaving," according to Yun. Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke and Northern Virginia, "are all performing very well," he said.

While everyone is concerned about a housing bubble, the Virginia/Maryland region has no large inventory of unsold new houses, according to a housing report released last week by Metrostudy, a Houston-based consulting business.

Northern Virginia's over-heated market could benefit other areas. Yun called it the "rolling boom." When one market takes off, demand moves into neighboring regions, he said.

The U.S. economy is creating jobs. Job growth in Virginia is outperforming the nation -- and new jobs keep housing bubbles away, Yun said.

Historically, mortgage interest rates are still favorable, he said.

Plus, the 3.19 million houses on the market nationwide can be absorbed by demand, he said. "It's definitely not a buyers' market."

It would take longer to sell all those houses than a year ago -- an average 5½ months instead of four. But it's manageable, and it does not imply an oversupply, Yun said.

Yun predicted mortgage interest rates will rise, but only modestly. Home sales will decline 6 percent nationally and price growth will slow to 6 percent, down from 13 percent a year ago.

Virginia sales are likely to drop by a larger amount -- about 10 percent -- due to slower growth in high-priced Northern Virginia, Yun said.

That said, the overall picture for housing is positive.

"Companies are reporting record profits. Investors are feeling comfortable. The U.S. economy is very healthy."

Still, all eyes are on rising oil prices.

"The economy so far has been able to absorb the higher oil prices," Yun said. "Sustained high oil prices will cut back on economic growth."

Oil prices reached a high of \$74 a barrel in the past couple of weeks. They were \$12 a barrel in 1998.

And just how will popular nontraditional mortgages play out over the next couple of years?

They were responsible in part for the sharp rise in housing prices, Yun said.

Interest-only mortgages put people into houses that cost 40 percent more than they could otherwise afford. "In San Francisco, 80 percent of new home buyers have taken out interest-only loans."

Home buyers might be in for sticker shock when new rates kick in and principal is added to interest payments.

That aside, housing should be OK in markets where jobs are being created.

A total of 2.1 million jobs were added to the U.S. economy in the past 12 months.

Phoenix, Washington, Los Angeles, New York, Las Vegas, Miami, Seattle and Chicago led the nation in job creation.

"A strong job market translates into more home-buying activity."

Cities on the job-loss list -- where housing is vulnerable or more likely to weaken -- are Detroit, Dayton, Rochester, Cleveland, Buffalo, Indianapolis and Pittsburgh.

# Delegate wants inquiry in apartment deaths

Action sought after 2 tenants were slain at Church Hill House

**BY JIM NOLAN**

*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

**May 5, 2006**

Richmond Del. Dwight Clinton Jones yesterday called for state and federal investigations of a government-subsidized East End apartment house where two residents have been slain in 10 months.

"Residents told us years and years ago somebody would get killed here," said Jones, standing in front of the five-story, 138-apartment Church Hill House at 2400 Burton St., where 78-year-old George "Squirrel" Fox was found dead with stab wounds in his apartment last week.

"We worked with the management over the course of the years asking them for the proper security, but nothing has been done to solve the problem we have here at the Church Hill House. . . .

"They are residents who are elderly and disabled and they deserve a safe place to live."

Fox's slaying was preceded in July by the slaying of 62-year-old James Garner, who was also found dead in his apartment by workers, having been stabbed and beaten on the head.

Robbery appears to have been the motive in both homicides. Police said neither case has been solved, and both investigations are ongoing.

Between Jan. 1 and April 26, the day Fox's body was found, Richmond police dispatched 116 units on 84 calls to Church Hill House, ranging from disorderly conduct to assault, noise and domestic trouble.

Jones, whose district includes the neighborhood where the house is located, was surrounded yesterday by several members of City Council, NAACP officials and black clergy leaders.

He called on Virginia Attorney General Bob McDonnell to investigate the operation of the aging building to make sure it complies with all codes and that the Virginia Housing Development Authority money it receives is being properly used.

Jones also called on the U.S. Attorney's Office to investigate Church Hill House, which is operated by Winn Management and operates as a Section 8 property.

Citing police statistics in recent years documenting crimes involving drugs and prostitution, the delegate called on the management company to kick out tenants who are believed to be breaking the law.

"It seems odd in a house that houses seniors that the kinds of things that happen here, do," he said.

Jones also said he wants management to hire what he called physical security. Currently the building has a security guard and cameras to monitor activity. Residents also must show proof of residency to enter and visitors must be signed in.

"We don't want rent-a-cops," said Jones. "We want off-duty policemen, armed, in this building, to deliver the kind of security that will make this place safe for the most vulnerable citizens in our community."

Church Hill House property manager Travis Henderson could not be reached for comment. Contacted after the Jones news conference, an assistant at Henderson's office said he had left the building for a meeting. Calls to his voice mail yesterday afternoon were not returned.

This week, Style magazine reported that Winn plans to spend \$700,000 in VHDA tax credits to upgrade security at Church Hill House and nearby Fairmount House. The improvements at Church Hill House are expected to include a new 16-camera security system, and be implemented in the next couple of months.

Jones said he has called for the investigations because he is tired of waiting for promised improvements.

"We can't stand to have any place in this city where two people are murdered in one building in one year," said Jones.