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Tysons Corner wants more people to call it home

By **Kafia A. Hosh**, Published: May 30

Fairfax County is reaching out to affordable housing builders, lenders and experts as it tries to draw more residents to Tysons Corner, a community centered around office buildings and shopping malls.

Part of the county's long-term plans for redeveloping Tysons includes ambitious affordable housing measures. Officials say new rules would allow young professionals and retail, hotel and restaurant workers to live near their jobs.

"If the plan did not include that kind of requirement . . . we would have people continuing to commute there from somewhere else," said Sharon S. Bulova (D), chairman of the county's Board of Supervisors.

Tysons draws millions of shoppers each year, and an estimated 100,000 people work there. But only 17,000 people call it home. County plans estimate Tysons could grow to 200,000 workers and 100,000 residents by 2050 as new developments rise around four Metro stations now under construction.

Real estate experts say a shortage of housing is one reason Tysons has had generally higher rents and home prices than other parts of the region.

An example can be found in the luxury rental market. In the first quarter of the year, rents for high-end apartments went up 15.8 percent in Tysons, according to the real estate analysis firm Delta Associates. The firm said the increase for the Washington region overall was 6.9 percent in the same time period.

The growth in rental prices is part of a regional trend, but in Tysons it is magnified because "there are not that many units delivering," said Grant Montgomery, vice president of Delta Associates. "It's supply and demand."

There are 8,943 residential units in Tysons, a vast majority of which are apartments and condos, according to Fairfax tax records.

Many people who work in Tysons have been priced out of living there or in nearby affluent neighborhoods of McLean and Vienna.

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The county requires that new developments in Tysons set aside 20 percent of units for buyers or renters with household incomes of \$51,350 to \$123,240, or 50 to 120 percent of Fairfax's median household income of \$102,700.

The 20 percent requirement is divided into five income tiers to include a wider spectrum of household incomes.

"The purpose of that is to make sure that you get some sort of diversity in your affordability, that you're not meeting your requirement by serving everyone at the upper level," said Michelle Krockner, the executive director of the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance.

However, after talking with housing lenders, county officials say that five income tiers may be too specific and could complicate the ability to rent or sell affordable housing units.

For example, an apartment complex owner who sets aside 20 percent of housing for affordable units could receive too many applicants in one income tier and too few in another, resulting in some vacant units.

"You run the risk of it being harder to fill the units, because again you're looking for a narrow band of applicants," said Fred Seldin, acting director of the Fairfax Department of Planning and Zoning.

"We'll have to explore" the tiers, he said. "This is part of a beginning discussion."

New housing in Tysons may come sooner rather than later, thanks to a reinvigorated rental market and the Metrorail extension. Residential builders are searching for development sites there in the hopes of teaming up with large landowners.

"They're all looking at Tysons as the hottest thing since sliced bread right now," said Thomas Fleury, executive vice president of Cityline partners, a Tysons developing firm.

The Silverwood Cos., a developer of low-rise affordable apartments in Arlington, is considering different properties to build in Tysons, though it has no plans yet.

"We've had discussions with a number of [land] owners," said Mark Silverwood, the company's president. "There's a great need for affordable housing in Tysons Corner."

Silverwood said his company is considering building six-story apartment complexes that would include affordable units.

The affordable housing rules may do little to encourage the redevelopment of existing properties for now. Owners of some of Tysons apartment complexes balked at the measures when they were being drafted by the county, arguing that they would make redevelopment too costly.

But for new residential projects, the rules could finally bring more mixed-income housing to the area, said Walter L. Alcorn, who chairs a Tysons-focused panel for the Fairfax Planning Commission.

"What I expect to see is that not all the multifamily rentals in Tysons will be priced up at the high end of the market," he said.