

Alexandria Group Endorses Mixed-Use Housing

By ELSA L. WALSH Washington Post Staff Writer

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The Alexandria Housing Coalition, after considering several proposals now before the city Housing Commission, has decided to endorse only one proposal for two public housing projects in the city. That plan would retain rental housing on part of the property while using some of the land for "income-producing" activities.

"It's the only one that will eventually allow us to be self-sufficient," coalition member Marjorie Shuman said, explaining why the coalition, a group of citizens representing tenant interests, rejected other options for the 90-unit John Roberts Homes and the 111-unit George Parker Homes.

Last month, the city Housing Commission, after nearly a year of

bitter debate over the future of the two projects, began considering several options for the properties, and apparently has narrowed the list to three, including the plan supported by the citizens' coalition. The three options mark the first time the commission has specifically outlined proposals for the 40-year-old units, located on land estimated by some housing officials to exceed \$12 million in value.

City housing Director Angus Olsen said the various options are being reviewed by the housing staff and will be presented to the Housing Commission at its meeting Aug. 31.

The selected plan theoretically does not need City Council approval, since the city Housing Authority, which is charged with overseeing the two projects, is an independent agency. However, some council members have said they would veto any zoning changes needed to imple-

ment plans if alternative housing is not provided for displaced tenants.

In addition to the plan favored by the coalition, the commission will consider two other plans at the Aug. 31 meeting. The first would combine private and public ownership of the properties. The plan would allow investors to buy part of the property and depreciate its value for tax benefits. The Housing Authority, which the commission oversees, would retain ownership of the remaining property.

The thrust of the plan, Olsen said, would be to use investors' money to continue operation of the projects while offering investors a substantial tax shelter. Preferably, Olsen said, most tenants could remain in their homes.

As in all the plans being considered, Olsen said, the specifics, including the relationship between the

authority and the investors and whether some residents would be forced to move, have yet to be worked out.

Also to be considered by the commission would be conversion of the units to federally subsidized Section 8 housing. Section 8 housing provides that tenants pay no more than 30 percent of their income for rent with the federal government paying the difference between residents' payments and the "fair market" rent.

A drawback of that plan, Olsen said, is that there are more units in the two projects than the city's current contract for Section 8 allows. Olsen said one way to overcome this problem would involve enlarging and combining some of the units. This, however, would require making a 20-year commitment to maintain some of the units as public housing, a move the commission has been trying to avoid.