

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

THE PROBLEM

In Charlottesville and Albemarle County, the average cost of preschool is more than rent. Over

250 at-risk & low-income families are unable to get their children into preschool every year due to these high costs, lack of available slots, and lack of full-day care to accommodate working parents. This means that more children are coming to Kindergarten not equipped to learn, widening the achievement gaps in Charlottesville and Albemarle County that are already two of the worst in Virginia. If our community wants to seriously address these gaps in our education system, we need to work to make sure that every child is given the chance to have a quality preschool education. One important step we can take now is to make sure that there are afterschool care options for pre-K students available to low-income families so that working full time will not conflict with enrolling children into pre-K. At our 2021 Nehemiah Action with the power of 1,221 people, we got Albemarle County School Board members to commit to support an afterschool pilot program that began August 2021.

WHAT WE WANT AT THE ACTION

We still have work to do in the City. City school officials have told us they are unsure if an afterschool care program is needed. We have heard from former parents and preschool teachers that this gap in care has been a barrier to enrollment, so we are asking city schools to do a needs assessment to ensure that the need for afterschool care is truly being met in the current arrangements.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS

6,600 families are one paycheck away from homelessness because they pay more than half their income toward housing. This problem has grown since the start of the pandemic. Four out of five of these families earn less than \$43,000 each year. Rents in the region have increased by 42% between 2011 and 2018, with residents experiencing a rent increase of 7% in 2017. In Albemarle County the affordability requirements for 445 units will expire within the next 10 years, leaving 445 families stranded. Seniors and people of color are affected at disproportionate rates. Zoning and land-use policies in Charlottesville with roots in the Jim Crow era, are pricing out lower income families. One in four Black homeowners have either moved or lost their homes between 2000 and 2018, while white homeownership has increased by 20%.

Our vision is to see HOUSING FOR ALL: Everyone needs an opportunity for safe, accessible and affordable housing. A bold step toward this is for the City, County and UVa to commit to solutions that will provide at least 3,000 new affordable homes by 2030.

WHAT WE WANT IN THE CITY

- Annual allocation of \$3 million in the Charlottesville Affordable Housing Fund (CAHF) starting in the upcoming (FY23) budget: The CAHF is the main tool for providing new, affordable homes in the City. Local experts estimate that \$3 million can yield 100 units each year. Over the average length of affordability, that equates to 600 families! If housing is a top priority, Council ought to set an annual funding goal that will never risk going unfunded, regardless of the economy. Currently \$925,000 is proposed for FY23
- Conduct a study to identify and dedicate income sources for CAHF: This is recommended as a best practice from the national Affordable Housing Trust Fund project, to ensure that it never goes unfunded. The new Housing Policy created by the Cville Plans Together steering committee suggests 8-10 possible income sources

WHAT WE WANT IN THE COUNTY

- Fully establish the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) with an ordinance: This is recommended as a best practice from the national Affordable Housing Trust Fund project. Staff currently doesn't plan to do this but it will provide transparency to tax payers and Supervisors for the following:
 - o Who it will serve and what eligible projects or programs it will fund
 - o The process for oversight and annual reporting back to the board
 - o Revenue sources and how funds are distributed
 - o Length of affordability of projects
- Conduct a study to identify and dedicate additional income sources for AHTF of at least \$5 million: This is recommended as a best practice from the national Affordable Housing Trust Fund project, to ensure that it never goes unfunded. Currently the only income source is developer proffers, voluntary payments to the County to mitigate the impact of their development. This is not enough and amounts vary too much year to year. Local experts estimate that \$5 million can yield 166 units each year. Over the average length of affordability, that equates to 996 families! We have secured commitments from 5 supervisors to support getting the fund to \$5mil for the upcoming budget. Staff recommends ongoing funding in 2-3 years but not all supervisors support an ongoing goal of \$5mil.
- Target 50% of funding for low income families: 80% of the county's families struggling with their housing make less than \$46,850 (50% AMI for a family of 4) yet staff do not plan on using the AHTF for these families! We want the fund to build homes for those that need it the most!

- **CARE FOR CREATION – TRANSPORTATION**

- **THE CLIMATE CRISIS**

- Climate change is a global problem that is already having many local effects such as worsening storms and heat waves in our area. Climate scientists have found that, to avoid the worst effects of climate change, we must cut carbon emissions in half by 2030. In our region, transportation is the single largest source of carbon emissions. Most of those emissions are caused by cars. For decades our leaders have deprioritized investments in public transit and have led us to a situation today where our community is now over reliant on cars. To meaningfully address climate change, improving our public transit system must be a priority.

- Right now, public transit in our community is unreliable and inefficient for people to use. The average wait time for a bus is over half an hour, which means that people cannot rely on the bus to get to work, medical appointments, or run daily errands. Across the country, the bus systems that are most well- used are those with frequent and reliable service. Most people who currently use the bus are low income and already face systemic challenges like the lack of affordable housing and low wages; having unreliable transportation is yet another hurdle towards being able to secure stable jobs and live stable lives. Reducing wait times ensures that people who rely on the bus can get to work and appointments on time and will make it easier for people to reduce their reliance on cars so that we can address climate change.

- In parts of the county, there is not regular transit. Those who live in more rural areas like Crozet, Scottsville and Esmont have to rely on scheduling JAUNT pick-ups a day in advance, or take a commuter bus that picks up once a day in the morning and returns in the evening. Many elderly and mobility impaired people are left with little options to get to midday appointments and need reliable transportation.

- **WHAT WE WANT IN THE CITY & COUNTY**

- To make sure that transit is a safe and reliable option, the top priority is to bring down wait times, and to do that the solution is straightforward: we need more bus drivers. Right now, Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT) has 59 drivers, and needs AT LEAST 30 more bus drivers to be fully staffed for 30 minute wait times on all routes, and 40 more to get down to 15 minute wait times.
- In the County, we want to see a commitment to a rural needs assessment. This is the first step towards providing more regular transit services to communities like Crozet, Scottsville and Esmont, and doing this needs assessment could allow for state and federal funding to cover much of the cost.
- Both Charlottesville & Albemarle County officials have said climate change is a top priority. If we want to be a community that is serious about this, we need to fully fund public transit and stop being over- dependent on cars.
- You can also take action now by signing onto this letter from the Community Climate Collaborative that IMPACT and other allies have signed onto:
- <https://c3climate.salsalabs.org/AccessibleCleanTransitACTonClimate/index.html>