

# F.C. Council Votes Preliminary Approval for Senior Affordable Housing Project

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At 12:12 am. this morning, the Falls Church City Council, four hours and 42 minutes after convening Monday night, gave a 6-1 preliminary approval for special exceptions permitting the development of a 66-unit senior affordable housing project at 350 S. Washington St. With the vote, the Council has complied with a tight timeline for the project to qualify for state tax credits and \$4 million in federal stimulus funds to construct a new building at the downtown site. Councilman Nader Baroukh cast the only negative vote.

However, Council members indicated that a number of outstanding issues need to be resolved, especially pertaining to easement and other issues with immediate neighbors to the site, in order for a final approval to be granted next month.

As the discussion of the issue propelled beyond the midnight hour, Rob Fosse, vice-president of the Community Builders, Inc., a non-profit teaming with the Falls Church Housing Corporation to build the project, became emotional in expressing his exasperation with the level of detail and conditions some on the Council were insisting upon. Measuring his words carefully, but clearly upset at Council comments such as "trust but verify," he said, "I am a little stunned." He was assured by Mayor Robin Gardner at that point that "it's not you, it's us" that are to blame for the hesitation, due to past disappointments. Then, prior to voting the preliminary "first reading" approval, Councilman Dan Maller said, "This is a remarkably good, even brilliant project."

Scaled back from earlier plans, the project if finally approved will be known as the Wilden Building in honor of the late, passionate proponent Bob Wilden. It will consist of a single, newly constructed building with 63 one-bedroom apartments and three two-bedroom ones, and 1,800 of commercial space dedicated to non-profit use. Neighbors to the 0.6 acre site took opposite views of it, with Tom Sauner, owner of one adjacent building, opposing it for impinging on and diminishing the value of his property, and Christopher Fey, executive director of Homestretch, Inc., the non-profit owner of the other building adjacent it, speaking in favor on grounds that it serves the less privileged population that his non-profit also serves.

"A budget is a moral document," Fey said. Foley added a quote from Martin Luther King to address the suggestion of some on the Council that a vote be delayed. "A dream deferred is a dream denied," he quoted from King, noting that failing to meet a late February deadline could risk the loss of \$4 million in federal funds.

Maller said he supported first reading approval of the project because, despite the ominous budgetary shortfall conditions facing the Council and the City, "We shouldn't just stop doing anything. We're here because we believe in the future."