

# Embattled Housing Nonprofit: 'We will continue'

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One of Washington's biggest affordable housing nonprofit groups is assuring its supporters, donors and volunteers that it is here to stay, despite its unsteady finances and debarment in Fairfax County.

The open letter, sent by Robert Pierre Johnson Housing Development Corp. on Monday, was meant to provide an update "in light of the recent elevated level of interest in RPJ Housing." The Washington Post ran a report Saturday detailing RPJ's financial troubles after the forced resignation of former executive Herbert J. Cooper-Levy, who Fairfax officials had accused of forging a zoning document used to apply for \$700,000 in local and state housing grants.

"We will continue to do whatever may be needed to operate in a fiscally prudent manner and to ensure that we can continue to serve those in need," read the letter from RPJ's executive director, Eric Bonetti.

## *Open Letter From RPJ Housing*

ARLINGTON, Va., July 12 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ --

To our friends, supporters, volunteers, partners, residents and other interested parties -

For over 100 days now, RPJ Housing has been managing through a challenging period in our organization's history, prompted by debarment of the organization by Fairfax County.

In the face of these challenges, we have kept a singular focus -- on delivering on our mission to provide a full range of affordable housing services. We have worked diligently with our partners -- government, corporate, faith organizations and individuals -- to continue delivering our mission and meeting the significant needs in our community. And we are thoroughly addressing the challenges of the current situation.

In light of the recent elevated level of interest in RPJ Housing, we would like to update you on our efforts to strengthen our organization and our ability to provide services to our friends and neighbors in Northern Virginia.

### *Fairfax County*

RPJ Housing has worked closely with Fairfax County to assist in the audit of our finances, and to reinforce our commitment to open, transparent business practices.

It is our understanding that the County did not find any evidence of wrongdoing other than the zoning-related allegations relating to our former executive director. And while we have not received a copy of the audit findings that were referenced in the recent Washington Post article, we have told the County that we are willing to discuss and address any issues that may be of concern.

Meanwhile, we are working diligently to address zoning issues at our Biscayne property. We recently completed phase one of the work under our agreement with the County and are on track to complete phase two of the work in a timely manner. We are excited about these changes and look forward to returning the Biscayne property to its original purpose of providing safe, decent, affordable housing to those in need.

### *RPJ Housing's Finances*

Both businesses and non-profits alike have been affected by the recession, and RPJ Housing is no exception. Indeed, the population we serve is the very population that tends to face issues of unemployment and under-employment when times get tough.

With 65% of RPJ Housing units rented by individuals whose incomes are 50% below the median income, many have had trouble paying their rents.

At the same time, demand for volunteer home repairs remains high at a time when in-kind contributions have fallen sharply, thus resulting in higher costs for RPJ Housing. In response, RPJ Housing has taken decisive actions to improve our financial posture, including reducing headcount and cutting costs across the board. We will continue to do whatever may be needed to operate in a fiscally prudent manner and to ensure that we can continue to serve those in need.

### *Volunteer Home Repairs*

Our volunteer home repair programs provide free home repairs to persons of limited means, with an emphasis on serving the elderly and disabled and enabling them to remain in their own homes.

While we have had to curtail volunteer home repairs in Fairfax County due to recent funding issues, we continue to provide services in Arlington and Falls Church. We are hopeful that we will be able to increase the services we provide to Fairfax County residents at some point in the future, and are working closely with our volunteers to plan the future of our volunteer home repair programs.

Meanwhile, we are planning for our annual Golf Tournament, which will be held in September and will raise money to support our volunteer home repair programs.

### *RPJ's Affordable Rental Properties*

RPJ Housing provides almost 400 affordable rental units across Northern Virginia. Our goal is to provide safe, decent homes that will contribute to the stability of the neighborhoods in which our properties are located. With this goal in mind, we have taken a number of steps to enhance quality of life for our residents, including:

- \* Increasing energy efficiency.
- \* Contracting for new building entrances at some properties.
- \* Re-roofing several buildings.
- \* Providing updated kitchen appliances.
- \* Adding off-duty police patrols.
- \* Adding landscaping to several properties in order to increase their curb appeal.

### *RPJ and the Future*

Founded more than 30 years ago by a minister in the National Capital Presbytery, RPJ Housing has a long and honorable history of service to our friends and neighbors across Northern Virginia. That history is far from over, and our service to the community will endure. We will continue to offer a range of affordable housing services, from volunteer home repairs, to affordable rental units, to homes for those living with disabilities and life-threatening illnesses.

As challenging as this time has been, one thing that RPJ Housing has learned is the passion, engagement and sheer volume of support for our mission in the community. We are deeply

humbled by the overwhelming support we have received from institutions and individuals during this time.

For all those who have taken the time to volunteer, who have helped us manage through this period, who have shared a kind word: thank you.

RPJ Housing was founded of the community, for the community. We are dedicated to continuing to do just that. We look forward to the future in faith, optimism, and a renewed commitment to serve our community.

Sincerely,  
Eric Bonetti  
Executive Director  
RPJ Housing