

# Wilden Senior Housing Project Suddenly Up for Grabs in F.C. Once Again

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Just when it looked like the City of Falls Church was finally going to push ahead with a senior affordable housing project, securing a 6-1 approval from the City Council just a few months ago, the fate of the Wilden House project is once again hanging in the balance. A special meeting of the F.C. City Council has been called for this Thursday night to determine whether or not an amendment to the agreement from the spring will be permitted.

A new reality since the spring, however, comes in the form of three new members of the Council, two of whom have joined with the new mayor (the lone 'no' vote in the spring) in expressing fundamental doubts about the plan, overall.

So now, a necessary amendment that many would argue should be something handled administratively, and not with need of a formal Council approval, has opened the door for a complete reversal of the overwhelming majority decision in the spring.

In short, the Falls Church Housing Corporation (FCHC) and its affordable housing development partner in the project, The Community Builders Inc., need to have City approval to tap \$1 million of the \$2 million loan approved last spring sooner than at first thought. The FCHC now needs a secure commitment to the first million by August 1 to help cement a complex financing arrangement that includes the new McKeever office building that will be built next door and that has been "joined at the hip" with the Wildren Project because its parking garage will provide the minimum parking requirements for the Wilden.

Deadlines are critical in the affordable housing business when federally-subsidized low interest tax credits are involved, as is the case here. With so much competition for the credits, meeting all deadlines is an imperative.

But now, new Mayor Nader Baroukh along with new Council members Ira Kaylin and Johannah Barry expressed grave concerns at the Council's regular business meeting tonight that they are being rushed to judgment at this Thursday's special meeting, and are demanding an overwhelming amount of information from the City staff. This is despite the extensive record that went into the years' long effort to get the Wilden project approved last spring.

The three all insisted tonight that the proposed amendment, and the commitment of \$1 million of the \$2 million loan now would introduce significant new risk to the City.

However, Councilman David Snyder said that while that is possible, it is also possible that the reverse is true, that by a Council action to torpedo the project now, it would increase risk to the City. A letter from The Community Builders also noted that the risk to the City was already significantly lowered because of the progress made to date on actually getting the project built, vastly increasing the certitude of the expected outcome.

Thursday's special meeting was called by Council members Robin Gardner and Ron Peppe under new rules adopted by the Council at its last meeting allowing for such a move. Had Gardner and

Peppe not acted to call the meeting, the matter would have been put over to the Council's next regular meeting on Aug. 9, well past the current deadline for the project.