

Despite protests from residents, city council approves Arlandria-Chirilagua redevelopment

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The Alexandria Times
December 18, 2011*



The Alexandria City Council voted 6-to-1 Saturday to approve two apartment and retail buildings in Arlandria despite protests from residents of the mostly immigrant, low-income community.

The six-story, 600,000-square-foot structures will replace Mt. Vernon Village Center, a low-lying 1950s-era strip mall on the 3800 block of Mount Vernon Avenue. With space for shops and restaurants on

the ground level, Arlandria Center will contain 478 apartments — 28 of which are considered “lower-income affordable housing,” according to a statement from City Hall.

In a city with a median household income of about \$80,000, that housing will be feasible for residents making about \$50,000 a year. Most of Arlandria’s residents make between \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year, according to Gabriel Rojo, executive director of Tenants and Workers United, a community organization based in the neighborhood.

The other 450 apartments will be affordable for the city’s workforce, like teachers and fire fighters, according to city officials. But the private developer, PMI, has not released an exact figure.

“Alexandria has been working hard to create more dedicated affordable housing units, so it was important to lock in these 28 lower-income, new affordable housing units for this neighborhood,” Alexandria Mayor Bill Euille said in a statement.

Arlandria residents and supporters packed City Hall in protest Saturday, telling elected officials they were not included in the planning process. Officials disagreed, pointing to several meetings held in the neighborhood since 2003.

Councilwoman Alicia Hughes was the lone dissenting vote.

City officials believe the redevelopment of Arlandria is necessary to improve the streetscape, safety and desirability of the area, while the opposition worries the move will gentrify the area by pricing out locals. Construction could start as early as next year.