



# ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Fairfax County

Program Title: Fair Ridge Shelter

Program Category: Health and Human Services

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Bryan Hill

Title: County Executive

Signature: 

DocuSigned by:

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## Executive Summary

The Fair Ridge Shelter provides safe, temporary housing for Fairfax County families experiencing homelessness. The Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (FCRHA) took advantage of an opportunity in the private commercial real estate market by purchasing a vacant extended stay hotel. Working with the Fairfax County Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, as well as other private and public partners, the hotel was converted into a temporary shelter for families experiencing homelessness in under eight months. Through relocating families to the Fair Ridge Shelter, the Embury Rucker Shelter in Fairfax County – where the guests had previously stayed- is now able to serve 76 single adults, an increase of 48 individuals from its previous capacity of 28.

## Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

### **A need to quickly improve and increase homelessness shelter capacity**

As Washington D.C.'s largest suburb, more than 1.3 million people call Fairfax County home. According to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), Fairfax County has the third-highest median household income in Virginia. At the same time, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Fairfax County [increased](#) by three percent (44 people) to 1,322 individuals, in 2025.

This economic duality has been documented by the [Northern Virginia Health Foundation](#), who found that “islands of disadvantage” (areas where residents face economic, educational, health, housing, and other challenges) persist throughout Fairfax County. Plainly stated, the County is not economically homogenous, and economically marginalized neighborhoods exist directly next to those with advantage. The pandemic exacerbated the differences and dramatically increased homelessness counts in 2021.

### **Providing people experiencing homelessness with safe, indoor accommodations**

Fairfax County has a series of modalities in place for people experiencing homelessness. In addition to operating six shelters, additional shelter space is made available through a [Hypothermia Prevention Program](#) during the winter months. Services are provided within existing shelters that serve single adults as well as in auxiliary programs that are administered in partnership with various faith communities throughout the County. Many of those who utilize the seasonal Hypothermia Prevention Program need to seek other means when it concludes on March 31 each year. While Fairfax County and its partners work with each Hypothermia Prevention Program client to find safe housing, many have limited options when shelters are at capacity.

### **Compassionate wind-down of outdoor encampments**

Across the U.S., people experiencing homelessness have created ‘encampments’ – makeshift, outdoor living communities, typically located on public land. In 2024, Fairfax County, with non-profit and public partners, compassionately wound-down one such

encampment and successfully relocated approximately 40 people to safe, indoor accommodations. Utilizing the template executed during the seasonal Hypothermia Prevention Program, the DHCD Office to Prevent and End Homelessness opened the Temporary Overnight Shelter.

While the compassionate wind-down was successful, Fairfax County and partners agreed the Temporary Overnight Shelter was just that - a *temporary* solution that would conclude on March 31, 2025, and a more permanent solution would need to be created by that time.

### **The Solution: The Fair Ridge Shelter**

In a mere eight months after the FCRHA's purchase of the extended stay hotel, the hotel was converted into an 80-plus unit facility for families experiencing homelessness and operational.

Located in a neighborhood with walkable access to grocery stores, health care, and public transit, the Fair Ridge Shelter provides temporary housing for families in need.

The initiative expanded shelter capacity even further as its opening enabled an existing shelter to more than double its service for single adults experiencing homelessness. It also increased shelter capacity at a critical seasonal moment: when the hypothermia prevention program ended.

The Fair Ridge Shelter was made possible through coordination with and commitment from many partners, including the DHCD's Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, community non-profits, and elected officials.

## How the Program Fulfilled the awards Criteria

Offer an innovative solution to a problem, situation or delivery of services.

**An extended stay hotel is transformed into a shelter for people experiencing homelessness in just eight months.**

At the direction of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, FCRHA purchased an extended stay hotel located in the Fair Ridge area of Fairfax County in August 2024 with the intent to explore renovating and repurposing the property as a homeless shelter. Acquiring a hotel with furnished units provided the opportunity for the new facility to become operational in a short period of time.

**Consistent purpose creates efficiencies**

Staff analyzed the potential project and found many efficiencies in converting the extended stay hotel into a shelter facility for people experiencing homelessness. These were presented to the Planning Commission, and, since there were so many similarities, they were able to approve the project with limited modifications:

- **Similar purpose:** The proposed use of the facility – temporary housing – is similar to its previous function: short-term lodging. The Fair Ridge Shelter is an emergency shelter (not permanent housing) for unhoused families whose onsite services include assistance finding permanent housing.
- **The location, character, and extent of the proposed facility were substantially in accord with the adopted Comprehensive Plan:**
  - **Location:** The Fair Ridge Shelter was determined to be in an appropriate location to provide additional shelter capacity. Through moving unhoused families currently living in scattered hotel sites or in Fairfax County's lone family shelter, Fairfax County created more space for single adults experiencing homelessness. To the south and west of the facility are two different neighborhood shopping centers with grocery stores, retail stores, and service uses within walking distance. At this location, individuals are able to take advantage of the shopping center proximity and potential employment opportunities without transportation barriers. In addition, the facility is near public transit and other County service agencies.
  - **Character:** The internal configuration of the existing building provides the necessary infrastructure for a family shelter and meets an immediate need that the County has identified. Greater use of the site will be achieved by utilizing an unused building that requires only minor modifications to meet its needs as a shelter.

- **Extent:** From a land-use analysis, the property largely functions as it did as an extended stay hotel. The physical structure of the building was not altered and there were no exterior or site changes to the property.
- **Cost Efficiency:** The adaptive reuse of the existing building is significantly lower than the cost of constructing a new shelter.
- **No traffic impact:** The staff report determined no significant impacts to traffic. In fact, staff found that conversion to a shelter would result in fewer vehicular trips compared to when the property served as an extended stay hotel.

### **Community engagement is paramount**

The Planning Commission hosted a community information session and a public hearing prior to green lighting the project. Community outreach continues as DHCD and its partners will bring together the community at an event in July to continue the conversation.

Promote intergovernmental cooperation and/or cooperation with local, state and federal entities and/or a private enterprise in addressing a problem or situation.

Many partners were involved in the creation of the Fair Ridge Shelter:

- **FCRHA:** Purchased the property, directed financing, planning, development, and its conversion into a homeless shelter.

- **DHCD's Office to Prevent and End Homelessness** : Manages and coordinates services to help people experiencing homelessness regain housing stability. The organization coordinated the partners and services for the Fair Ridge Shelter.
- **Fairfax County Board of Supervisors**: Backed by the political will of local elected officials. In fact, the Fair Ridge Shelter addresses multiple outcome areas of the [Fairfax Countywide Strategic Plan](#):
  - Effective and Efficient Government
  - Empowerment and Support for Residents Facing Vulnerability
  - Housing and Neighborhood Livability
- **Shelter House**: Non-profit partner who operates the Fair Ridge Shelter.
- **Fairfax-Falls Church Community Continuum of Care (CoC) Board**: Coordinates the implementation of the local housing and service system and identifies gaps in needs and services. The CoC amplified the need for additional shelter space among elected officials and the community.
- **Fairfax County Police Department, Fair Oaks Station**: Provided an important bridge to community engagement in the Fair Ridge Shelter neighborhood. The police have served as key communicators in addressing questions with surrounding businesses and residents.

Provide a model that other local governments may learn from or implement in their own localities.

### **Take advantage of marketplace opportunities to find efficiencies**

While a series of marketplace events occurred to create the Fair Ridge Shelter opportunity, it was the speed and efficiency with which Fairfax County and its partners acted that brought the shelter to fruition.

Speed and efficiency were possible because:

- **Consistent Purpose:** The purpose of the extended stay hotel and the shelter was consistent: short-term housing.
- **Staffing and Communication:** FCRHA staff were able to work closely with sister agencies on the transformation.
- **Model in Place:** Existing DHCD Office to Prevent and End Homelessness homeless shelters are operated by non-profit partners. Having this model already in place made it more efficient to identify and establish a partnership with the non-profit managing the Fair Ridge Shelter.
- **Political Support:** The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors committed itself to expanding homeless shelter capacity, resulting in the creation of the Fair Ridge Shelter.

## **Be creative**

The innovation of the Fair Ridge Shelter is not as ‘something new,’ rather, its innovation lies in its new purpose as ‘something reimagined.’ As the nation struggles with a homelessness crisis, reimagination of housing and services is critical. The Fair Ridge Shelter is customized to the unique need in Fairfax County:

- It is located in an area that had limited existing homeless services.
- It solves multiple needs at once by simultaneously expanding shelter capacity and providing services to help people get back on their feet.
- It took advantage of an opportunity on the private commercial real estate market.

**Tell how the program was carried out, including financing and staffing, and the program’s results.**

## **Funding:**

- \$14.5 million was the purchase price (includes all furniture, fixtures and equipment in the facility) and was paid for using non-local funds.
- \$4.1 million in federal funding via the earmark process is anticipated to support longer-term renovations.
- Appraised value: The currently unused southern portion of the 4.4 acre property may be able to support up to approximately 80 multi-family units, with potential

additional future land value of \$40,000 per unit. This future development potential was not a consideration of value for the appraised value of \$11.9 million.

**Staffing:** Guest services are provided by contractors on-site (Shelter House), including residential workers that monitor the space for safety and security and respond to guests' basic needs for food and other supplies 24 hours a day/seven days a week; case managers and housing locators that help guests find and secure permanent housing opportunities; and various supervisory staff.

**Impacts:**

- Additional capacity to shelter families experiencing homelessness: The Fair Ridge Shelter has more than 80 units.
- Additional capacity to shelter single adults: Through relocating families to the Fair Ridge Shelter, the Embury Rucker Shelter in Fairfax County – where the guests stayed previously - is now able to serve 76 single adults, an increase from the 28 it was able to host before.
- Greater ability to shelter people at the conclusion of Fairfax County's Hypothermia Prevention Program on March 31, 2025.
- Decreased use of scattered hotel sites to house families experiencing homelessness.