

New Report Analyzes Costs for Building Digital Equity

Providing internet access for 5,100 affordable apartments could cost \$4.7 million to \$6.2 million

May 12, 2022, Arlington, Va. — Today, AHC Inc., and the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH) released a report conducted by CTC Technology & Energy that analyzes how to equitably and efficiently connect local low-income residents in Arlington to the internet. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted inequities that have existed for years — particularly that many families, children, and seniors do not have access to reliable, affordable broadband options.

As the current health crisis has shifted many aspects of daily life online, the lack of affordable broadband significantly limits the ways families manage their health, finances, education, and job searches, as well as their options for building and maintaining social ties. In Arlington County, 16% of households do not have access to a fixed home broadband internet connection. Nearly three quarters of those households earn less than \$75,000 annually.

“The report’s findings will continue to inform Arlington County’s vision as we address the future of broadband in our community,” said Jack Belcher, Chief Information Officer of Arlington County.

“We will use this information to further Arlington’s digital equity goals of connectivity, access, education and training, as it relates to affordable housing and our residents,” said Claude Williamson, Director of the Department of Community Planning, Housing, and Development, which is leading the County’s digital equity efforts.

The report analyzed connectivity and construction data for 39 AHC and APAH affordable apartment communities of different sizes and types that provide homes for more than 5,100 families and individuals in Arlington. The total estimated capital cost to connect all the apartment communities surveyed in the report is estimated to be between \$4.7 million (for fiber to each floor, with Wi-Fi service to the units) and \$6.2 million (for fiber to each unit), or roughly \$925 to \$1,220 per unit. In addition to those capital costs, operating costs — which would include internet bandwidth — are estimated at approximately \$47,000 annually.

“Affordable, fast and reliable internet access is essential to navigate today’s world, from school and work to staying in touch with loved ones,” said Paul Bernard, AHC Inc. CEO. “AHC is proud to collaborate with local government and housing nonprofits to ensure community members, regardless of income level, have the tools they need to thrive.”

The design and cost estimates in this report are based on building connections to ConnectArlington, the county’s existing fiber network that links public buildings to the internet.

“We are thrilled to partner with AHC to progress toward our shared vision of increasing internet access in Arlington County,” Carmen Romero, President & CEO of APAH said. “This partnership represents our commitment to addressing the digital divide head-on. Now more than ever, communities need fast, reliable internet access to realize their full potential, whether at home, work, or school.”

About AHC Inc.

Founded in 1975, AHC Inc. is a nonprofit developer of affordable housing that provides quality homes and resident services for low-and moderate-income families. Based in Arlington, VA, AHC has developed more than 7,800 apartment units in 50+ properties in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. AHC's Resident Services program provides education and social services to more than 3,000 children, teens, adults, and seniors each year.

About Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH)

Founded in 1989, APAH now helps more than 2,000 households live in stable, secure, and affordable rental homes. APAH has 500 affordable apartments under construction and an additional 1,000 in its development pipeline. APAH was named one of the nation's Top 50 Affordable Housing Developers of 2019 by Affordable Housing Finance magazine. The organization was named 2021 Developer of the Year by HAND, the Housing Association of Nonprofit Developers.