**The Model**

**Background**

Arlington, Virginia is geographically one of the smallest counties in the United States, but is the 12th most densely populated county in the country. It has consistently been named one of the best places to live in America, but for many of its residents, Arlington increasingly becoming one of the worst.

 As Arlington becomes more populous, real estate prices sky rocket. Currently, the average price of a home in Arlington is almost $700,000, and prices and expected to continue to rise. In addition to the climbing prices of current apartments and homes, developers are knocking down market price properties in favor of high luxury developments. Long time Arlingtonians are being forced out of their homes and have dwindling alternatives within county lines.

 As a resident of Arlington for almost 20 years, I’ve witnessed the explosion of the housing market. My house is located in close proximity to a neighborhood that was once affordable, but now has become increasingly gentrified. What was once a unique and lively neighborhood has now turned into empty rows of luxury condos.

I’ve seen many students forced to uproot in the middle of their school year and relocated to a completely different school distract because their parents could not keep up with the outrageous housing prices. Many Arlington teachers and other public servants do not even live within county lines because their salaries do not sustain an “Arlington lifestyle”.

Many Arlingtonians don’t believe that this is a problem. The general attitude seems to be “if you can’t live here don’t” or “Arlington is not for freeloaders.” I would like to change the minds of those people and show them why affordable housing is necessary for maintaining the Arlington we know and love.

By 2020, almost all of market rate housing will disappear. Arlington prides itself on its vast diversity- both in income and ethnicity. If the county continues to push out affordable housing, that diversity, and what makes Arlington so great, will disappear.

**Proposed Solution**

The Arlington County Board has created an Affordable Housing Master Plan (AHMP) in an effort to ameliorate this issue. However, feedback from the public has been less than positive. The plan put forth by the County Board mandates that 17.7 percent of all housing in Arlington be market rate by 2040. It also outlines the areas in which these homes should be placed, typically in close proximity to major metropolitan neighborhoods and public transit like metro stations. The plan does not even mandate that these communities be placed in the top most expensive neighborhoods in the county.

Countywide elections will be held in November, and the vote will also feature approval of the AHMP. Currently, the general consensus of the constituents is to down vote this plan and continue to do nothing about market rate housing in Arlington. I would like to persuade these people vote for the plan and have created a model in order to do so.

**The Model**

I first begin my model with the current intended behavior- not voting for the AHMP. This behavior includes people who will vote against the plan as well as people who will not vote. Three things influence this behavior: belief about AHMP, perceived personal effect of AHMP and general apathy. In my model, I will discuss I will overcome these factors to change the opinions of my target population.

**False Beliefs**

After learning about the general consensus of the community, mostly through local online forums, I believe that incorrect assumptions are the root of much of this opposition to AHMP.When many people hear the phrase affordable or market rate housing, they immediately think of low-income housing. This is a little humorous because housing that true low-income families could actually afford has not existed in Arlington for at least 10 years. The goal of this plan is to create housing that is at market price, meaning not overly inflated by the real estate explosion that has been created in the Beltway bubble. The prices of these homes will more similar to the prices of homes in Arlington five or more years ago, when costs were not as inflated.

Another common rumor is that taxes will be significantly raised to pay for this project. This is also false because AHMP donates an extremely small amount of money to the project. The county will require building developers to create a certain number of affordable housing compounds, or sell a certain number of their properties at market prices. To enforce this, the county will refuse to issue building permits to real estate agents who do not comply. Being such a small county, Arlington also has more money than we need. The county has constructed several bus stops that cost over 1 million dollars last year, and the budget for this plan is much smaller.

The final incorrect assumption is about the people who will be living in these communities. It is often said that criminals and freeloaders are the types of people that live in this type of environment. However, most of the housing will be reserved for county workers such as teachers and government clerks who cannot afford to live in the town that they are paid by. Other eligible inhabitants include families who have lived in Arlington for many years or have at least one child attending Arlington Public Schools.

These negative assumptions are greatly influencing hoe people in my community think about this issue. People who have these beliefs are more likely not to vote for AHMP and the focus of my model is to correct them in order to have them vote in favor of the plan.

**Perceived Effect**

The next factor influencing this behavior is how people believe AHMP will affect them. Individuals who believe that their lives will be greatly affected and even disrupted by this plan are more likely to not be voting for it.

One of the perceived personal effects is the effect these communities will have on the real estate prices of adjacent properties. This will be much more of an influencing factor for those in close proximity of the affordable housing communities. Additionally, some people may live in a place that may be effected, but perceive little to no threat to the prices of their homes.

Another effect also applies most to those who live in close proximity. It is also thought that these communities will have greater crime rates that will spill into the adjacent neighborhoods. Homeowners or renters in the areas close to proposed affordable housing are also more likely to base their opinions on this issue because of how it may affect them.

**Educating the Public**

To change this behavior of not voting for the AHMP, I would like to begin by educating the public. I believe that many of these people who do not support the plan actually would if they were informed about the issue. Arlington County has already released a few PSA videos in hopes to accomplish this, but they could be better. These videos focus on a single demographic that is increasingly becoming the minority in Arlington- the elderly. These videos could be improved both by including more demographics and disproving many of the negative stereotypes that surround this issue. The videos should also look much more professional than they currently do and can be posted to the county website and social media sites.

In addition to these PSA videos, I would like to start a social media campaign. Much of the conversation about this issue has occurred on social media and I think that that would be the most effective way to educate the public. I would like to copy a model currently in use for promoting the Iran Deal. The White House has created a special twitter account, @TheIranDeal, to persuade public opinion. The twitter account tweets exclusively about the deal, often retweeting positive things that other users post. It invites the public to tweet their questions to the account and promotes positive rhetoric for the deal. Additionally, it also replies to individuals and organizations that tweet negative or incorrect fact about the deal in a pleasant manner. The account has over 32,000 followers and around a thousand tweets.

Although Arlington County already has a twitter handle and even a specific one for the Department of Community Planning, creating a new twitter account, @AtownMasterPlan, will allow all focus to be on the plan. Additionally, using #AHMPmyths to mark tweets about correcting false beliefs will allow information to be easily assessable. The public should also be encouraged to use this hashtag when addressing incorrect assumptions that they have used as well.

Accessibility to public forums is vital for this education strategy to work. Individuals on social media and active in community events will be exposed to more of the marketing efforts and are more likely to be influenced.

**Creating favorable opinions about AHMP**

Although I do believe that many people will have a favorable opinion about AHMP after being educated about it, there are a few who still may need persuading. To create favorable opinions about AHMP, I would like to continue using the twitter account, but increase the persuasive rhetoric used by it. Using the twitter account allows us to monitor the conversation and be the major drive of it. For many Arlington constituents, twitter is their main source of news. If this twitter account is the most vocal on social media about the AHMP, then it may become the main source of information for many.

County board members and other public figures would be inspired to retweet the @AtownMasterPlan as well as tweeting about the issue in general. The social media posts should include stories from individuals and families who would benefit from affordable housing, including teachers and long-time Arligtonians. These individuals should be urged to share these stories on their own accounts as well to promote the public to share their opinion about why affordable housing is important.

I would also make sure to highlight the low coast of this plan. I think that this is one of the most persuasive factors of AHMP and it will change minds if it is promoted correctly. In Arlington we are used to voting on lucrative projects and I think such a low budget project with such a large effect will be a welcomed change.

 Some individuals may be easier to convince than others, because of ingrained political beliefs. Certain people may be impossible to convince at all because of their strongly held beliefs, but with such a strong campaign, there should only be a few of these individuals.

**Persuading People to Vote**

Ideally, I would be able to persuade someone to become very passionate about this issue. Passion like that often pushes individuals to go out and vote and no incentive is needed to convince them. Although I believe strongly in my plan, creating that kind of passion is extremely difficult and I think that I will need to include incentives for most individuals to go out and vote.

When promoting the usual “get out and vote” rhetoric, the county should take special care to include the AHMP vote. Promoting this as a controversial issue will inspire many to vote in order for their voice to be heard or because they think they made decide the vote.

Resources affect people’s ability to vote. I would also highlight resources the county has for voting transportation and absentee voting. If easier voting is made, the more likely people will vote. Time and transportation are vital when voting, and there is a large percent of the population who may not have either. This is especially important when those who would benefit most from affordable housing and would be most likely to vote for it, are the ones lacking these resources.

 Through the use of social media campaigns to educate, persuade and create action, I think that I can change the minds of my community to vote for the AHMP. This issue means a lot to me and other members of my community, and I think that this strategy can create the same passion in other individuals that will enact change that improves the lives of others.