

Barriers to Improvement

Students identified several interconnected challenges that make it difficult for families to afford what they need and achieve greater financial stability. These pressures often build on one another and cannot be addressed through individual effort alone.

Costs Are Rising Faster Than Family Income

Students repeatedly described wages that do not keep pace with the cost of housing, food, healthcare, childcare, transportation, and other necessities. Even families with working adults may struggle to cover basic expenses or have little left after paying for housing.

"Jobs don't pay enough to support a family."

Basic-Needs Pressures Compound One Another

Students described families having to make difficult tradeoffs among rent, food, healthcare, utilities, transportation, and other necessities. One unexpected expense or loss of income can make an already difficult situation worse, while financial stress can affect housing stability, health, learning, and family wellbeing.

"With health care inflating year by year and the jobs paying lower and lower, it has become a nightmare to balance eating food and healthcare..."

Help Can Be Hard to Find, Navigate, or Qualify For

Students said assistance exists, but families do not always know what is available or how to access it. Complicated processes, eligibility requirements, language barriers, and stigma can discourage people from seeking support or prevent families from receiving help before they reach a crisis.

"People in need don't know what the City has available."

Systemic Problems Require System-Level Solutions

Students emphasized that families cannot simply budget their way out of high housing costs, low wages, unaffordable childcare and healthcare, or other structural pressures. Meaningful improvement requires coordinated policies, resources, and supports that reduce costs and strengthen families' economic stability.

"Poverty is expensive and breeds more poverty. The only way to escape is with money."



Youth Recommendations for Expanding Affordable Housing

Build More Affordable Homes

Build and preserve more affordable housing. Students recommended increasing public funding for affordable-housing construction, developing more city-owned, subsidized, and otherwise affordable units, preserving existing affordable homes, and requiring newly created units to remain affordable over the long term.

Sources: *Hawkins and Mobley, Housing Affordability in Alexandria, 2026; Michael G., Abdul S., and Mustafa K., Affordable Housing 2025; sortocruzsheilyn, Affordable Housing, 2025; Gonzales, Cost of Living, 2025; and Elyas, Cost of Living, 2025*

Include affordable homes in new developments. Students recommended using inclusionary zoning, promoting mixed-income housing, partnering with developers to reserve homes for low-income families, and offering developers incentives to include affordable units in new projects. They also called for more affordable housing to be included as Alexandria continues to develop.

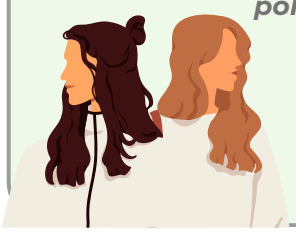
Sources: *Hawkins and Mobley, Housing Affordability in Alexandria, 2026; Michael G., Abdul S., and Mustafa K., Affordable Housing, 2025; sortocruzsheilyn, Affordable Housing 2025; Gonzales, Cost of Living, 2025; and Elyas, Cost of Living, 2025*

Make it easier to build affordable housing. Students recommended speeding up zoning and approval processes so affordable homes can be created more quickly. They also supported local policies that make it possible to develop more affordable housing in Alexandria.

Sources: *diazgerman, Affordable Housing, 2025; and sortocruzsheilyn, Affordable Housing, 2025*

"Virginia can provide more funding for affordable housing programs [and] support developers who build low-income housing... The City of Alexandria can expand on policies like inclusionary zoning ...preserving existing affordable housing while also creating more."

~ Kylie Hawkins and Taelor Mobley, 2026



Help Families Afford and Keep their Homes

Help families stay in their homes and avoid sudden housing cost increases. Students recommended rent control or rent stabilization to limit large rent increases, rental and utility assistance for low-income families, and property-tax relief. One student specifically recommended waiving condominium fees for people earning less than 30% of the area median income so unexpected increases do not make housing unaffordable or force people to move. Students also recommended expanding eviction-prevention efforts, rental assistance, utility assistance, and tenant protections so families receive help before losing their housing.

Sources: *Hawkins and Mobley, Housing Affordability in Alexandria, 2026; Morales & Furnari, Low-Income Rent Solutions, 2026; Fite, Silman & Romero, Cost of Living, 2026; Patrick, Equitable Rent, 2025; sortocruzsheilyn, Affordable Housing, 2025; Gonzales, Cost of Living, 2025; and Elyas, Cost of Living, 2025*

Expand housing support for families who are struggling to afford or keep their homes. Students recommended increasing funding for housing assistance and supportive housing programs, expanding rental support, and providing utility assistance to low-income families. They also identified legal-aid organizations as important resources for renters facing eviction or unfair housing practices

Sources: *Hawkins and Mobley, Housing Affordability in Alexandria, 2026; Michael G., Abdul S., and Mustafa K., Affordable Housing, 2025; sortocruzsheilyn, Affordable Housing by 2025; and Cost of Living, Elyas 2025*

"My other recommendation is to have rent controlled properties...so that rent increases and higher property fees won't force people to leave their homes because they don't have the money to pay it."

~ Sally Patrick, 2025

