

## Swine flu worries prompt record visits to local ERs

By Alan Suderman  
Examiner Staff Writer

A record number of patients have flooded some Washington-area hospitals fearing they have contracted the swine flu, but there had been no confirmed cases of the disease as of Tuesday afternoon.

Takoma Park's Washington Adventist Hospital has been averaging 20 extra emergency room patients a day since Friday, including a record-breaking 171 visitors Monday, according to a spokeswoman.

Many patients who were concerned they might have the swine flu complained of allergy symptoms, spokeswoman Lydia Parris said.

"There's a lot of pollen in the air right now," Parris said.

It was a similar scene at Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, which had a record-breaking day Sunday, largely because of allergy sufferers who thought they might have the swine flu, according to a spokeswoman.

Symptoms of swine flu include runny nose or nasal congestion, cough, sore throat and a fever higher than 100 degrees.

Two hospitals in suburban Virginia also saw an increase in ER visitors concerned about swine flu, according to a spokesman.

The virus has killed dozens in Mexico, has infected more than 60 in five states in the U.S. and has spread to several corners of the globe.

Hospital officials said that patients who are exhibiting flulike symptoms should try to consult with their personal physician before going to the emergency room.

Local governments have stepped up efforts to try to combat any potential outbreak of the disease, including establishing hot lines and starting public education campaigns to encourage people to wash their hands more often.

Metro officials said they were continuing a flu-season program of wiping down surfaces throughout the transit system with "hospital-grade disinfectant" because of the swine flu outbreak.

Metro trains and station equipment are disinfected daily, officials said, with buses disinfected at least every 14 days.

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### Flu tips

Protecting yourself and your children from the swine flu:

- » If you feel sick, stay home from work or school.
- » Wash your hands more often than you normally do or use alcohol-based sanitizers
- » Cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.
- » Call ahead if you need medical attention so providers can take necessary infection-control measures.

### Recognizing the symptoms:

- » Fever
- » Cough
- » Sore throat
- » Nasal congestion
- » Runny nose

## VIRGINIA » HOUSING

# Bureaucratic confusion stymies Fairfax plan to buy foreclosures

County effort to fix, resell blighted homes stalled by miscommunication

By William C. Flook  
Examiner Staff Writer

Bureaucratic confusion has stalled a Fairfax County plan to buy, revamp and sell dilapidated foreclosures that was approved and funded nearly a year ago.

Under the program, part of a broader initiative approved last summer to combat a mounting foreclosure crisis in Fairfax, the county government would have bought 10 of the most blighted homes in the hopes of eventually selling them to first-time homebuyers or nonprofits.

When then-Chairman Gerry Connolly rolled out the plan, he pitched it as a way to halt the crisis ripple effect on home values and to help middle-income families find affordable living space in the county.

Supervisors now say they're angry with county staff that the plan has gone nowhere. Much of the delay is because of a mix-up in which each group was waiting on the other to identify properties for purchase.

"It's extremely frustrating," said Dranesville District Supervisor John Foust, who worried the county has passed a window in which the program could be effective.

Sharon Bulova, who replaced Connolly this year as chairwoman, said the program should be in place by now.

Even those who questioned whether the small number of pur-



AP FILE  
Fairfax County supervisors say they're angry with county staff because a plan to buy, fix and resell foreclosed homes has gone nowhere.

chases could help the housing market faulted the county's housing department for inaction. Buying 10 homes is not going to "make or break our affordable housing problem" in a county of more than 1 million people, said Lee District Supervisor Jeff McKay.

"The more global issue here is our department of housing has not delivered on a promise that was made to the board and money that was approved," he added. "I never really felt like they got the 'sense of urgency' part in dealing with the foreclosure crisis."

Fairfax County had 1,566 active foreclosures in March, a number

that had decreased from the months before. Housing officials say that's the result of foreclosure moratoriums and a pickup in sales of starter homes.

The Department of Housing and Community Development recently put a bid on a Herndon home, but soon found out there were about a dozen other private bidders for the property, said John Payne, deputy director for real estate.

"The end result we were all seeking was to get the units occupied and get the units fixed up," said Mary Stevens, also a deputy director in the housing department.

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## Montgomery weighs reworking disability pay

Proposed measure would create two-tiered system for all county employees

By Alan Suderman  
Examiner Staff Writer

The Montgomery County Council is stuck on how to overhaul the county's disability pension system amid debates over whether to tie the payoff amount for hurt police officers to the severity of their injury.

Council President Phil Andrews, D-Gaithersburg/Rockville, who has co-sponsored legislation seeking more oversight into the disability pensions program, promised Tuesday that the council would vote on the issue next week.

The announcement came a day after County Executive Ike Leggett and the Fraternal Order of Police union failed to reach an agreement on disability pay after months of effort.

Currently, police officers injured in the line of duty who receive disability pay receive about two-thirds of their salary in a tax-free pension,

regardless of the nature of their injury. A report by the county's inspector general found that half of the police who retired in a three-year period qualified for disability pay, including some who went on to work physically demanding jobs.

In the last 24 years, 40 percent of officers have retired claiming a disability, according to the Fraternal Order of Police.

The proposed legislation would institute a two-tiered disability pay for all county employees: One for partially injured workers that would pay pensions at 52.5 percent of an employee's salary, and one for fully injured employees, who would receive 70 percent.

County council staff said the majority of police officers who receive disability pay suffered from orthopedic injuries that would be considered partial disability, and the county would save between \$1 million and \$2.8 million a year by switching to a two-tiered system.

Andrews said the two-tiered system, which is modeled on the disability pay system for county firefighters, "makes intuitive sense" because it pays less money to hurt police officers who are still able to

find substantial employment despite their injuries and more money to officers who are totally incapacitated.

"It's hard to make a case against a two-tiered system," Andrews said.

The police union has argued against the proposed changes and said the county's firefighters agreed to a two-tier system in "exchange for significant pension benefit improvements."

Councilman Mike Knapp, D-Upcounty, said he hadn't heard a compelling reason why the system should be changed.

"It doesn't appear to be addressing a specific problem," he said.

The proposed legislation also would change how the county determines whether an employee has been disabled, including requiring an independent medical examination for disability cases.

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## THE 3-MINUTE INTERVIEW

Colin Dixon

As director of Phoenix Bikes, an Arlington County-based youth development project, Dixon works with middle and high schoolers to teach them business skills while they learn how to fix and sell bikes. The group is celebrating its second anniversary Thursday with a bike show that promises to include bike-blended smoothies. For information, go to phoenixbikes.org.



### How many kids work in the program?

Since 2007, we've had about 120 kids register. About half of those have earned bikes with us. And probably on any given day there are three to 12 kids in the shop.

### How many bikes do you all fix each year?

We've recycled over 250 since we opened, which at this point is just under two years. Most of those go to bike sales that we sell for an average price of around \$80 to people in the community, as well as people all over D.C. since we're the only official used bike shop. And then a lot of them go to the kids, as well, that they earn through the program.

### How many bikes do you personally own?

Let's see, four and a half. That means I own a bike that I commute on. A bike that I go on long rides on. A bike for just going down the block ... a touring bike. And a tandem. I only own half the tandem.

### How do you blend smoothies with bikes?

Basically it's just going to be a blender that is attached to the back of a bike. Instead of a motor, it's going to have a little piece that goes down and connects to the wheel, and that's what drives the blender.

### What will be shown in the upcoming bike show?

We gathered nominations and had some judges from the cycling community pick out 10 people we are going to profile as extraordinary cyclists; people who have shown dedication to cycling but, more significantly, have made an important contribution to the community around them and/or to the bicycling community.

—Kytja Weir

## VDOT lays off 230 hourly workers

The Virginia Department of Transportation said Tuesday that it began notifying 230 hourly workers that their employment will end June 6 as the agency moves to reduce staffing costs. The cuts are one element of VDOT's plan to address a \$2.6 billion shortfall in transportation revenues over the next six years. The agency announced in February that it wanted to cut staffing levels by 1,000 full-time employees and 450 wage staff over the next 18 months. As of Jan. 1, VDOT employed nearly 600 hourly employees and approximately 8,400 full-time, salaried employees. "The reality of our budget shortfall means that we have to prioritize spending on safety-related projects and to maintain our existing highways," VDOT commissioner David S. Ekern said in a news release.

—Examiner staff writer

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