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# SEVERNA PARK VOICE

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY SINCE 1981

SEVERNA PARK, MD

SEPTEMBER 2022

## St. Martin's Volunteers Assist Afghan Refugees



By Diana Love

**A**ugust 2021 marked yet another crisis in Afghanistan. The country has suffered invasion, war and devastation for decades. This time, the Taliban — a nationalist movement that grew into a significant revolutionary group and political organization - returned to the country in force.

In an aggressive move to usurp the internationally backed Afghan government, Taliban forces bulldozed across the countryside, quickly reaching the country's capital of Kabul. As the insurgency swept in, Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, fled out. With him fled thousands of others. Political dissidents, employees of American companies and government agencies, human rights defenders, and vocal supporters of the American mission rushed to exit Afghanistan.

The United States recognized a responsibility to assist and support people fleeing Afghanistan because those people had worked for the United

States government or otherwise supported U.S. efforts in the country. President Joe Biden's administration ultimately approved temporary refugee status for about 76,000 people.

Maryland received over 2,000 refugees who were placed throughout the state. Two-hundred refugees, including 40 families, were placed in two Anne Arundel County hotels.

The government's financial commitments to the refugees ended 90 days after entry to the United States. After that time, the refugees became responsible for supporting themselves and their families. Many struggled to find housing they could afford, jobs, entry to the school system, and access to health care. As the government reduced its initial support, nonprofit organizations stepped up. Giving Back, Linda's Legacy identified the immediate needs of the refugees and set up a network of assistance.

Dawn Major heard about the influx of refugees at a presentation by

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## County Council Examines Cluster Development Definition

**Editor's Note:** The *Severna Park Voice* went to print before the county council meeting on September 6. Follow the *Voice* online or visit [www.aacounty.org](http://www.aacounty.org) to keep track of Bill 73-22.

remaining land for a neighborhood common area or other environmental features.

But sometimes houses are clustered together without preserving the land. That is an issue District 5 Councilwoman Amanda Fiedler hopes to change. Fiedler sponsored Bill 73-22, which was discussed by the seven-member Anne Arundel County Council on September 6, after the *Severna Park Voice* went to print.

"The intent is to fully capture the intended outcome of 'cluster development' by expanding the definition to include the elements of conservation and preservation of natural features etc. that cluster development is intended to produce," Fiedler said. "Without those, a proposed development would not fit the definition and thus should not be able to use the flexible lot sizes clustered together."

Fiedler said she spent more than two



*This example of cluster development done correctly was shared during a council work session.*

- R-2 Cluster Subdivision
- 13.24 Acres
- Density:
  - 19 Single Family lots planned
  - 31 Single Family lots permitted
- Open Space Area
  - Required: 3.97 AC (30%)
  - Provided: 6.89 AC
  - 2.92 AC more than required or 22%
- Active Recreation Area
  - Required: .218 AC
  - Provided: .24 AC

space. That's the intent: to have flexibility in lot design, but

modifications have been given in some cases, taking away those open spaces or recreational spaces," Fiedler said.

"I'm changing the approach to chip away at this area of the code," Fiedler said. "We are starting with an update to the definition and will see where it goes. This bill is active for two more meetings ... I don't believe we will solve the cluster problem entirely in this term."

County Executive Stuart Pittman did not respond to a request for comment.

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## St. Martin's Volunteers Assist Afghan Refugees



*Volunteers of all ages at St. Martin's have been collecting items and packing welcome boxes for refugee families.*

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Jeanette Sudano of Giving Back, Linda's Legacy. She felt moved to help.

"The presentation was extraordinary and incredibly inspiring," Major said. "It showed how desperate the situation was. You couldn't walk out of it without saying, 'What can I do to help?'"

Linda's Legacy assistance relies in part on creating circles of giving and sponsorship. Friends, neighbors, coworkers, congregants of churches, and other groups of people join to sponsor an individual or family in a multitude of ways. Major's family built a sponsorship circle by reaching out to their friends for time, treasure and prayers.

“

*It is sometimes hard for us, when people seem to be so different from us, to recognize the sameness in us all. It's a call to our humanity. [The Afghan refugees] just want a safe place for their children to be happy and healthy, with a roof over their head. That's all any parent wants, and we are called to help.”*

— DAWN MAJOR

Fifty welcome boxes were assembled and distributed. The family's church, St. Martin's-in-the-Field Episcopal Church in Severna Park, gathered household items, furniture, personal hygiene products and money for the refugees.

Kathy Berge is another member of the St. Martin's-in-the-Field Episcopal Church community. When she heard about the Afghan refugee crisis, she first contacted Global Relief, an international organization. Ultimately, Berge visited several refugee families located in Prince George's County. What she found was astonishing.

"I met a pregnant woman who was bleeding and needed immediate medical attention; children who needed major dental care but had no insurance; families who were living in an unfurnished attic apartment with no air conditioning because it was all they could find or afford," Berge said.

Both women have spent hours and days connecting refugees to medical care, English language lessons, immigration assistance, schools, and professionals in the community who are willing to help for free. Unfortunately, many Afghan refugees, even those with advanced education

and professional titles, have struggled to find jobs in America. Many find entry-level positions that barely pay the rent and don't include insurance benefits.

Helping the Afghan families in Anne Arundel County has been a transformational experience for both Major and Berge.

"It is emotional and inspirational to watch people who lost everything, who have led successful, productive, and happy lives but left behind homes, families, and jobs without flinching to protect their children and offer them a better life," Major said.

Berge said, "It is a joy and privilege to help in any way possible."

To see pregnant women with no medical care, the struggle of learning a new language, or even just women learning how to read and write, to watch the appreciation for all the freedoms Americans enjoy in the United States, is truly humbling.

The need to assist local Afghan families continues. According to Berge, that help doesn't have to be time-consuming or expensive. For example, two young girls were enamored with the idea of petting

horses. Under Taliban rules, girls are not allowed to touch the animals. Berge is setting up the sisters with a visit to a local farm.

"It only takes a couple of hours out of your whole year, and you've provided someone with joy," she said.

Consider volunteering to help teach English and language skills. Many classes are full, yet the refugees are desperate to learn how to speak. Anyone who wants to help can make phone calls to doctors, teachers, and other specialists on behalf of families or help fill out paperwork. An overriding issue is finding jobs. Berge calls on business owners and leaders to simply take a chance. Many refugees are well educated and willing to work hard for their families.

"If you are a business owner, even if [the refugee] doesn't speak the language, you could make accommodations for that," she said.

For those who can't donate time or treasure, consider donating financially through a church or Giving Back, Linda's Legacy, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The donation may be tax-deductible.

"We help because it is what Jesus calls us to do," said the Rev. Nathan Erdman, associate rector and chaplain at St. Martin's-in-the-Field. "So much of Jesus' teaching and ministry was about serving those in need. We are so blessed to have a vibrant outreach and service team at St. Martin's. Our members have such a heart for service. I am so grateful that our wonderful team saw this need in our community and responded with compassion."

# Our patients say it best:



*"I appreciated the pleasant atmosphere and the expertise and professionalism of everyone I came in contact with. Everything was as close to perfect as it could be."*

- Era P.



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