

# SFDC Hosts Discussion of Area Housing Affordability

By **EDYTHE KELLEHER**  
Executive Director, SFDC

Last Wednesday evening, about 50 local residents attended a conversation on housing affordability hosted by the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation. The speakers were Tom Fleetwood, Director of Fairfax County's Department of Housing and Community Development, David Levine, President/CEO of Good Shepherd Housing, and Kyle Talente, Economist/Principal at RKG Associates (and former President of SFDC).

Fleetwood and Levine began from the premise that housing is a platform for family and individual well-being. It benefits the community because appropriate housing leads to better performance at work and school, more potential for upward mobility, and economic growth as more spending money is available.

Talente pointed out that a variety of housing types will allow an in-



The panel from left, Tom Fleetwood, David Levine and Kyle Talente address the SFDC.

dividual to live in one community through all his/her life phases, and especially to age in place.

"Affordable" is the ability to pay within one's financial means. Tal-

ente said that he prefers the term "appropriately priced," because affordability is relative to income. The usual standard is spending no more than 30% of one's

gross monthly income on housing costs.

All the speakers agreed that rents and home prices have risen faster than household incomes in the

past several years, and they provided very similar dollar amounts. The average 2015 rent in Fairfax County was \$1,764, requiring an income of \$70,560. Most public-sector workers cannot afford to live here; starting teacher pay is \$47,046, police officers make \$50,264, and public health nurses \$51,254.

Many private sector job salaries are also too low; about 45% of all jobs in the county pay less than \$50,000.

According to Talente, demand is substantially greater than supply for price points up to 80% of Area Median Income (AMI), which is about \$112,000 for a family of four in Fairfax County. All three speakers described the inherent difficulties of building lower-rent housing, as construction and operating costs are the same, but the income stream is less. The deals don't "pencil out."

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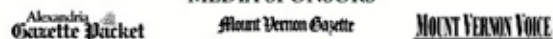
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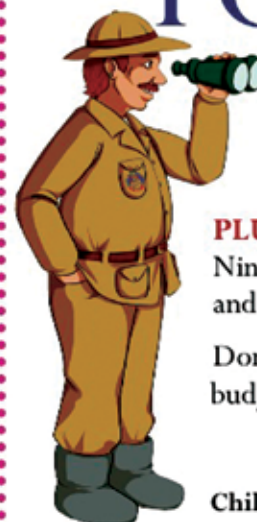
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## Enjoy the Delightful New 'Murder on the Orient Express'

By **MICHAEL CASTLEBERRY**  
Contributing Writer

This week's film is likely one you know something about, either having read Agatha Christie's novel or having seen the all-star 1974 version direct by Sidney Lumet with the all-star cast of Ingrid Bergman, Lauren Bacall, Sean Connery, John Gielgud, Tony Perkins, Vanessa Redgrave, and on and on. Oh, and a subdued Peter Ustinov as the Belgian sleuth Hercule Poirot. It was a popular hit and, like all Christie stories, very enjoyable.

The director of a new rendition of Ms. Christie's oeuvre, Sir Kenneth Branagh, just has to try and go it one better, assembling

a 2017 group of stars of equal or maybe even greater magnitude to the earlier version: the venerable Derrek Jacobi, Johnny Depp, Penelope Cruz, Willem Dafoe, Michelle Pfeiffer and the wonderful, wonderful Judi Dench as Princess Dragomiroff. And a ton of others.

It's a mystery and if — somehow — you don't know the story, reading this won't ruin the fun. While credit goes to the screenplay created by Michael Green, the writer for this year's smash *Blade Runner*, the real credit is due to the wonderful Ms. Christie. Yes, it was a different day and a different time but, when properly evoked, it can be visu-

ally mesmerizing and still quite enjoyable.

The story concerns a mysterious death on the fabled Orient Express, you know that going in

### MOVIE TALK

to buy your ticket, but what you don't know is who, what, when, why, or how. All very mysterious, with lots of accusations and blaming, and, sad to say, some untruths as well. Some people are, ahem, not as they seem to be.

It was a mystery book meant to be entertaining and Branagh doesn't lose that in his management of the complexity of the

tale. The actors appear to be having a great time, playing various 'types', sometimes against the way they're usually seen on-screen, and, face it, it is great to see the giftedness and gravitas of John Gielgud once more. What a great voice!!

And then there is .... wait for it, wait for it ... Dame Judi Dench! Playing a princess no less! And even in an ensemble piece Ms. Dench has a way of dominating every scene in which she appears. Which is good since she's worth the price of admission just to see her work!

What do you have to know about a film to know it will be a fine evening? You have a gifted direc-

tor who's also the lead actor, and a cast of some of the best among modern British and American actors and actresses. And they all seem to be having a ball!!

No, it won't win an Oscar, or make a lot of top-10 lists, or challenge your thinking about Art or Life as you know it. But it is visually beautiful and great fun.

Sometimes we forget exactly why we go to the movies and the good Sir Kenneth has kindly reminded us: to have an enjoyable evening watching gifted people go at it!!

He provides that and a lot more and you'll enjoy your time in those comfy rocking chairs! Go and have fun!

## Housing Availability Analyzed

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Talente asserted that the private sector simply cannot build and operate housing at a loss; public sector assistance is required to finance lower-rent housing projects. However, there is a concern that recent Federal tax proposals would eliminate some tax credits and lower the value of others, endangering these financing mechanisms.

Fairfax County has programs to help lower-income residents, including Housing Choice Vouch-

ers, First-Time Home Buyers, and county-owned units. In addition, about 3,500 units have been built under the county's rezoning requirements for Affordable and Workforce Dwelling Units (ADU/WDU).

Non-profit housing providers serve various portions of the community. Levine described Good Shepherd Housing (GSH) as providing permanent housing and financial support services for working families earning up to 50% of AMI. GSH currently

owns 62 units, and has a goal of adding 150 units in the next several years.

Many audience members expressed a desire to advocate for additional lower-cost housing. The speakers' consensus was that increasing housing supply overall will help, so citizens can promote higher density rezonings that include ADUs and WDUs.

(Slide presentations are available on [www.sfdc.org](http://www.sfdc.org) — click on "Events" and "What Makes Housing Affordable?")

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