

FACT SHEET

Faith in Housing (Yes in God's Backyard)

Problem:

There is a shortage of affordable homes in Virginia, both for rental and purchase. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) released a report on affordable housing in 2021. The JLARC report highlights that over 900,000 households in Virginia are cost burdened by housing, and that the commonwealth has a shortage of over 200,000 homes. While needs are numerically concentrated in urban areas, the high cost of housing affects families in every part of Virginia.

At the same time, many faith communities understand that caring for neighbors is a part of their mission. Congregations own land in localities all over Virginia and are interested in supporting their local communities. In addition, much of the land owned by faith institutions currently goes unused. Attendance at weekly services is shrinking, accelerated by the pandemic. There are parking lots and empty offices that congregations would like to see vibrant and supporting the community.

Solution:

VICPP advocates a bill that would streamline the process for congregations to build affordable housing on land that they own. This bill takes a multi-pronged approach, and gives local governments permission and incentives to support congregations embarking on this process.

First, the bill requires localities to consider how faith communities can contribute to the response to affordable housing crises when they update their comprehensive plans. Cities and counties are guided by a comprehensive plan, which they are supposed to update every five years. This ensures that every

locality is aware of the possibility of Faith in Housing, and allows the local government to include the concept in these guiding documents.

Second, the bill explicitly grants permission for localities to pass a Faith in Housing ordinance, streamlining the approval process for faith communities (and other organizations exempt from property tax) looking to build affordable housing. This could include an automatic zoning process or updated zoning district, streamlined administrative review, or other possibilities.

Third, the bill offers support from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development for localities on navigating zoning changes and supporting congregations

Fourth, the bill provides funding for two pilot programs. Congregations can apply for funding to cover pre-development costs (including feasibility studies, site plans, land use attorneys and architects) so that they are empowered to provide housing. Localities that have a Faith in Housing ordinance can apply for funding for infrastructure projects that would support the new higher-density housing on faith land.

Background:

Over a dozen congregations throughout Virginia have already used their land to build affordable housing, and over thirty are at some stage in the process. It takes between five and twenty years to move beyond discernment and raise funds, finish plans, get zoning approval, and actually undertake development. Allowing other congregations to more easily live their mission by providing affordable housing would benefit all Virginians.