



VIRGINIA CONGREGATIONS BUILDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A Match Made in Heaven

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74,000

acres of land
in Virginia are
owned by faith
communities

In 1972, 95% of
Americans were
affiliated with a
congregation.
Today, that number
is lower than
70%

There is a
shortage of
200,000

units of housing
in Virginia

45%

of renters in
Virginia pay
more than half
their income
on housing

*Caring for our neighbors is part of the
moral imperative for people of faith.*

This book offers practical and creative ideas to help congregations, policymakers and communities work together to address the affordable housing crisis.

“Virginia Congregations Building Affordable Housing” offers research and analysis of land owned by faith communities across Virginia, as well as opportunities to use that land for the common good. It includes examples of collaborative affordable housing projects that are built or are being designed. It also offers creative ideas for faith communities, advocates, and legislators, to address critical needs like housing and child care for our communities.

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The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization advocating economic, racial and social justice in Virginia's policies and practices. Founded in 1982, VICPP is the largest interfaith voice in Virginia with more than 20,000 advocates from all faiths and people of goodwill. VICPP fosters dialogue to bridge divisions, produces reports and fact sheets, and sponsors programs that educate the public and officials on critical issues. Priorities include affordable housing, health equity, economic justice, criminal justice reform and welcoming all people to Virginia.

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VIRGINIA CONGREGATIONS BUILDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING: A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

By Sheila Herlihy Hennessee, Director of Faith Organizing
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout Virginia, and across the country, people of faith are facing multiple crises, and trying to find creative ways to approach these challenges. Both attendance and affiliation with faith communities have declined in recent years. Congregations, especially in Virginia, have also been reckoning with their historic complicity in racial injustice. Additionally, clergy and faith leaders are among the first to hear about community members' struggles, including the tremendous difficulties in finding housing. The lack of affordable housing impacts hundreds of thousands of families throughout the Commonwealth. These factors have led congregations around Virginia to begin to consider how their property can be used in a mission-oriented way.

The groundbreaking research and data in this book offer creative ideas to support legislators, local governments, policy makers, community and faith leaders, nonprofits, and advocacy groups working on these issues. This book introduces the issues congregations face when considering the creation of affordable housing. It also highlights case studies of Virginia congregations that have been through the development process, providing a road map to both the challenges and the opportunities of these kinds of projects.

The Current Housing Crisis

Virginia has an affordable housing crisis. Rents have increased significantly faster than people's incomes. From 2022 to 2023, rents increased by an average of 11.3% statewide, while incomes increased by less than 2%. In virtually every part of the Commonwealth, low- and moderate-income renters are struggling.

For those who want to buy their first home, the picture is equally dire. From 2019 to 2023, home prices in Virginia rose 28% while incomes rose 6%. Skyrocketing housing prices combined with high interest rates have placed the American dream of homeownership out of reach for many moderate-income Virginia families and impossible for most low-income families.

At the same time as Virginians face this affordable housing crisis, many congregations have seen their membership age and attendance decline. Although this decline in religious participation has been a trend for decades, the pandemic hit congregational attendance hard, and many faith communities are not expected to fully return to their pre-pandemic membership and financial levels. In the 1970s, 90% of Americans identified with a Christian faith tradition. Today, according to the Pew Research Center, only 64% do. The fastest growing segment of religious affiliation is "none" or unaffiliated – 30% of Americans. Approximately 6% of Americans are Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and other faith traditions.

For Christian congregations, even individuals who are still affiliated don't attend services regularly. A congregation may have 200 registered members, but only 50 attend services every week. Lower attendance usually results in lower giving rates, and many congregations are struggling to make ends meet and initiate needed building repairs. As a result, many religious buildings, especially older ones, are falling into disrepair.

Eileen Lindner, a former editor of the Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches, which analyzes census data on religious organizations and houses of worship, was quoted in the New York Times on August 4, 2024 as saying that she expected as many as 100,000 Protestant church properties – approximately 20% of Protestant congregations – to close by 2030. Local denominational leaders in Virginia have shared similar predictions.

Why this book?

This crisis of attendance and funds, combined with community concerns and a desire to be good stewards over properties and resources, has prompted congregations to think creatively about their buildings and land. In addition, some religious institutions that once housed specific projects (e.g., convents or language-specific religious schools) are finding more flexible ways to fill dwindling demand.

Faith communities sometimes have an excess of property because they have long-owned large swaths of land in areas that have become more populated over time. A 2024 study from the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and HousingForward Virginia estimated that faith communities own more than 20,000 individual properties that, in total, encompass more than 74,000 acres. This land represents an area twice the size of the city of Richmond.

Congregations have long provided space to community organizations, including addiction recovery groups, food pantries, and child care centers. In fact, estimates are that congregations house 40% of the nation's child

care centers. Increasing numbers of congregations are allowing community groups to use vacant classrooms for meetings, or to host art exhibitions and summer camps. Such rentals may require building changes and alterations, but they are relatively simple, and helpful for the broader community. Other congregations are considering merging and/or closing and want to ensure that the community benefits from these transitions.

Given the enormous housing crisis in the nation and the Commonwealth, many congregations are considering how their land and property could be used to build affordable housing. Unfortunately, undertaking an affordable housing building project is more complicated than renting space. Developing affordable housing is not a regular pursuit of most congregations and their leaders. The rules and processes are complicated, and such projects require time and effort in addition to overcoming objections from some concerned neighbors. Nonetheless, congregations in Virginia have created new affordable housing, others are in the discernment process, and hundreds more are eager to learn how to move forward.

What is “affordable housing”?

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) says that for housing to be “affordable,” it should cost no more than 30% of a household’s income. The cost of housing includes obvious budget items, like rent and mortgage, but also utilities (a house isn’t livable if there’s no heat or running water), insurance (especially where required by law or lease), and sometimes transportation. With all these numbers combined, it’s easy to see how communities across Virginia count the lack of affordable housing as a top priority issue.

If a person works full time making the Virginia minimum wage (\$12.41 per hour, roughly \$1,920 per month), that person should spend less than \$576 on housing. Yet, even in the most rural areas, this price point is practically nonexistent. On the other side of the spectrum, if an executive earns \$10,000 per month and spends more than \$3,500 per month on housing, that person’s housing is also not considered affordable.

According to HUD guidelines, these people all pay too much money for their housing. This booklet is concerned about low-and moderate-income families and not those who have large incomes and still spend more than they should on housing.

In Richmond and other Virginia cities, more than half of renters are “cost burdened” by their housing. And many homeowners pay too much for housing, though not at such a high rate. Some people live with family or roommates to bring the total cost down. The term “affordable housing” does not refer to the actual price of the housing. Instead, “affordable housing” refers to the relationship between the cost of housing and the income of the person or family living there.

Another important concept in affordable housing is “Area Median Income” (AMI), which describes the ranges of housing affordability for a community. The AMI is determined by HUD to be the median income for a geographic location, both for individuals and for households. The median is the center of the price distribution, rather than the mean, a measurement of the average which can be thrown off by outliers.

Using HUD’s definition, the median income is 100% of AMI. People making 80% of AMI are below the median income; this group often includes people working as teachers, police officers, firefighters, and social workers. People and households making 50 percent of AMI earn half of the median income. This group typically includes food service workers, certified nurse’s aides, barbers and hair stylists, child care workers, preschool teachers, and other jobs that are important for the community.

Federal tax credits, administered by the state, are available for multifamily developments that are priced to serve community members with an income lower than 80% AMI. Legally, this is called “low income” housing, while housing for households with income lower than 60% of AMI is called “deeply affordable” housing. This booklet considers housing that serves those with less than 80% of AMI and costs them no more than 30% of their income as “affordable housing.”

Some people use the term, “workforce housing.” Literally, this refers to housing for people who are working. That includes the hair stylist, the teacher, the social worker, and the CEO. There are certain instances where “workforce” refers to people with incomes between 80% and 120% of AMI. However, people in those income levels are usually called “moderate income” households in HUD classifications.

Housing Crisis

The housing crisis is felt throughout Virginia. In 2021, Virginia's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission released a study noting a shortage of more than 200,000 units of housing needed to simply house families that already lived in the Commonwealth. In addition, the commission reported that more than 900,000 families are cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than one-third of their income for housing.

Faith communities are well aware of this shortage. Often, the clergy or church secretary is the first to receive a call when a community member needs financial assistance to pay their rent or to prevent a mortgage foreclosure. Because congregations can be found in every locality in Virginia, many faith leaders see these on-the-ground needs and want to help. Every single locality in Virginia faces a housing shortage and the struggles of the high cost of housing, from rural Virginia to the most populous areas. Although the cost of living might be higher in Northern Virginia than elsewhere in the state, the cost of housing in Lynchburg still exceeds what would be affordable to a household where wage earners are making minimum wage.

Virginia also has a history of housing struggles. Before the pandemic, according to the Eviction Lab housed at Princeton University, Virginia had one of the highest eviction rates in the country. According to 2018 data, three of the five highest evicting localities nationally are in Virginia - Richmond, Hampton and Newport News.

Too many renters live in fear of their rents increasing beyond their ability to pay, triggering eviction proceedings. When a landlord files an eviction, a court date is set to meet with the judge, and that date remains on the docket regardless of whether the tenant pays in full. Until July 2024, even when a renter paid the full amount owed and the judge decided in the tenant's favor, the eviction filing would still show on the person's legal record, rental history, and credit report. Evictions listed on a person's records can damage their chances of being approved to rent housing in the future. A 2024 law addressed this problem by requiring that an eviction

be removed from a person's record six months after a judge's ruling in their favor.

Virginia's housing builders are concerned about the current shortage of skilled construction workers. This was brought on by factors including the decline in construction jobs during the 2008 Great Recession, the increase in energy sector jobs, and the emphasis on pushing young people to obtain a college degree rather than attending technical school. In order to attract the dwindling number of skilled workers, builders and contractors need to offer competitive wages and cover their overhead costs (e.g., transportation, tools, workspace, etc.) while generating a profit. Given the high costs of land, labor, permitting, and approvals, it is usually more profitable for builders to construct large expensive homes than to build more affordable homes or condos.

Finally, there is concern about investors buying up modest single-family homes and converting them into rental properties. With the increasing cost of rent, these investments have become more profitable. A report from Drexel University's Nowak Metro Finance Lab found that between 2020 and 2021, 19.3% of sales of single-family homes in Richmond, Virginia, were bought by investors. This trend has further limited the stock of supply of homes for more modest income buyers. Although the percentage of investors purchasing homes in other parts of Virginia is lower than in Richmond, this issue is still important to address.

This gap in the housing supply of more modest homes and condos is sometimes called "the missing middle." In 2024, Arlington passed a new zoning policy designed to address this challenge by allowing up to six units of housing on what was currently zoned for single family use. This zoning change was contentious, and as of January 2025, it remains tied up in litigation.

Given the limited housing supply, the high price to rent or purchase a home, and the fact that wages have not kept up with housing costs, Virginia has a housing crisis.

Zoning challenges

One of the most complicated issues in building affordable housing is zoning. Although zoning is effective in some respects, such as ensuring that elementary schools aren't built next to industrial parks, the practice of local zoning – especially in Virginia – has often been used to exclude people based on race and income.

According to “Zoning and Segregation in Virginia,” a report compiled by the law firm McGuireWoods LLP, zoning in Virginia began with racial segregation. City officials in Richmond outlined separate blocks for white and “colored” people in April 1911. Eleven months later, the General Assembly approved legislation enabling all cities and towns in Virginia to adopt segregation districts, which prompted Ashland, Falls Church, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Roanoke to adopt similar racist zoning.

When the U.S. Supreme Court overruled the Supreme Court of Virginia, ruling that overt racial segregation is unconstitutional, zoning-enabling legislation was passed by the General Assembly to allow local planning processes that could – and did – enable segregation through planning processes. The McGuire Woods LLC report notes, “Although overt racism has been eliminated from zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans, the legacy of 20th-century racism remains.”

Zoning wasn't the only policy that created and encouraged segregation. Race-restricted deeds and mortgage redlining were significant levers around Virginia. However, zoning played an important role in keeping people segregated by race and continues to segregate people by income. Even today, many neighborhoods that are zoned for single-family residential use are places that were previously marked green (for white people) on mortgage maps and have historically been occupied by white homeowners. Neighborhoods now zoned for commercial or industrial use, even if they were previously residential, tend to be those historically occupied by African American residents and were marked red – hence the term “redlined.” (See *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein).

The most common type of residential zoning in Virginia

is single-family, which is also the most expensive type of housing to build because it allows for one detached home per plot. One comprehensive resource about the prevalence of single-family residential zoning is Virginia's Zoning Atlas, created by HousingForward Virginia. While many people might equate single-family residential neighborhoods as representing the American Dream, others note that neighborhoods composed exclusively of houses lack commercial or social services. Residents may not be able to easily walk to the grocery store or day care but instead need to rely on public transportation and private vehicles, both of which cost time and money.

One way to make houses more affordable is to increase density. There are many ways to increase density incrementally, such as allowing accessory dwelling units on single-family plots. However, the most efficient way to increase housing availability and decrease price-per-unit is by building multifamily housing. Multifamily affordable housing, which includes units such as duplexes, cottage courts and apartment buildings, is essential in the pursuit of both more homes and more affordable homes in communities throughout Virginia.

Developers could decrease the cost-per-housing unit if they were allowed to build more multifamily housing. Since the most common type of zoning is single-family residential, developers often seek rezoning, which requires approval from a locality's governing council or board. A public hearing is usually required to increase or change housing density. Sometimes this is done through the comprehensive plan (a multiyear process that includes updating the zoning map for the whole locality), and it's also done through a special use permit (SUP) or other site-based change (a six-month to two-year process that involves talking with the local planning commission and legislative body, city council or board of supervisors).

Another way to reduce the cost of housing is to build manufactured housing that essentially has large “ready-made” sections from factories. This concept is similar to the Sears “kit” houses that were built from 1908 to 1942.

Virginia has close to 400 Sears Modern Homes that are still occupied. Unfortunately, many people associate manufactured housing with poor quality mobile homes, and many communities have made it difficult through zoning and land use policies, especially in urban areas, to take advantage of manufactured housing.

Because most congregations are in residential neighborhoods, many will need changes in zoning ordinances to build affordable housing – whether single family, multifamily or manufactured homes. This can create challenges.

A change in local zoning usually requires several public hearings and several votes. The proposed development needs to be presented before both the local planning commission and the local governing authority (city council, town council, or county supervisors). When a project comes before a public hearing, a common response from neighbors is often, “I understand the need for affordable housing, just not in MY backyard.” This common refrain of Not in My Backyard (often abbreviated as NIMBY), is the primary pushback against increasing density.

People imagine that when affordable housing is built nearby, they won't like the neighbors. Many stereotypes play into this fear, including the idea of increased crime and drugs, or that residents of affordable housing won't be assets to the neighborhood. In addition, existing residents fear increased traffic, lower property values,

or burdens on emergency services. Although these fears and stereotypes are not supported by research, they are pervasive and hard to combat, particularly when the attitudes are expressed by large groups.

In public hearings, it's especially important for the decision-making body (whether it be a planning commission, county board of supervisors, or other council) to hear equally strong voices in support of the project. Faith communities can be important advocates for affordable housing. Members and clergy can talk about why rezoning would benefit the community and allow the congregation to express its mission. In addition, advocates and neighbors can share their excitement around increasing income diversity in the neighborhood or putting into practice the locality's comprehensive plan. As of 2024, Virginia does not have a uniform policy in place to streamline rezoning, so localities rely on the support of constituents as they decide what projects are allowed to be built on which land.

While zoning battles are current challenges, Virginia legislators need to take a long view. Affordable and available housing is essential to attract and retain a workforce. Affordable housing can reduce income segregation and broaden people's perspectives as they live in more diverse neighborhoods. Enabling legislation that encourages localities to create denser residential zones can be an interim step to help increase housing around the Commonwealth.

Faith Communities want to help

Given the crisis of affordable housing in Virginia and the changes going on within many faith communities, congregations are interested in exploring how they can help address the affordable housing crisis and be more responsible stewards for their buildings, land, and members. Although at least 14 congregations have successfully completed affordable housing projects in

Virginia, no one knows how many congregations have been interested but have given up when confronted with a complicated and often overwhelming process. Developing affordable housing is not for the faint of heart – it requires a lot of work. And it may not be appropriate for all congregations.

How to create affordable housing

Four primary components are needed to create any affordable housing development. However, faith communities approach these four pillars in their own unique way. Here are some aspects to consider around each component:

- **Discernment.** What does your congregation want to do? What is its dream for helping the community and for its worshipping community? What does the community need? What changes are congregational members prepared for and excited about? This dreaming and visioning process usually takes a year or longer.
- **Money.** Building affordable housing requires a great deal of money. There are multiple sources for funding, but most congregations need professionals to work with them on developing the plans and putting together the deal. These pre-development costs, before you even begin spending money on construction, can be significant.
- **Partnerships.** Once the vision is set, find professionals – architects, engineers, and others – to flesh out the vision. This component happens simultaneously with raising money and seeking approvals and usually takes between three to five years.
- **Approvals.** Work with city and county developmental staff early. They will be an invaluable resource when zoning or other approvals are needed and can point out which aspects of the plan need attention. For many projects, the approval process is painful and lengthy, with some neighbors opposing affordable housing projects out of fears about the impact on the community and property values.

Each of these components is dependent upon the others. Congregations often need assistance with the discernment process. Money is needed to create plans, because few architects and land use attorneys will work for free. Plans are needed for the approval, because a locality is not likely to approve a project that isn't clear on height or hasn't figured out where the sewer lines are going. Finally, you often need approval from the locality to get final commitments from big funders.

All affordable housing projects face these challenges, but faith communities have an even tougher time with

the process because developing housing projects is typically not a part of their historic mission or expertise. A particular congregation will likely make a decision to build new affordable housing once in its history. An affordable housing developer is likely to engage in this work a few times every year and will have more experience and more resources. Smaller congregations, which are often strapped for funds, need money to create the plans for the pre-approval process. They also need support from both government and development partners for the rezoning and approval process. And they need fundraising help to build affordable housing.

Even though some congregations have successfully built affordable housing, as this book demonstrates, this development is never done in isolation. Most congregations need help in realizing their visions and missions for affordable housing. Virginia state lawmakers and local cities and county leaders need to do more to support congregations in building affordable housing.

Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy is working with congregations, elected officials, and building or planning agency staff to:

- Educate congregations about their options for building affordable housing.
- Identify and provide funds to support congregations with the predevelopment or infrastructure costs.
- Explore creating expedited local processes for congregations seeking to build affordable housing.
- Consider statewide land use policies that would increase density, encourage affordable housing, and reduce both racial and income segregation.

This book is one resource to inspire and caution congregations in moving forward to build affordable housing. The following pages contain profiles of 14 congregations that decided to try developing affordable housing. Some of the stories are completed projects, others are works in progress, some were never built. Through the struggles and the joys of developing affordable housing on faith land, it is important to maintain hope. It's also essential for government officials and community leaders to take action to support faith communities building affordable housing.

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ARLINGTON PRESBYTERIAN GILLIAM PLACE

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** Arlington County
- **Acres of land:** 1.23
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 4 years
 - Pre-development: 5 years
 - Construction: 2 years
- **Date opened:** September 2019
- **Units in final project:** 173
- **Specific population served:** households making under 60% of AMI
- **Development Partner:** True Ground Housing Partners (formerly Arlington Partners for Affordable Housing)



Photo credit: Gilliam Place

Congregation



Arlington Presbyterian Church had been a traditional church building for many years, with a stone edifice, a steeple, a red door, and a large parking lot that was becoming less used by a shrinking congregation. Members had begun to question the church's future and how its presence in the community could be more congruent with a mission rooted in faith. The congregation saw that the previous status quo wasn't working and spent 10 years in discernment before the actual project and development began.

Affordable housing was on members' minds but was not necessarily the focus. The congregation's leadership decided to talk with neighbors using a community organizing model with one-to-one conversations. Each member involved was asked to speak with four community members each month to learn of their experiences and needs. This project was connected with other ministries from the church, which ensured that the conversations were not a stand-alone activity.

Vision



When the congregation's members talked to people in the neighborhood, they were often told that people couldn't afford to live and work in the community. Those messages inspired church members to move forward with an affordable housing project in late 2012.

The church hired a project manager and partnered with a respected nonprofit developer, True Ground Housing Partners (formerly Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing). The goal was to build affordable housing on the land where the church building had stood, as a witness for the Christian value of caring for neighbors. True Ground began working with the church in 2015, and construction began in 2016.

The goal was to build affordable housing on the land where the church building had stood, as a witness for the Christian value of caring for neighbors.

Roadblocks



"We've made 'making housing' incredibly complicated," says Pastor Rev. Ashley Goff. As the Arlington Presbyterian membership and the broader community heard about the potential project, concerns were raised. While there was broad support for the project within the congregation, some members pushed back on the idea of building affordable housing on the land where the church had stood for so long. Meanwhile, the denomination's judicatory body, National Capital Presbytery, required due diligence before it would allow the church to move forward with such a large change.

Commonly, this pushback is called "NIMBY" (Not In My Backyard), and it is often rooted in fear and stereotypes. The leadership at Arlington Presbyterian was surprised to hear negative stereotypes from members and neighbors. Even some representatives of the National Capital Presbytery were hesitant, because this was the first project of its type in that jurisdiction.

The church did not have a zoning fight, because it was

located on Columbia Pike in an area already designated for multifamily housing. However, concerns were raised about historic designation, infrastructure, and negative stereotypes about the types of people who live in affordable housing. When things got contentious in the community, the neighbors' stories from the earlier listening process are what kept the congregation faithful and committed to building the project.

Despite the opposition, the Arlington Presbyterian Church's development application was accepted on the first round (both for federal tax credit funding and site plan approval). This area of Arlington had Form Based Code, which expedited the process while moving through the local planning commission, historical review board, and county board of supervisors.

The leaders of Arlington Presbyterian Church chose to follow its call. In the words of Rev. Goff, "A third of the APC congregation left. Not everybody will get on the boat. And you do it anyway."

Project



Arlington Presbyterian Church sold its property outright to the developer, rather than using a ground lease strategy. The decision was that it would be too much responsibility and a different role for the church to become a landlord. This meant that the congregation received \$8.5 million from True Ground for the land (well below market value, but a significant sum). This allowed the congregation to pay for the project manager and to create a worship space more in line with the needs of the community.

In 2010, Gilliam Place opened its doors. Now, 350 people live in the 173 units, which are available to

families making 60 percent of AMI (Area Median Income). The facility cost \$80 million to build and has created a multi-generational community. The complex is named for Rhonda Gilliam, first Black elder at Arlington Presbyterian Church, and an important leader in getting the congregation to think about equity and mission in a different way.

Arlington Presbyterian Church rents a commercial space on the first floor. The congregation invested \$1 million to build out its worship space. The church has a 10-year lease of the space with True Ground, with an option for another 10-year lease.

Status



The congregation is now meeting on the ground floor of the new space. Arlington Presbyterian Church officially moved into the building in November 2019. Since the opening of both housing and worship uses, there have been many opportunities to build connections between those present in the building. The congregation has a garden open as community space and hosts a music ministry welcoming both residents and people from the broader neighborhood.

Because Arlington Presbyterian completed the development process with money in the bank, the congregational leadership is evaluating how to use

their resources most compassionately. Together, the listening and discernment process continues.

This project and those who were a part of it have helped to change minds and hearts around congregations developing affordable housing. Arlington Presbyterian Church partnered with Rooted Good to develop a pamphlet for faith communities considering this process. The National Capital Presbytery, based in greater Washington D.C., is now seen as a nationwide leader about how a denominational body can support congregations considering this change.

CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES

THE HALLOW SHELTER

Samaritan House

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Virginia Beach
- **Acres of land:** plot is 1.9 acres; project occupies <0.5 acre
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 10 years
 - Pre-development: 2 years
 - Construction: 2.5 years
- **Date opened:** November, 2024
- **Number of units:** 9 bedrooms (8 regular, 1 ADA)
- **Specific population served:** children who have experienced trafficking
- **Development Partner:** Chesapeake Homes



Congregation



The Church of the Holy Apostles is a unique congregation, containing both an Episcopal and Roman Catholic parish. The congregation has a strong focus on ecumenism and building relationships between denominations in the Christian community. The church building is built on a large plot of land in Virginia Beach, and members have long been involved in community outreach efforts. As congregation members have

seen needs in the surrounding community, they have considered several possible partnerships to use their undeveloped land to support nonprofits, but those deals have unfortunately fallen through. The congregation remains involved with interfaith work through the Interfaith Alliance at the Beach. In addition, Holy Apostles offers both a food pantry and financial assistance to community members in need.

Vision



Samaritan House is a nonprofit with a mission to help people free themselves from domestic and sexual violence, human trafficking, and homelessness. This organization already offers emergency shelters for adults escaping domestic violence situations, along with support for people facing homelessness. Executive Director Robin Gauthier had a dream to build a shelter for children who had experienced human trafficking and approached Virginia Beach staff with questions about where such a shelter could be located. She was warned there likely wasn't any land the nonprofit could afford.

Later, one of the staffers in the Virginia Beach Department of Housing and Neighborhood Preservation remembered a church had been interested in partnering with a nonprofit in a community-oriented

development process that hadn't materialized. The staffer already had the survey of the land that Holy Apostles had planned to sell years earlier. This conversation led to a meeting between Gauthier and Church of the Holy Apostles leadership in the fall of 2019. The whole church staff was immediately excited about the idea.

Samaritan House leadership had a donor who wanted to see a safe home for children in the area. This donor was willing to contribute to the cost of acquiring the land, and the church was open to selling the land for below market value. One of the most important factors from the parish perspective was to allow the land to continue with a mission orientation. The project itself would be known as The Hallow, because it would be a sacred place, built on hallowed ground.

Roadblocks



To use the land owned by the Church of the Holy Apostles, the project needed approval from both the Catholic Diocese of Richmond and the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia. The Catholic Diocese owned the land, and the Episcopal Diocese had an official hand in managing the property because of the shared parish. Initially, Samaritan House had wanted to lease the land, but that would have been complicated by restrictions imposed by the Catholic Diocese. The residents would be children who had been trafficked, so care would involve conversation about healthy sexuality, and the Catholics restricted conversations about birth control.

Gauthier consulted with the donor, who was concerned about the restrictions. The donor offered to buy the property, so Gauthier and her team talked with the CEO of the Diocese of Richmond's property

division. Gauthier says this was the most stressful time in the planning. She shared, "It was really up to the diocese, since the diocese owned the property. Of course you want the church to be on board, but it's really up to them." After conversations with the bishops of both dioceses, Samaritan House gained approval to purchase the land at below market rate.

Samaritan House hired an engineer and an architect to develop plans that could be presented to the planning commission for zoning approval. At the planning commission meeting, only one entity, the Montessori School next door, spoke against having The Hallow built. The administration of the school was afraid of traffickers coming to town, and police being a constant presence. One parent also expressed concern about the children living next door talking about sex and swearing in the backyard.

In response, Gauthier and the staff of Samaritan House reframed the conversation to make it clear that the children served by The Hallow were victims, not children trying to corrupt other children. Robin wrote a letter to all the parents at the school, explaining the project and expanded on the need for such a service locally. She noted that the Montessori school students would be safer with a heightened law-enforcement presence because of The Hallow. This explanation alleviated some of the neighborhood concerns.

In the end, Samaritan House promised the planning commission that it would place a six-foot fence between

the two properties. The Virginia Beach planning commission voted unanimously for the zoning approval. The Hallow was zoned as a group home, offering space for a maximum of eight children at one time.

The only other challenge was licensure. Samaritan House had been approved for zoning for eight children, and the licensure meant that the organization was required to have a 1:8 staff to child ratio. Virginia's Department of Behavioral Health would need to license The Hallow as a secure residential facility for children after construction and before the facility could open.

Project



The team with Samaritan House, Church of the Holy Apostles, and the Interfaith Alliance at the Beach celebrated the groundbreaking in 2022. Construction finished in the summer of 2024, and the facility received its license from the Department of Behavioral Health that October. The eight rooms upstairs are intended for girls. One room downstairs meets ADA requirements and could be used by a boy. Samaritan House has already hired all the staff necessary to run The Hallow.

Many community members came together to make this project possible. The Interfaith Alliance at the Beach, a partner nonprofit that had partnered with Samaritan House before, raised awareness about the project among other congregations in the area. The land-use attorney and architect for The Hallow both offered their services at discounted rates, and Virginia Beach contributed to the cost of the building. Gauthier had a conversation with Chesapeake Homes, an

organization that sponsors Samaritan House's annual golf fundraiser, and the director offered to donate some of their labor. Many private donations supported the cost of supplies.

The land that Samaritan House purchased from the church has space for three large buildings, making future expansion possible. Eventually, the organization would like to build three buildings in a "U" shape with a shared parking lot. The organization is considering building a house that would accommodate boys who have been trafficked as well as office space.

The estimated yearly cost of operating The Hallow is projected to be \$800,000, so the organization will proceed slowly. Of the project, Gauthier says, "It was truly a miracle, truly led by God. If we didn't speak to the right people who knew the church had this land... this never would have happened."

EMBRACE WAYNESBORO

EMBRACE VILLAGE

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Waynesboro
- **Acres of land:** 1.5
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 4 years
 - Pre-development: in process (2 years)
 - Construction: n/a
- **Date opened:** n/a
- **Number of Units:** 25 small homes
- **Specific population served:** low-income individuals and families
- **Development Partner:** Building Trades Center at Valley Career Center in Fishersville



Photo credit: Embrace Waynesboro

Congregation/Community Center



Embrace Community Center was formed in 2015 after the youth group at Basic United Methodist Church created a clothing ministry as a response to bullying in their community. The young people wanted to share clothes with those who needed support, so their classmates wouldn't be the target of judgment for wearing dirty clothes to school. At the same time the clothing ministry was expanding at Basic UMC, the congregation itself was diminishing in membership and nearing closing. The governing official of the local United Methodist district, along with the district

leadership, decided to donate the use of the former church and the surrounding land for the clothing ministry and other community outreach.

Out of this simple clothing ministry emerged a variety of ministries to “love the neighbors” in the Waynesboro area, including a zero-barrier community garden, a community center with meals and fellowship events, a health desk staffed by community health workers, a medical clinic held twice monthly, and a clinic for recipients of the WIC program. Together, these ministries became Embrace Community Center.



The Center's website says, "We are people who believe that everyone has a place at God's table, that grace is best shared face to face, and that love is a verb demanding our action. To that end, we view the church building from which we serve as a tool box, one provided in order to equip ourselves and our community to love well." Though the space is no longer a traditional congregation with worship every week, it is a place to build relationships and live out faith in Waynesboro.

...we view the church building from which we serve as a tool box, one provided in order to equip ourselves and our community to love well.

Vision



The leadership team at Embrace Community Center had long wanted to use some of the land owned by the church to develop affordable housing, but the vision gained clarity in late 2023. At that point, the Community Foundation of the Blue Ridge convened community leaders, including businesses, the planning district, the hospital system, government agencies, nonprofits – including Embrace – and the community college to develop plans for addressing the region's housing stock shortage and lack of support for unhoused individuals and families.

Through this planning process, Embrace Community Center, which wanted to do something good with its land, connected with the Building Trades Center at Valley Career Center in Fishersville, which wanted to build small homes for people in need. The small homes are too large to be defined as a "tiny home," which is 400 square feet or less. Instead, these homes will be about 450 square feet each, which is still small, but gives dignity and privacy to the future residents.

Together, Embrace Community Center and the Building Trades Center developed a vision for creating a village of 25 small homes on the land still owned by the Virginia Methodist Conference. A design firm donated the work to map out and structure a village that would contain clusters of four homes each. The plan is to build the homes in "building blitzes," two weekends at a time in which local contractors train students in building these small homes, following the model that has been designed.

Local building supply companies are also interested in supporting the initiative, which is expected to result in donations of construction materials. Some of the homes will be auctioned off at market rate in order to cover building costs, and the rest will be reserved for people with unique housing needs. Hopefully, four or five new small homes will be added each year to Embrace Village starting in 2025 and continuing for the following five or six years.

Roadblocks



Despite having land that can be donated for the project, people who want to donate their time and effort to build the homes, and strong support from community and political leaders, the project still has issues to address:

Zoning. There is no zoning classification in Waynesboro or nearby Staunton that would allow small homes with the proposed level of density. The city is considering creating a new classification. This “Cottage Court Zoning,” modeled after zoning that passed in Winchester, would allow buildings of 400 to 1,200 square feet with higher density. Embrace Community Center would then need to apply for a special use permit (SUP) under the new zoning.

Neighborhood concerns. The church building that hosts Embrace Community Center is in the middle of a residential neighborhood with a school and a Head Start center nearby. The center has already heard that neighbors have concerns about the proposed village and so will need to engage the broader community in

conversation to explain the mission and facts of the village.

Site control. Because the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church still owns the property, the land will have to be transferred to Embrace or formal use agreements will be required.

Pre-development money. The project will need pre-development dollars to undertake a feasibility study, infrastructure plans, engineering reports, environmental reports, and other fees.

Construction/permanent financing. Even though there will be few costs associated with building the homes, there will be infrastructure costs to develop land. The homes will need water, sewer, and electricity, none of which is currently connected on the plot.

Legal and management structures. The project will need to determine the legal ownership structure of the village and how it will be managed.

Project



The project is still in its early phases, but the Waynesboro community is excited and eager to help. Embrace Community Center sees itself as an incubator and dreams of building this village and expanding the model to other communities.

EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

THE SPIRE

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Alexandria
- **Acres of land:** 2
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 2 years
 - Pre-development: 3 years
 - Construction: 3 years
- **Date opened:** March 2021
- **Number of units:** 113
- **Specific population served:** low-income families (30% AMI–60% AMI)
- **Development Partner:** Affordable Homes & Communities (AHC)



Photo credit: Allen Russ Photography

Congregation



For many years, the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection stood tall in Alexandria's West End, on the border with Fairfax and Arlington Counties. The West End is generally considered a lower income area with more multi-family housing and fewer high-end single-family neighborhoods. Though the West End used to be considered a neglected area of the city, this changed recently with the opening of an office building nearby housing city services and three new elementary schools. As attendance at Resurrection shrank in the mid-2000s, the congregation realized that it was spending more time focusing on maintaining a building than it was on mission and outreach. The members decided to change that focus, and in 2012 gained approval from

the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, its governing body, to embark on a ReVisioning process. Throughout 2013, they explored 20 different plans for the future of the congregation and their land.

In 2014, the Resurrection community decided to move forward with building affordable housing. The members designated a building committee to lead the work from the congregational side and the committee interviewed quite a few developers, both for-profit and nonprofit. The committee chose Affordable Homes and Communities (AHC) both to help design and build the project, and to provide property management once the new housing opened.

Vision



Recognizing the need for affordable housing in Alexandria, and particularly in its neighborhood, the Resurrection community wanted to build a place that would be accessible to many who are often priced out. The congregation focused the project on working families that earned well below the area's median income.

The community at Resurrection had conversations with neighbors to find out what was needed, and what the community members wanted to see from a new development. This was a huge undertaking, but Rev. Jo Belser, the rector of the parish, helped remind members of their mantra, "God provides everything needed to do what God calls us to do."

Roadblocks



The project required approval from both the city and the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. Pushback came from corporate senior living facilities on three sides. One of the most challenging and surprising groups to question the project was Goodwin House, an Episcopal facility for seniors, located behind the new project. Residents and leadership came to both civic and religious meetings to speak against Resurrection's project. Helpful feedback included the suggestion that adding brick would improve aesthetics. More negative feedback was related to disruptions caused by construction, which had occurred with previous neighborhood projects, and classic NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) messages about not wanting low-income families in the area.

Each time there was a major change to the plan, Resurrection would bring the new proposal back to the whole congregation for a vote. Although this wasn't a legal necessity, it helped ensure that people remained invested in the goal of building affordable housing. At one point, AHC realized that increased expenses would prevent the units being offered to residents at the 60% AMI affordability level. AHC offered two options: reduce the amount the church would be compensated for its land (from \$7.1 million to \$4.3 million, already below market rate) or build a strip of market rate housing on the edge of the property and use that higher price point to maintain the original compensation.

Ultimately, church members decided that they wanted the project to have at least 100 units of housing at the 60% AMI (Area Median Income) affordability level, so they agreed to the lower compensation.

As the community neared the decision point to tear down its church building and create something totally new, it faced another hurdle: finding a place to worship. Eventually, the members were allowed to use space at nearby Virginia Theological Seminary for free. Of course, moving out of the building also meant moving place-based ministries, which caused some dissension within the congregation. In the end, the preschool the church housed on site merged with a childcare facility, and the food pantry was housed by a different local church.

Another challenge was the fact that a discernment schedule, whether congregational or diocesan, doesn't always fall neatly into a government or business-oriented agenda. In 2013, Resurrection was the first congregation within the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia to ask to do this kind of creative project. Although the diocese was supportive of the concept overall, the time needed for decision-making at the denominational level slowed down the application and approval process for other aspects of the project. As Kat Turner, a lay leader with Resurrection, shared about the experience of applying for federal Low Income Housing Tax

Credits, “applications are due March first. You either turn it in then, or you wait a year.” The diocese wasn’t quite prepared and needed to postpone the decision by a month. That, in turn, put the project behind by a year. In the end, the diocese approved a 65-year ground lease from the church to the developer.

Project



After many delays, the new church building opened in time for Easter 2021. The apartment complex, dubbed The Spire, welcomed new residents in March 2021. Due to COVID delays, not all the units were able to open

God provides everything needed to do what God calls us to do.

at once, but the rest of the residents were able to move in by October 2021. Now 113 families have a place to live close to public transportation and a vibrant faith community.

Status



Although the Resurrection community never expected that residents of The Spire would come to the church, the community did want to be supportive neighbors. The most popular programs are those geared toward children, whether a Christmas party with Santa in December or an ice cream truck to celebrate the last day of school. The church has also offered tutoring and some after-school care, in addition to backpacks for students.

Although the transition required letting go of some of Resurrection’s outreach ministries, those have continued to breathe new life in different forms and locations. When the church needed to find a new home for its weekly food pantry, it found a temporary location at a nearby Methodist church less than two blocks away. Once the new Resurrection building was opened, the members considered reinstating the food pantry on site, but it would have had a smaller space. Now, instead of one church feeding 25 families per week, there are five churches in partnership that feed

80-100 families per week. Some of those families are residents at The Spire.

Resurrection has a ground lease relationship with The Spire, and therefore has some shared contracts for maintenance of the grounds. The shared contracts have required some navigation to figure out issues like snow removal on the shared driveway, but the relationship has largely been successful. The congregation is grateful that the same partner that developed the property is doing the property management, because it allows for a strong ongoing relationship.

A few people who live at The Spire have started attending Resurrection because of its physical proximity and lived mission. One such new member serves on the church’s vestry (or governing council). The members of the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection are grateful for their neighbors, and grateful for the journey that has allowed them to live their mission.

FAIRLINGTON PRESBYTERIAN

THE WAYPOINT

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Alexandria
- **Acres of land:** 3; project occupies 1 acre
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 2 years
 - Pre-development: 2.5 years
 - Construction: 2.5 years
- **Date opened:** November 2022
- **Number of units:** 81
- **Specific population served:** income-qualifying, with 9 units set aside for people with disabilities
- **Development Partner:** Wesley Housing



Photo credit: City of Alexandria

Congregation



Fairlington Presbyterian Church was built in the 1950s in Alexandria. The dream was to expand and grow, so the church building itself could accommodate hundreds of people. The church grounds included a large yard and parking lot. Over the years, the neighborhood came to appreciate the green space provided by the church, even as attendance was

shrinking. There was a playground for kids, ample parking, and a beautiful facade. However, as members considered the rest of the neighborhood, they realized there was an unmet human need. Members decided to build affordable housing and use their land in a more mission-driven manner.

Vision



The community at Fairlington Presbyterian Church started talking about affordable housing in earnest in 2015. Prior to that, individual members had raised the issue of using their land in a more mission-focused way. However, the conversation was always put on pause because the logistics were so intimidating. The hardest part for this community was taking the first step.

In the end, the reason Fairlington Presbyterian Church members were able to have a serious conversation (both within the congregation and within the larger community) was because they hired a consultant who had helped Arlington Presbyterian Church with its redevelopment. The consultant could talk in layman's terms about what the process would entail. As a consultant, she didn't have a stake in the outcome and could help the congregation assess the developers, who all had their own self-interests. Fairlington Presbyterian Church says the process would have been much harder to navigate without a consultant's guidance.

According to the church's website, on Sunday, May 7, 2017, the congregation voted to sell a portion of its current church parking lot to Wesley Housing Development Corporation, to develop a high-quality, affordable rental housing building of 75–81 units on the site. The church said, "We are turning spaces for cars into spaces for people."

On November 17, 2018, Fairlington Presbyterian Church received the unanimous approval of the Alexandria City Council to partner with Wesley Housing to build 81 units of affordable housing on its property. The church thanks all its members and friends – especially from Fairlington United Methodist Church, Arlington Presbyterian Church and the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection, who led the way and helped the church. Fairlington Presbyterian Church says, "It takes a village to house a village!"

Roadblocks



The first roadblock was managing the internal congregational dynamics. There was pushback when the church leadership floated this idea, especially from long-time members who struggled to process what the change would mean. Even though the majority of the congregation was supportive, a small subset of members was vehemently opposed. The church leadership requested support from the National Capital Presbytery to facilitate conversations within the congregation. This facilitated conversation was important and wasn't a process the pastor could lead.

Another roadblock was NIMBY-ism (the Not In My Backyard attitude). The city and the developer had hosted several community town hall meetings to talk

about the process. Rev. Juli Wilson-Black remembers, "Neighbors walked into those meetings having already made up their minds. It was very dispiriting, both for me and for our congregation.... We'd already had a lot of drama, and then to feel like 'Oh, our neighbors hate us,' was an even bigger challenge."

A common approach to community discussions starts with presentations about why a project is great while those in the audience hold onto their entrenched opinions without an opportunity to express them. The congregation's leaders decided to take another approach. They gathered people around tables and presented questions to talk about in small groups: Do you see affordable housing as a need in this

community? What have your experiences been? This format allowed people to share their opinions. After that, presentations could be made, and participants were more receptive.

An even more effective process, the congregation discovered, was an “open house” style gathering, where people could move among displays and have direct conversations with people involved in the process. Small groups were also an effective way of building relationships, hearing real concerns, and asking people for constructive feedback. The congregation provided information through the church’s website to keep any interested parties informed about the project and the process.

The rezoning process went smoothly. There was one public hearing, where the planning commission unanimously approved the project, followed by recommendations to city council that were also unanimously approved. Rev. Wilson-Black notes, “The City of Alexandria was supportive. Not all places are as supportive.”

Project



Fairlington Presbyterian Church and Wesley Housing created 81 units of affordable housing with underground parking for the residents. The church retained the original church building and 60 surface parking spots. The green space on the church property has remained, though it is not as extensive as it was before construction. Overall, the Waypoint has been an

One logistical roadblock was accommodating parking for the residents as well as the church. The solution: Fairlington Presbyterian reduced its parking spaces from 120 to 60, and the developer built underground parking for residents and surface parking for the church.

To manage ownership and zoning challenges, Fairlington Presbyterian Church and Wesley Housing created a Land Condominium agreement, in which both are joint owners of a “Land Condo” that is a single parcel. If the congregation had sold the developers the acre, the rezoning likely would not have been approved, because the housing would have been deemed too dense without enough open space. There were also requirements about ratios of permeable versus impermeable surfaces that made it more worthwhile to maintain the two properties as one plot. The church’s open space and green space were able to count for the rezoning application, and there is ample open space on the property.

immense benefit to the community. One extra perk has been that since the church is still a co-owner, it has a vested interest in maintaining strong relationships with both the building managers and the residents. This has led to important conversations, helping navigate potential conflicts.

Status



Even once the project opened in late fall of 2022, the challenges were not over. Because Fairlington Presbyterian Church was so focused on the intricacies of the redevelopment process and getting it approved, its leaders were not able to spend enough time learning about property management; they wish they had done more preparation for the time after construction.

Wesley Housing was both the development partner and the property manager, through two separate divisions. These two functions are under one roof but have different approaches to their clients. Fairlington Presbyterian Church requested a formal MOU agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) to flesh out what is expected of each party. The congregation is learning how to participate in management.

*We are turning
spaces for cars into
spaces for people.*

Lessons



Fairlington Presbyterian Church recommends that when interviewing development partners, consider the property management that will follow. This won't be important for every church, but it is very important for those who remain neighbors and want an ongoing relationship.

Fairlington Presbyterian Church members heard complaints from residents about excessive late fees, alleged harassment about minor violations, and

disrespectful treatment. Fairlington Presbyterian Church recently arranged a "know your rights" training for tenants, to make sure that the residents were heard and had access to resources.

Even with all these complications, Rev. Wilson-Black says, "I would absolutely recommend the experience to congregations that have some capacity for managing change." The project has been transformational both for the church and for the neighborhood.

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF FALLS CHURCH

KINDRED CROSSING

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** Fairfax County
- **Acres of land:** 3
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 5+ years
 - Pre-development: in process; goal is to break ground in late 2025
 - Construction: uncertain
- **Date opened:** n/a
- **Number of units:** 95
- **Specific population served:** seniors
- **Development Partner:** Wesley Housing



Image credit: Wesley Housing

Congregation



In the early 2010s, Fairfax County wanted to build a temporary homeless shelter and contacted First Christian Church about building a shelter on the church's property. While the idea wasn't popular with

neighbors, the congregation became excited. The church already had a feeding ministry for people who were unhoused, and this seemed like a natural complement.

Vision



First Christian Church of Falls Church (FCCFC) connected with Wesley Housing about the possibility of building affordable housing in 2018. Through the Fairfax County approval process, Wesley and the church decided to build 95 affordable senior housing apartments on a plot of land the church owns. The congregation selected Wesley Housing because, as a nonprofit, Wesley has a commitment to work with neighbors and preserve as much of the tree line as

possible. Wesley also has experience with building quality affordable housing.

FCCFC created a “future story,” with a plan to become a hub of the community. Eventually, this will include a performance space, tutoring, mentoring, and a community garden. The congregation currently partners with Culmore Clinic, which provides no/low-cost health care to residents in the broader community.

Roadblocks



The process took a lot longer than the congregational leadership expected. The current pastor, Steve Moore, says logistical lessons include overcoming NIMBYism (a Not In My Backyard attitude), calculating parking spaces, and stormwater-related issues. Moore says he would encourage all government officials to simplify the process, “because the need is so great.”

For this project, First Christian community needed approval for the increased density through the county’s Comprehensive Plan; zoning approval came next. Both processes required public hearings. The church engaged in community outreach in 2021 and 2022, including multi-language outreach. Using pamphlets and videos to explain the plan and process, the church’s aim was to ensure the whole community could

participate in the discernment process, not just vocal community members. Even so, the actual approvals and financing took longer than the church had expected.

The church worked to maintain a good relationship with local government officials throughout the long approval process. Keeping elected officials informed ensures that no-one is surprised during public presentations. At the same time, local government staff can provide critical guidance through a complicated governmental process. The church found a good partner in Fairfax County. Pastor Moore notes, “The key is to have a really good development partner and have a really good team.”

Project



FCCFC had the capacity to hire a consultant who could offer guidance and represent the church's interests. Through the process, the church community learned that community outreach needs to be broad and include those who will live in the residences. Within the larger community, some neighbors have been vocal about the desire to keep an appealing green space. Others have expressed a strong NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) attitude, despite professing interest in the project and agreement that affordable housing is needed. Wesley, the developer, has indicated that response from the neighborhood has been tame

overall, but it hasn't always felt that way within the church community.

First Christian decided to sell the land to Wesley Housing, which will build the complex and handle property management. The congregation is planning to renovate the church building to become fully accessible, and to better serve the greater community. Members and leadership are hopeful that the combination of community services and worship space will stand as a witness to what faith can and should look like in public.

HINTON AVENUE UMC

RACHEL'S HAVEN

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Charlottesville
- **Acres of land:** 0.76
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 3 years
 - Pre-development: 2 years
 - Construction: n/a
- **Date opened:** never built
- **Number of units:** 15
- **Specific population served:** adults with developmental disabilities
- **Development Partner:** Piedmont Housing Alliance



Image credit: JJM Design

Congregation



Hinton Avenue United Methodist Church owned an historical building in the picturesque Belmont neighborhood of downtown Charlottesville. The church had seen declining membership for decades, although some of their outreach ministries remained strong. Members participated in local interfaith community organizing efforts and initiatives to

welcome immigrants. Housed within the congregation were a free clothing closet and a preschool. As housing prices rose in Charlottesville, the congregation began to consider how its space might be used to continue to serve the community, even as regular worship attendance dipped below 40 people.

Vision



In the mid-2010s, the church members began to consider converting some of their land to build affordable housing for adults with developmental disabilities. This ministry was strongly supported by Rev. Robert Lewis. His wife, who had passed away in 2016, was a long-time advocate supporting people with developmental disabilities. The newly imagined project was named in her honor. Hinton Avenue

United Methodist Church entered into a partnership with Piedmont Housing Alliance to design a potential project. The nonprofit that would support the adults was called Rachel's Haven. The hope was to have 10-25 units of supportive and affordable housing in the heart of a walkable neighborhood, with on-site support and a friendly church right next door.

Roadblocks



The initial rezoning caused a huge stir at both the city's planning commission and the city council. Although many community members spoke in favor of the project, many more expressed concerns. Even though this neighborhood was already a dense part of the city, there were concerns about having too many apartments on this property. Although most of the residents wouldn't be driving, neighbors expressed worries about increased traffic. In addition, some community members expressed reservations about supervision of and services provided to residents. In defense of the project, many members of the local interfaith community organizing group spoke in favor of the project at public hearings.

In 2019, Charlottesville's city council granted approval for the original Rachel's Haven design that Piedmont Housing Alliance submitted. This would have created 15 units on the Hinton Avenue United Methodist Church site, rezoning the land as a "neighborhood commercial corridor." This zoning meant that both the daycare and church worship space could remain on the plot, but limited the maximum number of units that Rachel's Haven would be able to build. To create more supportive housing, the groups would have had to apply for a special use permit (SUP), which would have required more planning.

Despite this initial approval, Piedmont Housing Alliance realized that the original plans were going to have a higher cost than was originally projected. Instead of renovating the currently existing structure at Hinton Avenue, Piedmont Housing Alliance would have to demolish and rebuild. When those additional costs were factored in, the income projections were less viable with only 15 units. Consequently, the community supporting Rachel's Haven came back with another proposed site plan to increase density. That revised site plan was voted down by the city council in 2020. After that disappointment, and with the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly becoming the primary focus of most housing providers, the project lost momentum. The increased cost of materials and the limit on density meant that Rachel's Haven was no longer financially viable.

In the end, instead of building a community of accessible housing for adults with disabilities, the congregation at Hinton Avenue United Methodist Church merged with another Methodist Church in Charlottesville and sold its building to an Anglican congregation. With the combination of zoning and supply chain factors, another opportunity to build affordable housing was missed.

INTERFAITH PARTNERSHIP

CHESTERBROOK RESIDENCES

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Falls Church
- **Acres of land:** 5
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 2 years
 - Pre-development: 5 years
 - Construction: 1.5 years
- **Date opened:** November 2007
- **Number of units:** 97 assisted living units for seniors, with 49 units set aside for seniors with “very low incomes”
- **Specific population served:** seniors
- **Development Partner:** Chesterbrook Residences Inc.



Photo credit: Chesterbrook Residences

Congregation



Three congregations partnered on the project to bring affordable senior housing to this space. Chesterbrook Residences was built through the hard work and deep partnership of Lewinsville Presbyterian Church, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, and Temple Rodef Shalom, as well as the National Capital Presbytery, the regional judicatory body for the Presbyterian (PCUSA) churches in northern Virginia.

Leadership of the National Capital Presbytery initially became involved when Chesterbrook Presbyterian Church’s dwindling congregation was preparing to disband. This congregation wanted to donate five

acres of its land for affordable housing for low- and moderate-income seniors in the Falls Church and McLean area. In Presbyterian polity, the presbytery owns land, not the local congregation.

The Presbytery asked nearby Lewinsville Presbyterian Church if it might undertake the feasibility study because of its experience and success in developing another senior living community, the Lewinsville Retirement Residences, in 1975. Lewinsville Presbyterian Church agreed to take the lead and recruited other congregations to join in developing the vision. Immanuel Presbyterian Church and Temple

Rodef Shalom responded to the invitation and become vital partners in the journey of more than seven years.

The initial informal task force of volunteers from all three congregations eventually became a more formal

nonprofit organization. This non-profit, Chesterbrook Residences Inc., maintains formal board representation from all three congregations in addition to the presbytery.

Vision



Seeing the need for affordable housing in the area, the trio of congregations hoped to use the land to respond to the crisis in some fashion. The leaders knew many community members lived on fixed incomes and couldn't afford high-end assisted living. After conversations with all three faith communities, the board decided to build an affordable assisted living community for seniors, focusing on lower incomes, but welcome to all.

The initial vision was to build a structure with at least 100 units and a day center for individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Unfortunately, it became clear early on that there were no funding sources for the development of the day center. Through many years of conversations and applications for funding and approvals, the project was scaled back to 97 units.

Roadblocks



Despite having land donated for the project, a strong volunteer leadership team, and a strong vision, the project still faced challenges and roadblocks.

Site control. Even though Chesterbrook Residents Inc. was given five acres for the project, the entire site owned by the presbytery was nine acres, divided into three parcels. One parcel had the church building and education wing that was being used by the Chesterbrook Taiwanese Presbyterian Church (with the permission of the presbytery). Another parcel was the five acres intended for the project. The third parcel provided access from the main street to the parcel that was to be developed. There was some confusion initially when leadership of the Chesterbrook Taiwanese Presbyterian Church thought it had been granted use of all three parcels. This dispute took almost four years to get resolved, which complicated the project's relationships with Fairfax County and the Virginia Department of Transportation regarding land use approvals.

Pre-development money. The project was very successful in getting its seed money, most of which was used to undertake a feasibility study. It struggled more to get the pre-development dollars. Large amounts of money are needed for architectural drawings, engineering reports, appraisals, legal fees, environmental reports, traffic studies, development consultant fees and pre-construction fees for the general contractor. The project initially sought to raise money from multiple sources, which takes time and effort, but finally managed to secure a line of credit that eventually rose to \$1.2 million based on using the land as equity.

Construction/permanent financing. Finding pre-development money was challenging, as was sourcing construction funding and securing permanent financing, with various funders having different requirements. One key challenge, which added costs, was a requirement from Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) that each unit have a full kitchen, even though assisted living units usually

only have partial kitchens. VHDA financing also would not cover the shared central kitchen and healthcare spaces, essential for assisted living.

The project ultimately secured a loan of \$11.6 million for the building from VHDA and two loans from Fairfax County. However, since the pre-development phase had taken several years already, the expected cost of the project increased had increased more than \$1 million from original estimates as construction was going to begin. Through a “final mile” campaign to the three faith communities, that gap in funding was filled by donations.

Neighborhood opposition. Despite the fact that Chesterbrook Residences was a project for seniors, the

proposal still generated neighborhood opposition. A relatively small, but vocal, group of neighbors raised concerns about traffic, ambulances, and loss of open land. One neighborhood group worked hard to elect someone who would oppose the project to the county board of supervisors.

Lengthy local decision-making processes. It took more than four years to move through the permitting and zoning processes. Just when the project was about to begin, a storm water management reviewer raised concerns about outfall requirements related to the stream behind the property. Resolving this took an extra six months. The lengthy time to move through required steps added nearly \$2 million to the project costs. The outfall issue alone raised costs by \$400,000.

Project



Despite the many challenges, Chesterbrook Residences opened its doors to seniors in the region in November 2007. The website for the residences says, “Chesterbrook Residences believes that assisted living should be affordable without large entrance fees and with reasonable monthly rent and service fees offering value without sacrificing quality for our residents.”

The board of directors continues to be composed of members from the three congregations and National Capital Presbytery. The board has hired Coordinated Services Management Inc., a professional management firm, to oversee the day-to-day operations of the facility. When Chesterbrook Residences opened in 2007, it was recognized as an attractive and functional living space, in addition to being affordable to seniors.

Status



Neighborhood residents celebrate what a lovely addition Chesterbrook is to the community. One neighbor who had opposed the project when it was still in the approval phase is now one of its biggest fans and teaches a weekly yoga class at Chesterbrook. According to a member of Temple Rodef Shalom who served on the board, “Everyone is made to feel welcome there, no matter their faith tradition, no matter the color of their skin.” All three faith communities that were part of the initial planning maintain representation on the board

of Chesterbrook Residences. These communities offer religious services in various traditions and celebrate holidays with the residents. The goal of supporting locals to age in place is lived every day in this community.

For more details about this project and great suggestions for others considering developing affordable housing on faith lands, see *The Long and Winding Road: A Case Study about the Development of Chesterbrook Residences* (link in Resources).

MICAH ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES

JEREMIAH COMMUNITY

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Fredericksburg
- **Acres of land:** 31
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 4 years
 - Pre-development: 3 years
 - Construction: likely 4 years total (1 year for phase one)
- **Date opened:** 2027 planned (phase one)
- **Number of Units:** 189 (phase one, 50)
- **Specific population served:** people who have experienced homelessness, with priority for those with disabilities
- **Development Partner:** Tricord Companies; SupportWorks Housing



Image credit: HKS Architects

Congregation



Micah Ecumenical Ministries isn't a traditional congregation, but rather a collaborative ministry founded in 2005 by nine churches in downtown Fredericksburg. The churches wanted to have an inclusive shelter and social service provider for people experiencing homelessness, one that recognized the intrinsic humanity of all those in the community and didn't discriminate based on struggles such as substance use or criminal history.

As of early 2024, Micah offers a "continuum of compassion," with a day center, the Hesed transition facility, a cold weather shelter and street church for folks who

are currently without housing, and some housing and stabilization services. As the Executive Servant-Leader of the organization, Meghann Cotter, observed, "People become homeless when they run out of relationships." Micah strives to be a bridge to both relationship and resources. Churches and other communities of faith are uniquely situated to build this bridge.

Since those working and volunteering at Micah have built such strong relationships within the community, they understood the unique challenges for people experiencing homelessness, as well as the unique challenges of Fredericksburg. Many people who have been

unhoused don't want to live in a crowded setting, which is how many apartments are structured, especially for residents with low incomes. In addition, Fredericksburg doesn't have a public housing authority, which makes

both construction of permanent supportive housing and placement into housing challenging. Therefore, the Micah team dreamed about responding to all these challenges through the creation of the Jeremiah Community.

Vision



Since living in a crowded apartment complex is not appealing to the staff of Micah, nor to the community they serve, the Jeremiah Community was envisioned as a neighborhood of 109 small single-unit homes and duplexes. Modeled on similar community projects in Texas and Missouri, this approach allows individuals to have their own space, while still being efficient with the

land. Each home will be approximately 450 square feet (larger than trendy “tiny houses,” defined as less than 400 square feet). In addition, SupportWorks Housing (formerly Virginia Supportive Housing) is hoping to build 80 units of Permanent Supportive Housing with additional resources including vocational training and a community clinic.

Roadblocks



The journey to build the Jeremiah Community has been a six-year process so far, largely due to community pushback. The projects that inspired this vision (Eden Village in Springfield, Missouri, and Community First in Austin, Texas) were able to use land without zoning restrictions, which is a rarity in Virginia. Micah sought permission from the city of Fredericksburg to build on the land where it envisioned the community. The city required Micah to research other potential sites around the region, which took more than a year. In the end, Micah returned to the original proposed site because it was conveniently located near resources and within city limits. Additionally, neighboring counties weren't prepared for this kind of project.

In addition, zoning laws required a “single family home” to be built on at least a 6,000-8,000 square foot lot. The small single-unit homes proposed in the Jeremiah Community would cover less than one-twelfth of that land, but the requirement was written into the city's zoning ordinance. Therefore, the city's planning commission had to update an existing zoning

classification to allow higher density and form-based code. This process also took more than a year.

There were additional roadblocks that are less common in more urban areas. For example, since Fredericksburg doesn't have a local public housing authority, Micah needed to partner with Virginia Housing, a nonprofit that works closely with state government, for funding. Virginia Housing does not currently allow project-based vouchers, which would allow subsidies to attach to units, rather than the person looking for housing. In addition, Micah leaders were investigating federal “new market” tax credits for disadvantaged census tracts. The project would have qualified in 2019. However, since the site has a high concentration of poverty near an area rapidly growing with wealthier development, the 2020 census disqualified the location from receiving the tax credits.

As of fall 2024, Micah had spent more than \$100,000 in pre-development costs, which excludes some professional services (land use attorney and architect) that were donated.

Project



The rezoning proposal was initially heard by the planning commission in the summer 2024, and conversations continued into the fall. The planning commission voted to recommend approving the project, and the proposal was referred to Fredericksburg's City Council. Because this project includes both increased density, supportive housing, and a right-of-way variation, there are two ordinances and two resolutions that need approval. City Council took the first vote on rezoning and updating the comprehensive plan in December of 2024. The meeting included almost three hours of public comment, largely supporting the project, because of the diligent outreach efforts of the

staff and volunteers at Micah. The final approval of the ordinances is scheduled for January 2025, and then the resolutions can be approved in the spring. The team at Micah is hoping for approval to be granted in the spring, so the project can break ground in late 2025.

Phase one will include 50 units of housing (mostly small single-unit homes, but with a few duplexes) and a community center. This first phase will cost \$17 million to build, primarily financed through community fundraising. Meghann Cotter, Micah's Executive Servant-Leader, says, "By all logic, we shouldn't have gotten this far. But we're doing this in the name of a God who does impossible things"

PARK PLACE BAPTIST

THE HANSON COMPANY

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Norfolk
- **Acres of land:** <1.0
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: n/a (church closed)
 - Pre-development: 3 years
 - Construction: not started
- **Date opened:** n/a
- **Number of units:** 40–70
- **Specific population served:** seniors with low incomes
- **Development Partners:** The Hanson Company and Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority



Photo credit: Kendall Warner/The Virginian-Pilot

Congregation



Park Place Baptist had been a vibrant congregation through the 20th century, peaking in the 1950s at 2,300 members, but as church attendance declined in the 1980s and 1990s, the leadership had to consider next steps. In 2003, the congregation began sharing the space with other community ministries. By 2012 the congregation had dwindled to a dozen members, and worship services were suspended. The building continued to be used by several urban ministries and church communities until 2016.

Over the next few years, the property stood vacant. News stories focused on the decaying property, the danger it posed to the community, the potential for illegal activity, and thefts of the church's beautiful stained-glass windows. In 2021, The Hanson Company, a for-profit developer that specializes in historic preservation, purchased the property.

Vision



The Hanson Company, in partnership with the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA), plans to build 40-70 affordable housing units for seniors, plus a senior service center. The current church building is 20,000 square feet, with a large sanctuary that could be used for community gatherings. There is also a

commercial kitchen that the developers envision could be used as an incubator for emerging restaurants or a place to expand feeding services. This vision is based on the needs of the community, in addition to the expertise of the project leaders.

Roadblocks



To build so many affordable housing units, The Hanson Company had to apply for a special use permit (SUP) from the city. Norfolk receives more than 120 SUP applications every year, even though some of them are for relatively small changes. The volume of SUP applications means applicants wait weeks, if not months, for city review. The special use permit was approved in the spring 2024. Final zoning and site logistics are pending.

There was some pushback at public hearings on who would live in the affordable senior housing. As for many of these projects, much of the controversy is rooted in negative stereotypes about people who struggle to pay for housing. Concern was expressed by community members and city council members.

Project



With support from the NRHA and the state Department of Historic Resources, the project is moving forward. The city has approved the rezoning, but additional funding needs to be secured before construction can begin. The NRHA has agreed to help seek funding for the project and will have a 30% ownership stake in the development. The Hanson Company is also seeking tax credits through both the national Low Income Housing Tax Credit program and

Historic Preservation program, which could lower the cost of construction and subsidize the lower rents for those living in the space. The leader of the project for The Hanson Group, Tarvaris McCoy, expressed that he was glad to preserve the legacy of ministry that Park Place Baptist offered for so long.

The goal is for construction to begin in late 2025.

ST. ELIZABETH CATHOLIC CHURCH

SAINT ELIZABETH APARTMENTS

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Richmond
- **Acres of land:** 6
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 5+ years
 - Pre-development: 5 years
 - Construction: estimated 18 months
- **Date opened:** rolling completion with first units expected winter 2025
- **Number of units:** 56
- **Specific population served:** 14 units at 40% of AMI, 14 units at 50% of AMI, 28 units at 60% of AMI
- **Development Partner:** Commonwealth Catholic Charities Housing Corporation



Photo credit: Joe Mahoney/times-dispatch

Congregation



St. Elizabeth Catholic Church, founded in 1923, is a racially diverse congregation located in Richmond. Known locally for its gospel choir and commitment to social justice, parishioners have long been focused on giving back to their community. As with most

Catholic churches, the building and land where the parish is located are owned by the regional body, the Catholic Diocese of Richmond. However, the ministries operating at the church are run by parish staff and volunteers from the St. Elizabeth community.

Vision



The diocese owns the parcel of land on which the church building and its parking lot are located. In total, that plot is just above four acres, 3.59 of which are currently vacant. That vacant site on St. Elizabeth campus was once the site of a Catholic school and convent. In the 1970s the school was relocated, and by the early 2000s, the convent was closed. In the ensuing decades, the buildings fell into disrepair. This portion of the campus would change hands many times with several developers attempting unsuccessfully to resurrect the property and turn it into a community asset over several decades.

After unsuccessful attempts to develop the adjacent parcels into affordable housing, the parish partnered with Commonwealth Catholic Charities Housing Corporation (CCCHC) to finally realize its dream of transforming its vacant lots into a community asset. With the City of Richmond selling 5.59 acres that were adjacent to the vacant lot, a large space was available to use for affordable housing. This new housing development, known as the St. Elizabeth Apartments, will mimic the American foursquare style home that is found throughout the surrounding neighborhood. The current plan is for 14 buildings to house 56 rental units for families with household incomes less than 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

Roadblocks



Even though the current project design includes a lower density than plans previously submitted by developers, it still required strong community support and a special use permit (SUP) from the city due to the underlying zoning. As such, between 2019 and 2021, CCCHC held more than 15 community meetings with adjacent property owners, community groups, and the neighborhood's city council member to both understand community needs as well as to obtain their support.

Together with leaders at St. Elizabeth, CCCHC applied for and was awarded an SUP in 2021, obtaining approval from both the city planning commission and city council. Despite years of discussions with the community, some neighborhood resistance remains.

Additionally, since the parish is in a National Historic District, the city's department of planning and development review and the state's Department of Historic Resources (DHR) were required to evaluate the project to assess compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. Late in the development process, DHR raised questions about the timing of the demolition of the school building. CCCHC and St. Elizabeth addressed these questions, and DHR issued its approval in July 2024.

Finally, like most projects dreamed of during COVID, the Saint Elizabeth Apartments had its share of construction cost increases and design-related pivots. The total project cost has increased from just over \$11 million in March 2021 to \$19.3 million in October 2024.

Project



The St. Elizabeth parish was determined to utilize its land to create more affordable housing options for its neighborhood. It has taken years of perseverance to negotiate with all parties involved in the project: the neighborhood, the City of Richmond, DHR, the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, the architects, and CCCHC.

Final site plan drawings were submitted to the city in July 2024 and are pending approval. Construction is expected to begin in December 2024 and is anticipated to take 18 months. New units will begin leasing in winter 2025 through spring 2026.

St. Elizabeth Catholic Church and CCCHC are excited to finally break ground and begin this exciting project. In addition to offering more affordable

housing options to the Northside neighborhood, the St. Elizabeth Apartments will also include a community room and playground, a walking path to the local elementary school, and access to the parish and nearby neighborhoods. Within the apartment complex, Commonwealth Catholic Charities will offer empowering and supportive services to both residents and community members, including – but not limited to – housing and financial counseling, workforce development, case management, counseling services, and nutrition assistance.

The parish at St. Elizabeth remains engaged with the process and is excited to work with its new neighbors. According to one church leader, members are excited to “answer our call for love and service to others.”

TABERNACLE BAPTIST CLAIBORNE SQUARE

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Petersburg
- **Acres of land:** 12
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: >10 years
 - Pre-development: 2 years
 - Construction: 2 years
- **Date opened:** August 2011
- **Number of Units:** 47 units (4 fully accessible)
- **Specific population served:** seniors with low incomes
- **Development Partner:** Better Housing Coalition



Photo credit: Better Housing Coalition

Congregation



Tabernacle Baptist Church was founded in 1890 and has long worked to serve all people in the Petersburg community. In the 1990s, the senior pastor, Rev. Dr. Robert Diggs, started to consider how the congregation could expand its presence in the community. Tabernacle Baptist operated a daycare, and had a

vibrant offering of ministries, but there wasn't enough space to fill the needs. Along with the congregation's leadership, Rev. Diggs saw a desire for a community center and other services. However, the sanctuary was landlocked in the middle of a block, so the congregational leadership needed to get creative.

Vision



Together with the pastor, the board of deacons and board of trustees created a separate nonprofit – Restoration of Petersburg Community Development Corporation – in 1999, and began to allocate finances every year for acquiring real estate. The initial goal was to build a community life center that could house an event space, classrooms, and other community services. As the project matured, it also became obvious that

affordable housing, especially for seniors, was a need in the broader community.

At a conference for community development corporations in 2008, Rev. Diggs met several representatives of the Better Housing Coalition (BHC), and asked if they would look at the land. That started a partnership that resulted in 47 units of housing being built on the same block as the congregation.

Roadblocks



When the idea was first broached within the congregation, some members were on board from the beginning, and some weren't. Tabernacle Baptist's Joint Board (comprised of the Board of Deacons and Board of Trustees) was able to approve the plan and each decision point along the way before those decisions were brought to the full congregation, thus the process wasn't as complicated as working within a more hierarchical church structure.

The main roadblock was the lack of density zoned throughout the City of Petersburg, which meant that

infrastructure for utilities was also sparse. During the Obama administration, there was money in the federal budget for inner city infrastructure. Restoration of Petersburg and the Better Housing Coalition applied for money through the Department of Housing and Urban Development to underwrite all the infrastructure (streets, lighting, sewer, sidewalks, etc). That funding was incredibly helpful. Petersburg would not have been able to support the project in that way, because the city didn't have money for it.

Project



Restoration of Petersburg CDC acquired a full block in the Halifax neighborhood of Petersburg. That was enough land to build a 30,000-square-foot community life center in addition to a three-story apartment complex with more than 40 units of housing, and a fully handicapped accessible fourplex. After almost two years of construction, the development, christened Claiborne Square, opened with 47 affordable housing units dedicated for seniors over 55 in August of 2011.

Claiborne Square won the Governor's award for Best Housing Development in 2011. It featured energy-efficient technologies and easy access to transportation

and services through both Tabernacle Baptist and the surrounding neighborhood.

Restoration of Petersburg CDC has continued work within the community. The organization was hoping to build another 58 units for senior citizens, in partnership with BHC. However, the permissions for that project have been held up, partly because the city of Petersburg doesn't currently have the budget to support the infrastructure additional units would require. In the meantime, Restoration CDC is selling small plots for single-family homes, especially for first-time homebuyers.

Status



The geographic closeness of Tabernacle Baptist Church and Claiborne Square means there are many opportunities for interaction. There is a senior citizens recreation program in the community life center Monday through Thursday mornings, in partnership with the city.

Some Claiborne Square residents worship at Tabernacle Baptist Church and participate in congregational ministries. The property management, handled by BHC, has gone smoothly. BHC is also responsible for filling vacancies. Dozens of people are on the wait list; units only become available upon the

death of a resident. While this is sad for the community, it is a testament to the positive environment that Tabernacle Baptist and BHC have worked to create together.

Tabernacle Baptist is in the process of selling land acquired outside the triangle of the church and Claiborne Square for more single-family home development. Rev. Diggs is hopeful that the city will have more funds to invest in infrastructure improvements with the 2024 approval of a casino referendum in Petersburg. Either way, Pr. Diggs knows "the divine development will continue."

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST RESTORATION HOUSING

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** City of Roanoke
- **Acres of land:** 2
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 2-3 years
 - Pre-development: in process, likely 2 years
 - Construction: n/a
- **Date opened:** n/a
- **Number of units:** 15
- **Specific population served:** senior citizens with restricted incomes
- **Development Partner:** Restoration Housing



Photo credit: Scott P. Yates for the Roanoke Rambler

Congregation



Trinity United Methodist Church was formed in the 1890s and has stood on the same corner in downtown Roanoke since 1903. The congregation started as a Sunday school class of Greene United Methodist Church, which remains only six blocks away. As the community grew, Trinity became an independent congregation and built a beautiful place to worship in downtown Roanoke.

The church had a gorgeous historic space, with a cupola, intricate stained glass, and a sanctuary that could fit 250 people. Before the pandemic in 2020, attendance was low, with approximately 30 people attending weekly. When the church re-opened for

worship after the shutdown, 20 people in attendance was considered a “good” Sunday. Trinity tried to make good use of the space, offering free and low-cost space to other community groups and ministries. The congregation enjoyed having an acoustic music group and crafting ministry in the building; however, the building wasn’t financially viable. When the part-time pastor, Rev. Joanna Paysour, was in the building alone during the pandemic, she noticed plaster falling from the ceiling. She realized that despite the beauty of the space, its age and maintenance needs meant that it could be a burden for the congregation. As she noted often over the coming years, “The building was no longer our servant; it was our master.”

Vision



Rev. Paysour knew about housing projects undertaken by congregations, including Emery Fellowship in Washington, D.C., and several in Atlanta. Roanoke often has a waiting list of several thousand people for affordable housing. The congregation recognized genuine need in the community. Rev. Paysour described the church, saying, “This is a great location, because it’s near historic homes, but also walking distance

from medical facilities and on public transportation.” The original dream from the congregation was a community center/ mission center that nonprofits and the community could use. Members approached Legal Aid and other nonprofits to ask if they could use the building. At some point, however, they realized the need in Roanoke wasn’t for more office space, but rather for more affordable housing.

Roadblocks



Rev. Paysour started reaching out to developers in the area and encountered many dead ends. She spoke to a for-profit developer in the spring of 2023, and that developer said they would buy the building for \$10. Their plan was to convert the sanctuary into after-school care (a current ministry of the church) and then add loft apartments in the education wing. The congregation recognized that its membership continued to decline, but didn’t think \$10 was a realistic value for the building.

Restoration House is a local nonprofit that does historical preservation and affordable housing in the community. Trinity United Methodist Church started a conversation with Isabel Thorton, Restoration House’s

executive director. Originally, the hope was to maintain part of the building for after school care and ministry, and have some affordable housing, but that wasn’t viable.

Conversations moved quickly with Restoration House leaders, leading to a plan between the nonprofit and the church. Simultaneously, Trinity United Methodist Church and Green Memorial United Methodist Church began conversations about reuniting. The plan for transitioning the church building and merging with another congregation was unanimously approved by the congregation. Rezoning and congregational mergers both went smoothly.

Project



Restoration House began the conversation with Trinity United Methodist Church in the spring 2023. Restoration House suggested converting the building to 15 affordable units for seniors. The focus on the elderly lessened the impact of NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) concerns from the neighborhood. The proposal included maintaining the historic look of the building by using historic tax credits for funding. The exterior of the building has not changed much, though the inside will undergo significant renovation. Restoration House initially offered to try to keep the afterschool care, but the afterschool program had found another location during the pandemic and decided to remain in the new space. Renovation of the building is underway, and tenants are expected to move into the units in early 2025.

The two Methodist congregations have joined, and Rev. Paysour is now the pastor for the new, larger community. Greene Memorial United Methodist Church birthed Trinity United Methodist Church more than 100 years ago, and now they have reunited. Rev. Paysour has said of the project, “It’s not what we hoped for, but it’s more than we could have imagined.”



The building was no longer our servant; it was our master.

WARRENTON UNITED METHODIST HERO'S BRIDGE VILLAGE

Fast Facts

- **Locality:** Town of Warrenton
- **Acres of land:** 11
- **Timeline:**
 - Discernment: 3 years
 - Pre-development: 2 years
 - Construction: pending
- **Date opened:** waiting for rezoning
- **Number of Units:** 44
- **Specific population served:** Senior veterans
- **Development Partner:** Hero's Bridge Village



Photo credit: Sheila Herlihy Hennessee

Congregation



Warrenton United Methodist Church has always been a community-focused congregation, and with 11 acres of land, it had room to serve its neighbors. The church runs a day care and has a playground that is open to the whole neighborhood. Over the last few decades, the town of Warrenton has increased in population, becoming less rural and more metropolitan. For years, the congregation had many conversations about the

best way to use its land in a mission-focused way. The neighborhood where the church is located has seen many financial struggles over the years. There is a motel that often hosts people experiencing homelessness for a night or two, and neighbors have experienced hard times. Even so, the church remains vibrant and committed to making Warrenton a better place.

Vision



Church members have long considered ways to use their land in service to their neighbors. The former pastor, Rev. Carl Chapman, had the 2006 blueprints for a community life center in his office for years – reminding him how much easier it is to make plans than to realize them. In 2019, the congregation held a series of listening sessions where members dreamed about what the best use would be. Together, they settled on the goal of offering affordable housing for seniors.

With growing need for housing in Warrenton, the local fire department and American Legion had both built housing, but neither was affordable to aging adults on a fixed income. The goal for Warrenton United

Methodist Church was to build a smaller community center, affordable senior apartments, and maintain an outdoor space with a playground. The congregation secured a Community Impact Grant from Virginia Housing to help with the pre-development process, including a community needs assessment and first drafts of engineering plans.

During the discernment process, leaders of the church met Hero's Bridge, a veteran-focused nonprofit that works with aging veterans in the area. Hero's Bridge was looking to expand its services into affordable housing for senior veterans, and Warrenton had a plot of land that was a great fit.

Roadblocks



The primary pushback for the project came from neighbors who didn't understand what the project would look like, and the town council, reflecting the neighbors' concerns. In its 2020 comprehensive plan, the town of Warrenton, which rewrites its comprehensive plan every 20 years, said one priority was to increase housing through "infill," which means developing higher density in already populated areas. When members at Warrenton United Methodist Church saw this, they were excited because it seemed the Hero's Bridge Village project fit exactly within the parameters of the comprehensive plan. Nonetheless, the town council had concerns.

When the conversation was first started, Rev. Chapman sent information to every neighbor with a property adjacent to the church and invited them to a town hall. Unfortunately, that was not the best setting to encourage listening. He described the experience as "being yelled at for two hours straight." The church planning committee did note concerns raised by those

in attendance and adjusted their plans in response to the feedback.

Six months later, Rev. Chapman hand-delivered updates to all the neighbors. The church then decided that instead of having a giant town hall, it would host small group sessions for residents of the neighborhood, and even invited Piedmont Dispute Resolution Center in to mediate. Only seven people showed up for 30 seats.

In private, several town councilors have been supportive of the concept, and sometimes even of this specific project. However, in response to the loud pushback from some neighbors, the town council has been unwilling to make a decision to move the project forward. One town councilor has been opposed to all development in part because of frustration with a large nearby corporate distribution center. He sent out a mailer to the whole town asking people to sign a petition to oppose this project. Church members believe he has misrepresented the church in his conversations with community members.

Even among those who support the project in general, there is concern among elected officials about setting precedent for increased density within zoning. The NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) attitude is also strong. In response to one of the angry phone calls he received, Rev. Chapman recalls saying, “This property doesn’t belong to me, or the church, or the community. It belongs to God.” At that point, the person on the other end of the line hung up on him.

Warrenton United Methodist Church has been working with a land use lawyer for more than two years to obtain rezoning. The congregation has spent approximately \$100,000 thus far, including the grant from Virginia Housing. A longtime parishioner bequeathed a house to the congregation in his will. Funds from the sale of the house covered half of the cost of legal fees, with Hero’s Bridge paying the other half. At least 18 months of time and more than \$50,000 would have been saved if the rezoning process had been streamlined and clear.

Project



When completed, Hero’s Bridge Village will provide 44 units of independent, affordable housing to seniors. The nonprofit finalized the contract to lease five acres of land from the church in summer 2024. After many delays, the rezoning request was heard by Warrenton’s Planning Commission in September 2024. With more than 20 public comments in support of the project, the

rezoning was recommended for approval. In December of 2024, the rezoning received final approval from Warrenton’s Town Council. While fundraising will continue, construction will begin in early 2025, and the community will benefit from the ongoing resources. With God’s continued grace, the church looks forward to welcoming new neighbors in a few years.

CONCLUSION

Looking forward: policy

The stories in this book help articulate the complicated and often overwhelming process of developing affordable housing in Virginia, especially for faith communities. Even in the most ideal scenario, it takes five years to develop housing. Often, the discernment and approval stage can last more than a decade. It is incumbent upon state and local policymakers to address the affordable housing crisis by helping to prioritize and streamline this process.

One essential change is to develop a more inclusive zoning policy, which can be approached at either the state or the local level. As discussed in the introduction (and more in depth in the book, “The Color of Law”), zoning has historically been used to reinforce racial and economic segregation. Some zoning is important to protect public safety, but much of it, particularly the preference for single-family rather than multi-family residential areas, often serves to continue the legacy and inequity of segregation.

An important bill that will be considered by the 2025 Virginia General Assembly is focused on Faith in Housing. This bill would give explicit permission to localities to streamline the approval process for congregations (and other property tax-exempt non-profits) that want to build affordable housing on their land. Enabling legislation like this is necessary since Virginia is a Dillon Rule state, meaning that cities and counties’ powers are limited by the state legislature. This bill will also provide support to write these local ordinances, especially beneficial for small localities that may not have the resources to do it alone.

In the same legislative session, there will also be a bill focused on zoning for mission-oriented development, which would create a state-wide administrative approval process for property tax-exempt non-profits, including faith communities. This bill would create minimum standards for multi-family development in every locality.

Other ways to support housing

Not every congregation has the capacity to build affordable housing. Some congregations are seeing increased attendance, despite a nationwide decline in attendance. Some congregations do not own land or are too far from public utilities to make housing development viable. However, many faith communities have a moral desire to help those who need housing. The good news is there are other ways to support these efforts, without undertaking construction.

Advocate

Stand up for affordable housing as a public policy. This means talking to legislators at Virginia's General Assembly and Congress. There are effective organizations doing this already, including the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, and the National Low Income Housing Coalition (more are listed in the appendix). Joining their mailing lists, signing up for action alerts, and participating in lobby days are all important steps.

Participate in community development efforts

Much like the story about Chesterbrook Residences in this book, there are sometimes opportunities to support other congregations in building affordable housing. Congregational members can contribute money or resources, and individuals can testify at local rezoning hearings.

Organize

Get to know your community, especially the people and families who struggle to find housing. Building relationships with diverse communities helps ensure that you are connected with and informed about the actual needs rather than perceived needs. In addition, there are local community organizing groups (some faith-based) that are finding creative local solutions that you can support.

Financial and material assistance

Offering support to community members in need has a major impact for families. Even if your congregation doesn't have the capacity to offer long-term housing, providing short-term help with rental assistance or organizing a food pantry can make a big difference.

Final Thoughts

Congregations have a shared focus on caring for people in need, and one of the biggest needs in Virginia right now is affordable housing. It is important that policy makers at the local, state, and federal level support affordable housing initiatives, especially those championed by people of faith. There are many challenges for congregations who want to develop affordable housing, but the success stories in this book demonstrate that it is still possible to complete a project. These homes have already improved the lives of hundreds of families from more than a dozen communities across Virginia. As one pastor of a completed project reminds others considering the path, "When we didn't think there was a way, God made a way."

APPENDIX A – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF “FAITH-BASED PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IN VIRGINIA”

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy commissioned a report from HousingForward Virginia in 2024 to estimate the number, locations, and characteristics of properties owned by faith-based organizations in Virginia. The report, summarized below, can be found in an interactive form online at <https://housingforwardva.github.io/yigby/>

The primary objectives of this research were to identify and examine properties owned by faith-based organizations in Virginia, and to determine:

- Total number and acreage of parcels
- Number of parcels by region
- Proportion of undeveloped vs. actively used properties
- Development potential based on current zoning (for a representative sample of properties in one planning district)

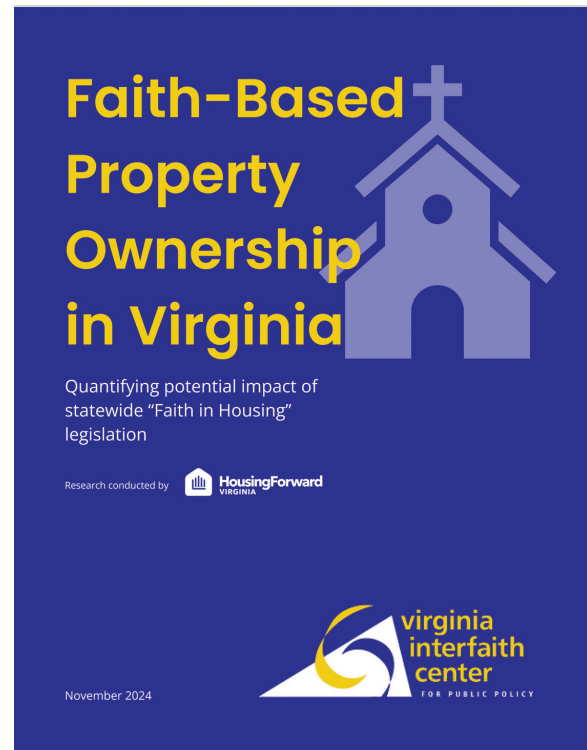
The data for the report was retrieved from several primary sources. The Regrid Parcel Dataset from LOVELAND Technologies identifies the owners of properties in Virginia. The Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data is compiled by the US Department of Homeland Security and includes a list of all places of worship. In addition, Virginia’s State Corporation Commission was consulted, because that agency grants corporate charters to religious organizations.

Using this data, HousingForward searched keywords to find property owners that were likely to be religious organizations. Afterwards, those were mapped, and a final review was performed to create an estimation of faith-owned land. The final data set has a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error.

Out of the over 4 million parcels in Virginia, 22,453 were identified as likely owned by a faith-based organization – with a 95% confidence level that the true accuracy of the entire dataset lies between 99.03% and 100%. Some faith-based properties could be absent from the analysis due to terms or phrases not accounted for in the keyword search. In total, these parcels amount to 74,116 acres of land.

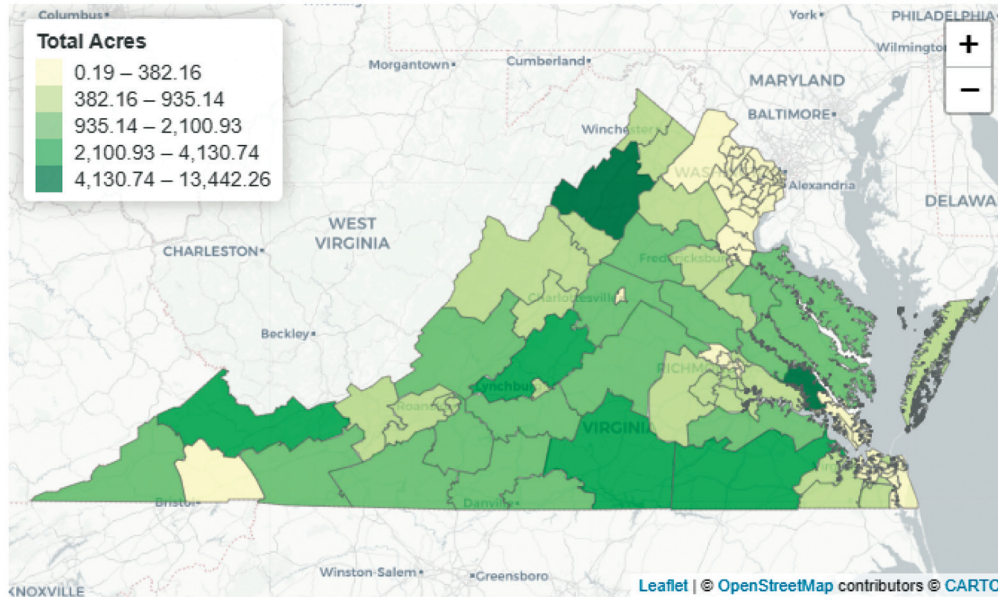
The median lot size is 23,509 square feet, which is approximately 0.54 acres. In many circumstances, this lot size is only viable for a small multifamily building of fewer than 20 units, particularly in urban areas served by public water and sewer. However, there are still significant shares of these parcels that could theoretically support larger residential development projects. About 38% are larger than 1 acre, and 25% are larger than 2 acres.

The report includes maps of faith-owned land listed by acreage and number of parcels in all of Virginia’s planning districts and state legislative districts. The Hampton Roads planning district has the largest number of congregational-owned parcels in Virginia, with more than 3,000. The Northern Shenandoah planning district contains the most acreage, totaling over 14,000 acres. The report serves as an essential resource for advocates, faith communities and lawmakers as they consider how to use land to address Virginia’s affordable housing crisis.



APPENDIX A – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF “FAITH-BASED PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IN VIRGINIA”

Figure 5.2: Total acres by House District



Northern Virginia Zoning

Current zoning impacts how difficult it is to redevelop faith-owned land.

The Virginia Zoning Atlas presents a unique opportunity to leverage research already conducted by HousingForward Virginia and the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. With the Virginia Zoning Atlas, parcels identified can be associated with their respective zoning districts and the rules governing residential development on them.

Utilizing the Northern Virginia Zoning Atlas, the 648 faith-owned parcels in the planning district were identified (with four additional parcels owned by faith communities deemed protected or undevelopable). For those 648 parcels, HousingForward categorized their current zoning. The median lot size among these 648 parcels is 25,723 square feet (0.59 acres). The number of parcels that are one acre or greater is 255, which is 39% of all parcels.

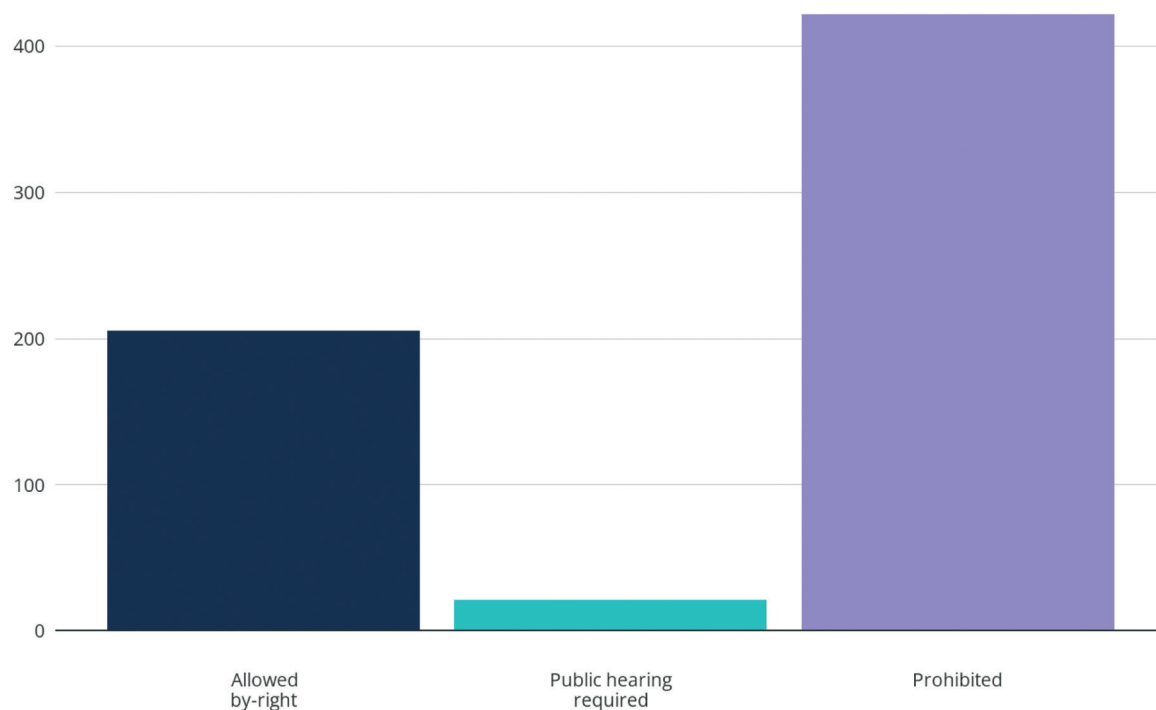
Based on the Virginia Zoning Atlas analysis, multifamily housing is prohibited on 422 of the identified parcels. A public hearing is required for multifamily housing development on 21 of those parcels, and it is allowed on 205 parcels by-right. If legislation were enacted to automatically grant faith communities the right to build multi-family housing, that policy would impact 443 parcels in the Northern Virginia Regional Commission service area (68% of identified parcels).

APPENDIX A – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF “FAITH-BASED PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IN VIRGINIA”

Figure 6.2: NVRC parcels by multifamily zoning treatment

Multifamily development potential for NVRC parcels

Current multifamily development treatment in local zoning



Report Conclusions

The Faith-Based Property Ownership in Virginia Report represents a preliminary examination of faith-owned parcels in the Commonwealth of Virginia. With additional time and resources, experts could conduct further research to determine the potential development capacity of these properties.

The findings here represent the first attempt to identify parcels owned by faith-based organizations within the entire Commonwealth of Virginia. Congregations and faith communities own an estimated 22,453 parcels that amount to 74,116 acres. This land is double the geographic size of the city of Richmond. If even a fraction of these parcels were developed, it has the potential to provide affordable housing to hundreds of thousands of Virginians.

APPENDIX B – CHART OF CONGREGATIONS BUILDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING

CONGREGATION	LOCALITY	LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS	NAME OF PROJECT
Alfred Street Baptist Church	Alexandria	HD 5 and SD 39	Old Town West
Arlington Presbyterian Church	Arlington	HD 3 and SD 40	Gilliam Place
Belmont Baptist	Roanoke	HD 38 and SD 4	Belmont Lofts
Blacksburg Presbyterian	Blacksburg	HD 41 and SD 5	Habitat Houses on Church St.
Central United Methodist Church	Arlington	HD 1 and SD 40	Unity at Ballston
Interfaith Partnership	Fairfax	HD 6 and SD 38	Chesterbrook Residences
Christ Episcopal Church	Glen Allen	HD 57 and SD 16	(Better Housing Coalition)
Citadel of Hope	Richmond	HD 79 and SD 14	Goodwyn at Union Hill
Claredon Baptist	Arlington	HD 2 and SD 40	vPoint
Claredon Presbyterian	Arlington	HD 2 and SD 40	
Embrace United Methodist Church	Waynesboro	HD 36 and SD 3	Embrace Community
Episcopal Church of the Resurrection	Alexandria	HD 4 and SD 39	The Spire
Fairfax Presbyterian	Fairfax	HD 11 and SD 37	Glebe View
Fairlington Presbyterian	Alexandria	HD 3 and SD 39	The Waypoint at Fairlington
First Baptist Church of Norfolk	Norfolk	HD 95 and SD 21	Aspire at Church Street
First Christian Church of Falls Church	Falls Church	HD 13 and SD 35	Kindred Crossing
Ecumenical Partnership	Harrisonburg	HD 34 and SD 2	Suter Street Project
Hinton Avenue United Methodist Church	Charlottesville	HD 54 and SD 11	Rachel's Haven
Lewinsville Presbyterian	McLean	HD 6 and SD 38	Retirement Residences
Macedonia Baptist	Arlington	HD 3 and SD 40	The Macedonian
Micah Ecumenical Ministries	Fredricksburg	HD 65 and SD 27	Jeremiah Community
New Light Full Gospel Baptist Church	Virginia Beach	HD 96 and SD 32	
Park Place Baptist Church	Norfolk	HD 92 and SD 21	
Presbytery of the Shenandoah	Harrisonburg	HD 34 and SD 2	Homeless Services Center
St. Elizabeth Catholic Church	Richmond	HD 79 and SD 14	Saint Elizabeth Apartments
St. James Methodist Church	Alexandria	HD 4 and SD 39	St. James Plaza
St. Luke's United Methodist Church	Danville	HD 49 and SD 9	England Trail (Habitat Village)
St. Paul's on-the-Hill Episcopal	Winchester	HD 31 and SD 1	Senseny Place
Tabernacle Baptist Church	Petersburg	HD 82 and SD 13	Claibourne Square
Trinity United Methodist Church	Roanoke	HD 38 and SD 4	Restoration Housing
Warrenton United Methodist Church	Warrenton	HD 61 and SD 38	Hero's Bridge

Color Key

- Built and Open
- In Progress (pre-development and development)
- Never completed

	UNITS PER PROJECT	DATE COMPLETED (OR EXPECTED)	POPULATION SERVED
	77	2021	80% AMI and below
	173	2019	60% AMI and below
	32		80% AMI and below
	7		
	144	2024	30% AMI - 60% AMI
	97	2007	Seniors. Mixed between market rate and subsidized
	32	n/a	Seniors
	52	2019	50% - 60% AMI
	70 affordable; 116 total	2012	multi-family
	92		Seniors; LGBTQ+
	113	2021	30% - 60% AMI
	10		Homeownership 40% - 80% AMI
	81	2022	30% - 60% AMI
	85	2024	
	95		Seniors
	21		Habitat & low AMI homebuyers
	15	n/a	Adults with developmental disabilities
	161	1980	Seniors
	36	2011	multi-family, 50% - 60% AMI
	109		Formerly Homeless
	60		Seniors
	72 beds		Homeless
	56		
	93	2018	60% AMI and below
	30	Still in progress (first homes opened in 2023)	Habitat homeowners
	63	2022	Seniors; veterans
	40	2009	Seniors
	15		Seniors
	44		seniors; veterans

RESOURCES

Additional Resources: tinyurl.com/housing-vicpp

Websites and Institutes Focused on Faith-based Housing and Redevelopment

Bricks and Mortals (bricksandmortals.org)

Enterprise Community Development (enterprisecommunity.org)

Notre Dame Church Properties Initiative (churchproperties.nd.edu)

Ormond Center (ormondcenter.com)

Partners for Sacred Places (sacredplaces.org)

Rooted Good (www.rootedgood.org)

Sympara (sympara.org/home)

Trinity Wall Street Mission Real Estate Development,
(trinitywallstreet.org/grants-partners/mission-real-estate-development)

Books and Reports

“Building Belonging: The Church’s Call to Create Community & House our Neighbors” by Rev. John Cleghorn
(Westminster John Knox Press, 2024).

“The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America” by Richard Rothstein
(Liveright, 2017).

“Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City” by Matthew Desmond (Crown Publishing, 2016).

“Gone for Good?: Negotiating the Coming Wave of Church Property Transition” by Rev. Mark Eldson
(Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2024).

“The Long and Winding Road: A Case Study about the Development of Chesterbrook Residents”
by Rev. Jerry Hopkins (Chesterbrook Affordable Assisted Living Facility Task Force, 2002).

“Transitioning Older and Historic Sacred Places: Community-Minded Approaches for Congregations and Judicatories”
by Rachel Hildebrandt and Joshua Castano (Partners for Sacred Places, 2021).

Housing Advocacy Organizations

HOME (Housing Opportunities Made Equal) of Virginia (homeofva.org)

Housing Forward Virginia (housingforwardva.org)

Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance (nvaha.org)

Virginia Housing Alliance (vahousingalliance.org)

Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (virginiainterfaithcenter.org)

Virginia Poverty Law Center (vplc.org)

Virginia Zoning Atlas (www.zoningatlas.org/virginia) (produced by HousingForward Virginia)

YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard) (yesinmybackyard.org)

Religious Development Partners and Resources

Commonwealth Catholic Charities Housing Corporation

- (cccova.org/ahd)
- Based in Richmond, covers most of Virginia

Presbyterian Church (USA)

- (presbyterianmission.org)
- “How to Develop Well” is an online tool designed to assist congregations as they work with property developers

United Church of Christ Church Building and Loan Fund

- (Cblfund.org)
- National organization supporting all faith-based communities in mission-oriented renovation or development

Virginia Episcopal Real Estate Partners

- (episcopalvirginia.org/organizations/homes)
- Based in Richmond, works around the state
- Formerly Virginia Diocesan Homes, part of Episcopal Diocese of Virginia
- Helps congregations discern how to use land for mission purposes, including affordable housing

Wesley Community Development Corporation

- (wesleycdc.com)
- Based in North Carolina, covers the whole mid-Atlantic region
- Primarily works with United Methodist churches

Other Non-profit Development Partners in Virginia

Affordable Homes & Communities

- (ahcinc.org)
- Serves the entire Northern Virginia region, developing affordable housing and offering resident services focused on youth development, community building, and economic mobility

Better Housing Coalition

- (betterhousingcoalition.org)
- Serves the greater Richmond area, develops affordable housing, and restores neighborhoods
- Offers services to residents that include youth academic enrichment programs, financial support for higher education, and many others

Community Land Trusts

- A model for affordable homeownership in which a nonprofit owns the land while the family owns the house; this lowers the total cost to the family and promotes home equity development.
- Virginia Statewide Community Land Trust (vsclt.org) serves the Commonwealth in communities where there is no active CLT, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. Virginia. VSCLT was featured in the PBS documentary series “Life in the Heart Land.”
- Regional Land Trusts
 - * Maggie Walker Community Land Trust (maggiewalkerclt.org), Richmond
 - * Piedmont Community Land Trust (piedmontclt.org), Charlottesville region
 - * Lighthouse Beloved Community CLT (lighthousebelovedcommunity.org), Lynchburg
 - * New River Home Trust (communitypartners.org/homeownership/new-river-land-trust), Blacksburg and Montgomery County

Habitat for Humanity

- (habitat.org)
- Operating nationwide to help build housing from the ground up; many Virginia affiliates
- Works on a model of “sweat equity” for first-time homeowners, where families with low incomes help build the house and receive a zero-percent interest mortgage

LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation)

- Local branches in a national network support community development with a focus on affordable housing
- LISC of Virginia (lisc.org/virginia) serves Richmond area
- LISC of Hampton Roads (lisc.org/hampton-roads) serves Hampton Roads

Piedmont Housing Alliance

- (piedmonthousingalliance.org)
- Serves City of Charlottesville and counties of Albemarle, Greene, Fluvanna, Louisa, and Nelson
- Develops affordable housing and offers HUD-certified housing counseling

Project: HOMES

- (projecthomes.org)
- Richmond-based
- Focused on restoring and replacing manufactured and mobile homes

True Ground Housing Partners (formerly Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing)

- (truegroundhousing.org)
- Formerly Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing
- Serves the DC metro area with sustainable housing development and resident services

Wesley Housing

- (wesleyhousing.org)
- Based in Northern Virginia; focused on developing affordable housing and resident services

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Sheila Herlihy Hennessee is the Director of Faith Organizing for the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy where she focuses on engaging congregations and the public in the work of justice and advocates for affordable housing policies statewide. Previously, she served for eight years at a bilingual church, coordinating 15 ministries, including advocacy and community organizing. Sheila is a professed Secular Franciscan (OFS), an order in the Catholic church following the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi and committed to living in the spirit of simplicity, humility, and peacebuilding.



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Special Thanks

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Have you ever wondered how congregations can support their surrounding communities?

This book is a valuable resource for faith communities, legislators, and advocates to learn about the success stories and challenges congregations face when building “Faith in Housing” projects. Inside, you’ll find stories of congregations that have gone through the process (some are completed, and others are in progress). You’ll also find information about policies that make it easier for faith communities to live their values and provide affordable housing to the broader community.

Fourteen congregations throughout Virginia have responded to the affordable housing crisis by developing affordable housing on their land. More than forty other congregations are considering doing the same. Five faith communities in Virginia tried to build affordable housing on their land but were not able to secure the funding, permits, or necessary support.

Read this book to learn more about faith-owned land and affordable housing, a match made in heaven.



Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
1716 E. Franklin Street
Richmond, VA 23223
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The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) advocates economic, racial and social justice in Virginia’s policies and practices. Founded in 1982, VICPP is the largest advocacy voice for the interfaith community in Virginia with more than 20,000 advocates from all faiths and people of goodwill. VICPP fosters dialogue to bridge divisions, and sponsors programs that educate the public and officials on critical issues. Priorities include affordable housing, health equity, economic justice, criminal justice reform and welcoming all people to Virginia.