

FACT SHEET

What to know about Faith in Housing

Problem:

Faith leaders know about the need for affordable housing because of their members and community, and many want to respond. In addition, many faith communities are experiencing decreased attendance, and are wondering how to use their spaces in a mission-focused way. Developing affordable housing allows congregations to provide resources to community members who are struggling, while putting faith into action.

Solution:

A new Virginia law streamlines the permitting process for property tax-exempt nonprofits (most of which are faith communities) to build affordable multi-family housing on their land. In response to an exclusionary attitude of “not in my backyard” (NIMBY), this policy can be thought of as a “Yes in God’s backyard” (YIGBY) approach.

- **Affordable Housing Requirements:**

- Property must be owned by congregation or non-profit 5 years prior to application
- At least 60% of homes must be affordable to residents making less than 80% of the area’s median income (consistent with federal programs)
- The housing must remain affordable for at least 50 years

- **Guardrails:**

- Projects must be within 500 feet of existing water and sewer
- All existing health, safety, and environmental regulations still apply
- Local review, including site plan, environmental, historic, and archaeological reviews, all remain in place.

- Some sites remain off-limits, including industrial zones and sensitive military areas
- **Other important provisions:**
 - Must comply with Virginia Fair Housing Act
 - Subject to local real estate tax
 - Ground floor may contain other uses (including child day care and worship space)

Understanding height and density

The bill allows a maximum height of 45 feet by right in a typical residential area with detached homes and townhouses. Here’s what that might look like compared to a church or a house:



The bill allows a maximum height of 60 feet in historic districts, if there is already a 60 feet or higher building within 500 feet, otherwise the cap is 45 feet. Here’s what that could look like, with the VA state capital for scale:



In a city center with existing tall apartment buildings, eligible properties could build housing as tall as the tallest building nearby (within 500 feet.)



The Faith in Housing bill goes into effect on January 1, 2027. However, since there is a long process to put together a proposal for a new affordable housing development, it’s wise to get started as soon as possible!

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