

R-3 Resolution on Congregations and Affordable Housing

Whereas, the Commonwealth of Virginia suffers from a profound lack of affordable housing units for its citizens; and

Whereas, unaffordable, unsafe, and unstable housing negatively affects the health of everyone, the educational outcomes for our youth, and the employment prospects for adults; and

Whereas, the lack of affordable housing disproportionately affects households which have been historically discriminated against in Virginia; and

Whereas, the lack of affordable home ownership opportunities has exacerbated the historic racial wealth gap in Virginia; and

Whereas, churches are located in communities of opportunity – communities with strong public schools, access to health care and healthy foods, and employment opportunities – thereby opening up transformational opportunities for families who could one day live in housing on former church properties; now

Therefore, Be it Resolved by the 229th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Virginia,
That this Convention supports legislation supported by the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy in the General Assembly of Virginia that will establish by right development of affordable housing on land owned by any church, congregation, or faith community.

Submitted by: The Rev. Benjamin P. Campbell, St. Paul's, Richmond.

ATTACHED: A flyer from the VICPP entitled "Congregations and Housing (Yes, in God's Backyard)."

FACT SHEET



Congregations and Housing (Yes in God's Backyard)

Problem:

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

At the same time, many faith communities understand that caring for neighbors is a part of their mission. Congregations own land in localities all over Virginia and are interested in supporting their local communities. They already do this through supporting local shelters and partnering with non-profits, but many are interested in developing affordable housing on their own land. However, challenging zoning regulations and discriminatory attitudes stand in the way.

Solution:

VICPP advocates a state level zoning change that would allow by-right development of affordable housing on land owned by any congregation or faith community. 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.

This policy would create an opportunity for congregations to use land to develop new affordable housing, which benefits both the broader community and the faith institution. Faith communities are often located in residential neighborhoods, which means that new residents would have access to services.

In addition, much of the land owned by faith institutions currently goes unused. There are parking lots and empty offices that congregations would like to see vibrant and supporting the community. Congregations hear the need for affordable housing from their clergy and members, and many of these institutions want to offer housing. Developing affordable housing allows congregations to provide resources to community members who are struggling.

Background:

There are already more than 20 congregations in Virginia that have developed affordable housing on their property. The process usually takes between 7 and 20 years, and a significant part of that time is spent applying for Special Use Permits or zoning changes, along with convincing nearby residents that the development is good for the community. These communities have already seen the benefits of affordable housing. Allowing other congregations to live their mission would benefit all Virginians.