

HB 1859/SB 5885

Expanding opportunities for affordable housing developments on properties owned by religious organizations



BACKGROUND

Across Washington state, our communities are grappling with an inadequate supply of affordable housing. At the same time, many faith communities are struggling with upkeeping old buildings and dwindling congregations. Churches and other communities of faith are trying both to respond to urgent housing needs in their cities and faithfully steward the land according to their teachings and missions to support the poor and marginalized.

Properties owned by faith communities have been serving the community through affordable housing and community services for decades, but there is growing interest and demand for reimagining property owned by religious organizations. In 2019, the legislature passed a bill helping faith communities build affordable housing on their properties through a zoning density bonus.

HB 1859 builds on that legislation, making it possible for more faith communities across the state to build affordable housing through these key provisions:

- Expands the density bonus to all cities and gives local governments the flexibility to shape what works for that community.
- Lowers the affordability threshold to a minimum of 50% of units set aside for households below 80% Area Median Income (AMI) to allow for mixed-income development, OR 20% of units for households below 50% AMI.
- Faith communities often partner with a developer to build the housing through a ground lease. This bill allows a leasing entity to pay all fees, mitigation costs, and other charges, instead of only requiring/allowing the religious organization to do so.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ON LAND OWNED BY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

There are dozens of projects in various stages of development across the state, right now! Bethany and Knox Presbyterian in Spokane are developing projects that will serve women and refugees. Across the state in Bothell, Bothell United Methodist Church is developing affordable housing with a community center and human services. Projects like Good Shepherd House in Seattle are already taking advantage of the 2019 density bonus legislation.



Four Amigos Beloved Community, Seattle

Building on the legacy of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, which closed in 2010 and gave its land for affording housing and a new church start, Columbia City Church of Hope. Church of Hope partnered with El Centro de la Raza and Beacon Development Group on a six-story development that includes 87 units of affordable family housing, an early childhood learning center, and a new church home.

Walnut Corners, Spokane

In 2009, Lutheran Churches in the Downtown core of Spokane came together as Spokane Urban Ministries to repurpose two vacant lots owned by Salem Lutheran Church. The result was Walnut Corners, two buildings with 46 affordable units and a coffee shop on the ground floor.



New Life Housing, Tacoma

Shiloh Baptist Church in Tacoma built two buildings on two church-owned properties across from the church. The land previously contained homes that housed people transitioning out of prison. The buildings contain 60 units total, ranging from 1 to 2 bedrooms, all serving low-income households.