



Faith & Housing Cohort Overview

Solving Richmond's affordable housing crisis will require some creative thinking about how we utilize what is already present in the City. Vacant City-owned parcels, underutilized public infrastructure and, as it turns out, hundreds of faith-owned acres and the buildings upon them.

Permanent supportive housing for unhoused individuals; multifamily residential; senior housing; housing for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities; mixed-income rentals; and first-time homeowner opportunities — all of these can be built on faith-owned properties. What's more, new housing can catalyze equitable development: affordable childcare, accessible healthcare, green spaces, healthy food systems, plus jobs and enterprises owned by women and people of color. The question is: How to unlock religious properties so that everyone flourishes?

As part of Richmond's Faith & Housing Initiative, the City is launching a cohort for up to 12 congregations that want to build housing on their properties for missional impact and financial sustainability. Starting in January 2027 and facilitated by the national nonprofit Sympara (www.sympara.org), the 12-month peer-learning experience will help congregations discern their calling to housing, engage neighbors and other community stakeholders in visioning, and prepare for the multiyear journey with developers, funders, and programmatic partners.

Curriculum: Each congregation will have a cohort team of six leaders, including clergy and neighbors. The cohort will kick off with a daylong Saturday gathering, followed by monthly 90-minute lunch sessions on a weekday, and conclude with another Saturday gathering. The cohort experience will include:

- Theological reflection on identity, hospitality, stewardship, and community wealth-building.
- Introduction to historical and contemporary models of faith-rooted community development.
- Site analysis, massing studies, market feasibility, financial feasibility, and initial renderings.
- Asset-mapping with neighbors to make visible resources, strengths, and opportunities.
- Design sprints that lead to short-term experiments in property reuse.
- Field trips to learn from other congregations that have built affordable housing.
- Introductions to mission-driven developers with experience working with faith communities.
- Individual coaching on discernment and change management.
- Deepening in what Sympara calls "a spirituality for the long haul" — spiritual and narrative practices to sustain the community through a multiyear process.

Criteria for Congregations: The cohort is for congregations that have (1) *developable property* — excess land and/or buildings that can be redesigned or reconstructed to make room for housing; (2) *leadership capacity* — passion, skill, and bandwidth in clergy and laity; (3) *social capital* — community relationships that can be leveraged; (4) *expansive mission* — a commitment to reimagine the nature of spiritual community with neighbors of other faith traditions and no religious affiliation; (5) *judicatory support*, if necessary; and (6) *spiritual health* — the disposition, practices, and willingness to embark upon a journey that will take at least three to five years beyond the cohort experience.

Information Sessions: The City will host two virtual information sessions: November 4 and 6 from 12-1 p.m. RSVP to loren.brown@rva.gov.

Application: Congregations are invited to apply for the cohort. The purpose of the application is to determine a congregation's readiness to embark upon the multiyear journey of housing development. **Submission Deadline: 5 p.m. ET November 30, 2026.**

Apply at: go.rva.gov/applyfaithhousing