City of Richmond
Faith & Housing Cohort
Information Session

November 6, 2026

CITY OF RICHMOND

CITY OF RICHMOND
FAITH & HOUSING
INITIATIVE

RICHMOND FAITH & HOUSING INITIATIVE

- Richmond faces an affordable housing crisis. More than 20,000 affordable units are needed.
- Mayor Danny Avula has charged City leaders to think creatively about housing development. One solution: build housing on faith-owned properties.
- A new state law that takes effect on January 1, 2027 will make it easier for faith communities to develop affordable housing on their properties.
- The Faith & Housing Initiative is a two-year pilot. The centerpiece is the Faith & Housing Cohort.
- The City has hired Sympara, a North Carolina-based nonprofit, to design and guide the initiative.

OVERVIEW OF INFORMATION SESSION

- About Sympara
- Examples of Affordable Housing Built on Faith-Owned Properties
- Cohort Overview
- Application Process and Criteria for Selection
- Q&A

ABOUT SYMPARA

- **Governance:** Sympara is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation governed by a board of directors.
- **Mission:** We help communities reimagine underutilized religious properties for social impact.
- **Vision:** We see just, equitable, and sustainable communities emerging through sacred/civic placemaking.
- **Approach:** Participatory consulting engagements and congregational cohorts.
- **Impact:** Since launching in 2019, Sympara has helped 50 congregations reimagine their properties — for affordable housing, mental health, nonprofit office space, youth development and recreation. More than 1,200 units of affordable housing will be built in the coming years as 21 Sympara-equipped churches move into pre-development.

BIG QUESTIONS

Who will pay for development?
Who will do the work?
Who will manage the affordable housing?

EXAMPLES OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING BUILT ON FAITH-OWNED PROPERTIES

Church of the Resurrection

Alexandria, VA



Arlington Presbyterian Church

Arlington, VA



Fairlington Presbyterian Church

Alexandria, VA



Greenway Village

Richmond, VA





Allen Temple Baptist Church

Oakland, CA

Lincoln Park Holiness Church

Raleigh, NC



Caldwell Presbyterian Church

Charlotte, NC



Bethany Christian Church

Austin, TX



OVERVIEW OF COHORT

- **Dates:** January-December 2027
- **Composition:** Up to 12 congregations
- **Design:**
  - Each congregation assembles team of 6: 1 clergy + 5 members/community stakeholders.
  - Two Saturday retreats: kickoff and closing.
  - Monthly 90-minute peer-learning exchanges hosted by participating congregations.
  - One weekday field trip to visit congregations that have built affordable housing.
  - Monthly one-hour team meeting.

OVERVIEW OF COHORT

- **Curriculum:**
  - Theological reflection on identity, hospitality, stewardship, and community wealth-building.
  - Introduction to historical and contemporary models of faith-rooted community development.
  - Asset-mapping with neighbors to make visible resources, strengths, and opportunities.
  - Site analysis, market feasibility, financial feasibility, and preliminary sketches.
  - Design sprints that lead to short-term experiments in property reuse.
  - Technical assistance and coaching.
  - Outcomes/deliverables: Plan, partnerships, roadmap, and confidence to move forward.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: CONGREGATIONAL READINESS

- Developable property
- Leadership capacity
- Social capital
- Expansive mission
- Judicatory support, if necessary
- Spiritual health

Application deadline: November 30 by 5 p.m. Submit via City website: go.rva.gov/ApplyFaithHousing

APPLICATION DEADLINE

November 30 by 5 p.m.

Submit application via City website: go.rva.gov/ApplyFaithHousing

Q&A