



drone photo by Brian Smale

AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATES

by John Hoerster, *Chair, Affordable Housing Committee*

IN MARCH 2023 the Vestry confirmed its strong interest in using the Cathedral's St. Nicholas site for affordable housing and authorized our Affordable Housing Committee to launch a detailed feasibility phase. While the year-long feasibility study revealed some site development challenges, no critical stumbling blocks were unearthed. Accordingly, in March of this year, our committee recommended, and the Vestry approved, moving forward to the stage of selecting a development partner that would bring expertise, credibility, and financial strength to the project while being aligned missionally with Saint Mark's and being supportive of the project criteria we have outlined.

This April we launched this new phase by seeking expressions of interest from potential development partners meeting our criteria. At that stage, though, we learned of a "perfect storm" of systemic and economic challenges facing affordable housing developers that discourage them from taking on additional projects in the short term. Our current assessment is that it will take two to three years for this storm to pass. Despite this timeline extension, the Vestry has directed our committee to con-

tinue exploring affordable housing on the St. Nicholas site. I think this is because, despite the perfect storm:

- ◆ There is *still* a long-term, critical need for affordable housing in Seattle.
- ◆ Affordable housing is *still* the highest and best mission-related use of the St. Nicholas site.
- ◆ St. Nicholas is *still* a highly compelling site for affordable housing.
- ◆ It is *still* critically important to help rectify the history of housing discrimination on Capitol Hill.

Our committee has very important work to do while the market challenges settle. A key focus will be to expand and deepen a robust engagement with the community, including intentional engagement with communities most impacted by housing insecurity in the region. We are in the process of finalizing a Community Engagement Roadmap for 2024–2025 focusing on three groups: the parish; neighbors; and the communities from which the housing residents will be drawn.

PARISH COMMUNICATION

The draft Community Engagement Roadmap sets objectives to (1) address housing justice issues as gospel-oriented and as an expression of Christ's charge; (2) expand engagement on the interrelated issues of housing, income inequality, and poverty; (3) deepen our knowledge of housing inequities and the responsibility of faith communities to respond in just ways; and (4) build awareness that affordable housing is just one part of Saint Mark's commitment to address a spectrum of housing needs.

We are considering several specific programs to engage the parish:

- ◆ Partner with the Restorative Justice Council and other Cathedral housing ministries (see sidebar) to host a "Housing Summit" in 2025.
- ◆ Host a Wednesday Forum periodically on housing with community partners such as Operation Nightwatch.
- ◆ Host a parish-wide study of two books by Matthew Desmond: *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* and *Poverty, by America*. (Copies of the books are available through a National Book Fund grant.)
- ◆ Create an intergenerational reading list of books on housing justice with potential to check out books from the library at Saint Mark's.
- ◆ Maintain and enhance the Housing Ministry website content.
- ◆ Explore with Visual Arts Ministry an art exhibit that has ties to redlining or housing justice issues.
- ◆ Explore opportunities for further collaboration with the Diocese of Olympia's Multicultural Ministries and Circles of Color and with Sacred Ground groups. Consider hosting an affordable housing workshop at Diocesan Convention (potentially in collaboration with St. Luke's, Ballard).

COMMUNICATION WITH NEIGHBORS

Our communication objectives are to (1) cultivate a network of support by neighbors for the plan to develop affordable housing on campus; (2) provide ongoing transparent communications; (3) meet any public process requirements; and (4) continue to invite engagement at Saint Mark's (for example, cathedral lawn, labyrinth, Greenbelt, Leffler Garden, and Music Series; we also want to welcome participation by neighbors in the parish communications activities discussed above). Overall, we want to cultivate the sense of a welcoming shared space for affordable housing residents, neighbors, and parishioners.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITIES THAT WILL BE SERVED

We seek to work with BIPOC organizations whose members have been harmed by housing discrimination on Capitol Hill. Our communication objectives are to (1) identify the existing networks and entities within the impacted communities; (2) build relationships to listen and learn; (3) identify potential long-term partners; and (4) lay the groundwork for later engagement on design and operating decisions to assure that the St. Nicholas project feels welcoming and safe. As a very first step, our Affordable Housing Committee and the Vestry will be participating in Intercultural Competency Engagement work; we will then be reaching out to community organizations for their input and advice as we seek to meet the goal for the affordable housing project to best serve those whose communities have been harmed by housing discrimination on Capitol Hill. We will be reporting on our progress in the Winter 2024 *Rubric*.

AND FINALLY...

A heartfelt thanks to Emily Meeks for her extraordinary service as co-chair of the Affordable Housing Committee. We look forward to Emily's return to the Diocese of Olympia upon graduation from seminary and will work hard to make her proud.

We welcome and would greatly appreciate your feedback, your questions, and your possible interest in volunteering, especially to help with one of the programs discussed above in the parish communications section. Please email: affordablehousing@saintmarks.org ◆

HOUSING MINISTRIES AT SAINT MARK'S:

Meals Ministry

The Threshold Fund

Affordable Housing Committee

Saint Mark's Habitat for Humanity Team

Operation Night Watch

Lowell Elementary

(over 25% of Lowell students are unhoused)

Tent City 3

(Saint Mark's has hosted Tent City for 17 years)

For more information please visit:
saintmarks.org/housing