

Building Community

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BETHLEHEM HOUSING VISION



SUSTAINABILITY FEATURES

**Building
Community**
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN HOUSING VISION

The First Presbyterian campus will...

Be a green community



More than 50% of land
conserved as open space

Be energy efficient



New housing will meet or
exceed Energy Star criteria

Protect local ecology



Comply with Enterprise Green
Community standards

Which sustainability features would you most like to see?

Most widely used
green building design
certification, which
leads to 20-30%
less energy use, on
average

LEED

Net-Zero

A building that creates
as much energy
as it uses through
renewable sources
like wind and solar

Passive House

A holistic approach to
creating sustainable
buildings that need
minimal energy to
heat and cool, often
leading to 75-100%
less energy use

RENEWABLE RESOURCE PRACTICES

Solar

Recycle stormwater
& greywater

Collect, treat and reuse
stormwater runoff or non-
sewage residential water
for gardening and toilet
flushing

Compost organic
waste

Convert
into fuel
or energy

WRITE YOUR IDEAS HERE!

01 / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A NEW VISION FOR FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

How does God's love abide in anyone who
has the world's goods and sees a brother or
sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love not in word or speech
but in deed and truth.

– 1 John 3:17-18

The First Presbyterian Housing Vision was born out of a shift in First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem's missional focus to explore possible uses of its vast resources — a 124,000-square foot building and 31.56-acre campus — to meet our community's critical housing needs.

In 2023, the City of Bethlehem conducted a Housing Needs Assessment to better understand the key drivers of the city's affordable housing challenges, the current and future housing needs of Bethlehem residents, and opportunities to close the gaps. This assessment, which informed the creation of a Comprehensive Housing Strategy for the City to address Bethlehem's growing affordable housing crisis, revealed shocking statistics about the reality many families in our community face in accessing stable housing due to the high cost and low availability of rental housing in the city of Bethlehem.

**45% OF BETHLEHEM
RENTERS ARE COST-
BURDENED, MEANING
THEY SPEND OVER 30%
OF THEIR INCOME ON
HOUSING**

**NEARLY HALF OF
BETHLEHEM'S
HOUSEHOLDS ARE
RENTERS, COMPARED TO
32% ACROSS THE LEHIGH
VALLEY**

**1,052 NEW RENTALS
ARE NEEDED TO MOVE
THE CITY BACK TO A
HEALTHY 7% VACANCY
RATE FROM ITS CURRENT
2% RATE**



In response to this need, and the growing sentiment among church members and leadership that the church's vast resources could better serve our community, First Presbyterian initiated a 9-month public planning process from September 2023 to May 2024. This process sought to include church members, surrounding neighbors, and other community stakeholders in developing a vision for what mixed-income housing and community amenities on First Presbyterian's campus could look like.

The primary goal of this Housing Vision is to create significant, positive community impact. In addition, it will offer the church long-term financial sustainability to continue offering ministries of expansive welcome, cultivating spiritual nurture and community for all ages, and serving our most vulnerable neighbors.

A COMMUNITY-INFORMED PROCESS

From September 2023 to May 2024, First Presbyterian's Housing Vision planning team

- comprised of church leadership, a Steering Committee of church representatives, a planning and engagement consultant, and a financial feasibility consultant - conducted the following engagements:

- Two surveys totaling 714 respondents
- Three listening sessions with 24 participants
- Three community meetings engaging an average of 200 people per event
- Intimate conversations with over 80 immediate neighbors
- A mass mailing of 5,000 postcards to neighbors within a one-mile radius
- Door-knocking of 12 homes along Center Street and Laros Estate's private drive

The Steering Committee also held countless informal discussions with community members and church members and institutional neighbors to discuss their concerns and aspirations for the future of the campus, regularly making themselves available for one-on-one conversations about the process.



AN INCLUSIVE HOUSING VISION

These extensive community engagement efforts contributed to the iterative development of a set of principles to guide the creation of the Housing Vision, as well as the design concepts comprising the vision itself. Eleven visions for the future of the campus - which incorporated the amenities, features, and housing types that were most preferred by community members in an initial survey - were developed by the community at a design workshop in November 2023. Three initial design concepts emerged from the design and planning elements reflected in these visions. These were presented for community feedback at an open house in January 2024, with an online survey made

available to collect input through March 2024. The Housing Vision, shared publicly at an outdoor community event in May 2024, culminates the feedback provided on these initial concepts.

The Housing Vision maintains and builds upon the natural features and beauty of the campus, clustering homes around amenities including playgrounds, community gardens, and athletic fields. Over 50% of the campus remains landscaped open space. Homes connect directly to 1.5 miles of public walking trails that loop throughout the campus, connecting housing to amenities. The Housing Vision utilizes housing

Responsive



Reflect feedback from over 850 surveys and comments

Neighorly



Maximum building height of 4 stories

Contextual



Match the density and style of the neighborhood

Scenic



No buildings within 200 feet of Center Street

Open & accessible



Welcome parishioners, residents, and neighbors

Faith-centered



With space - and parking - for congregational growth

A driver of opportunity



Offer diverse homeownership and rental options

Family-Friendly



New playgrounds, athletic fields and recreation areas

Restorative



Landscapes that nourish our habitats and souls

Green



More than 50% of land conserved as open space

Connected



1.5 miles of new walking paths and trails

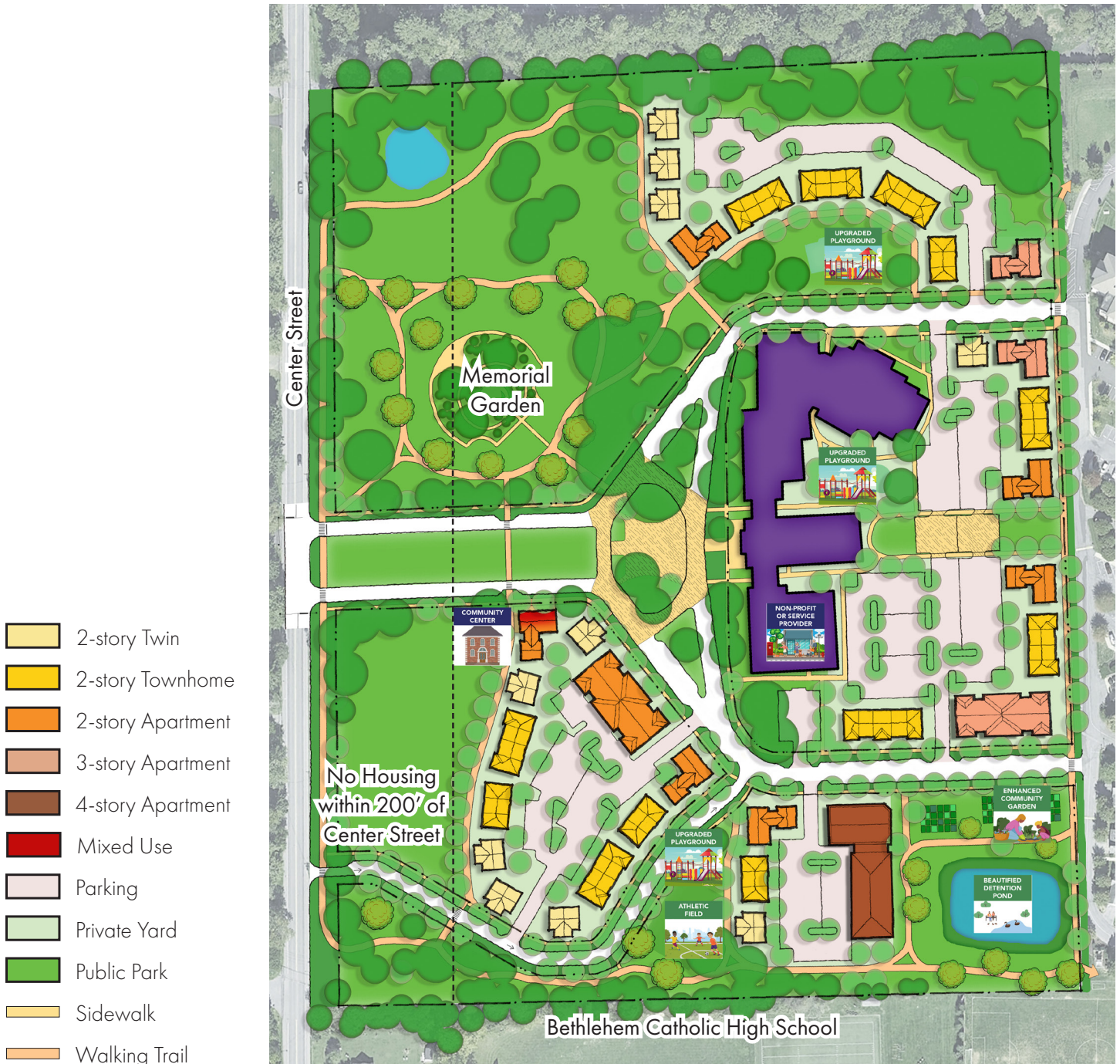
Forested



More trees and diverse plantings than today

200 UNITS
500 PARKING SPACES
6.4 UNITS PER ACRE
50% OPEN SPACE PRESERVED

types already found in the neighborhood including twins, townhomes, and small apartment buildings. The range of housing types is typical of a resilient, healthy community with a balance of housing opportunities for a wide range of families and households.



CAMPUS HOUSING VISION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why have a Visioning Process?

Our city is facing a housing crisis. As a result, First Presbyterian Church is shifting its missional focus to explore possible uses of our vast resources (building and land) to meet our community's housing needs. Doing so will have significant, positive community impact, and it will also offer the church long-term financial sustainability to continue serving our most vulnerable neighbors.

What was the Visioning Process About?

First Presbyterian Church is working to create a vision for the future of the campus. The Church selected COLLABO and Urban Ventures to lead a planning process that was transparent, inclusive, and centered on building trust and capacity for the next chapter of the Church's story with a strong focus on mixed-income housing. The church plans to retain ownership of its property and pursue development as a joint-venture partner in the project; this will help ensure that the vision is implemented as intended and that the property continues to be managed well.

Who did we engage?

We listened and learned from the project Steering Committee, congregation members and participants, neighbors, and other stakeholders in the community to identify core goals, create a vision, and outline action steps for implementation of the Plan.

How does this relate to Broader City of Bethlehem goals?

The City recently completed a study that determined there is a significant unmet need for affordable and mixed-income housing in the broader community. This documented identified and outlined opportunities for new high-quality housing and neighborhood amenities on the First Presbyterian Campus, along with open space and circulation improvements.

How long will it take to develop the campus?

Redevelopment of the campus is likely to occur in 2-3 phases, and will require multiple years before construction is likely to begin. The project will utilize multiple financial sources including bank construction loans, conventional loans, and state and federal tax credits. The process will continue to include multiple opportunities for public input and will inevitably change based on a variety of factors.

As a non-profit will the Church continue to not pay property taxes if developed?

No. Once the property is rezoned and used for residential purposes, it will pay taxes similar to other development projects. Additionally the property is not located in an Enterprise Zone, Opportunity Zone, or LERTA tax abatement program so it will not receive special tax treatment like some developments on the south side of the City.

Is there enough parking?

Yes, there is enough parking for both the Church and residential uses on the campus. Studies have shown that religious and residential uses compliment each other well because they have different peak demand times for parking. Additionally, for the one or two large annual events in which parking might be a challenge, surrounding owners have expressed interest in volunteering part of their property for parking.



How does the density of the Vision Plan compare to the surrounding neighborhood?

The vision is for a contextual community, at approximately 6 dwelling units / acre, less than 1/3 the density of adjacent Kirkland Village, and about the same as areas west of Center Street including Madison Avenue.



What is "mixed-income housing?" Who will live in this community?

Our vision is for a diverse mixed-income community which would include a healthy balance of housing opportunities for a wide range of families and households: one-third of the units would be market rate, one-third would be middle-income, and one-third would be low-income. (This will not be public housing.)



OUR NEXT STEPS

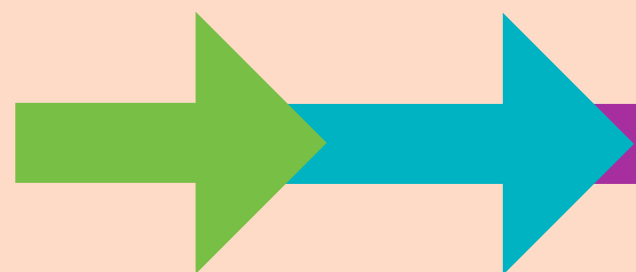
REALIZING THE CAMPUS VISION

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This Housing Vision document is the first step of many in the development of the campus. Before a single line was drawn the community was asked what they wanted to see in the future, and they were engaged multiple times as the vision was refined. The City's final planning process builds on this engagement, with additional opportunities for community members to help sculpt the final plan for the campus.

The Church is dedicated to using their property to help alleviate Bethlehem's housing crisis and respond to community needs. The Church will partner with a developer who is dedicated to the principles outlined in this Vision.

Redevelopment of the campus is likely to occur in **2-3 phases**, and will require **multiple years** before construction is likely to begin. The project will utilize multiple financial sources including bank construction loans, conventional loans, and state and federal tax credits. The timeline shown lists major milestones, with continuing opportunities for public input. Every development process inevitably varies slightly over the years and is subject to change based on a variety of factors.

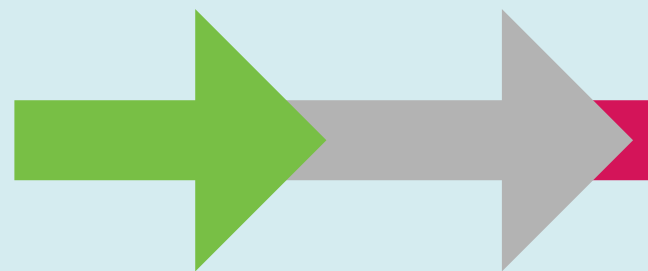


STEP 1
Final Vision Plan

Summer 2024

STEP 2
Development
RFP Issued

Summer 2025



STEP 8
Final Plan
& Rezoning
Approval

2026

STEP 9
Phase 1
Architect Hired

2026

