
**Housing Hope:
Tacoma Faith Community Policy Priorities for Affordable Housing Action Strategy**

Summer 2018



*“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” **Micah 6:8***

WHO WE ARE

Associated Ministries is a 49-year-old organization partnering with over 200 faith communities across Pierce County. For decades, people of faith and goodwill in our network have worked together to join in the struggle against poverty and homelessness.

As people of faith, we are called to look into the eyes of *all* of our neighbors and to see in them the presence of God, and therefore, to see the inherent dignity and value of every member of our community. We look into the eyes of those experiencing homelessness and displacement and see broken systems; racial, economic, and other forms of oppression in our community; and entrenched and complex issues. Yet, we have faith that we can—and must—work to ensure the dignity of all our neighbors.

We are alarmed at the growth and deepening of the crisis of homelessness and housing affordability in our region. Median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Pierce County increased 49% between 2012-2017. An individual earning minimum wage in Tacoma would need to work 78 hours per week to spend 30% of their income on a one-bedroom apartment. We see a dramatic increase of our neighbors experiencing poverty in booming community meals in church halls, in family rotational shelters in church basements, in the turning away daily of more than 200 people at local area shelters, and through the formal coordinated entry work of Associated Ministries.

We believe that faith communities have a critical role to play in our region's collective response to this emergency, and we are energized by a moral imperative to care for the marginalized in our midst. We are prepared to contribute significant resources of people, buildings, land, and locally rooted leadership as we strive to be a strong moral voice dedicated to the pursuit of the common good over profit or personal power.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

We know that we can only do this work effectively in relationship with one another.

To that end, Associated Ministries has convened quarterly meetings for faith community members and allies since last year to learn, strategize, discuss, pray, and plan to confront homelessness in partnership with Pierce County homeless and housing service providers and other allied community organizations.

Attendance has grown every quarter, reaching 80 in March, with over 54 faith communities in total participating from across the county.

At our March meeting, a group of 25 local faith leaders from a range of local congregations agreed to form an Advocacy Working Group to learn more about the City of Tacoma's Affordable Housing Action Strategy and to develop a response to be shared at a later quarterly meeting.

Since April, this group has met several times, conducted in-person small group meetings with city and non-profit leaders from Planning Services, the Housing Division, the Housing Authority, City Council, met with the City's consultants on this project, and developed the recommendations in this report.

- **5 quarterly local faith leader meetings** since 2017

- **80 local faith community members** at largest gathering

- **54 faith communities** represented at these gatherings

- **25 local faith community members** on Advocacy Work Group

POLICY PRIORITIES FOR TACOMA'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACTION STRATEGY

Based on our in-person research meetings with local leaders and rooted in our values and vision for the City of Tacoma, we call on the City Council to adopt the following four policy priorities as part of their development of a bold approach to the crises of homelessness and housing affordability.

1. Focus on the development of 0-30% AMI housing

The wellbeing of the most vulnerable in our community is the central moral test of our city

- Our most urgent housing need in Tacoma is at the level of 0-30% AMI; this level of extremely low income housing is also the most challenging to fund.
- Based on 2017 data, 30% AMI would be around \$16,000, which would translate to rents of around \$400. According to the 2018 Housing Authority Rent Burden Report, there are about 10,000 Tacomans who meet this definition.
- We call on the City to pursue creative strategies to target the development of housing at 0-30% AMI including: assessing available city and state-owned land and partnering with faith communities with available land for the development of very low-income housing.

2. Develop an affordable housing preservation ordinance and strong tenant protection ordinances

All members of our community are equally valuable, and deserve a clean and affordable place to live

- We are at serious risk of losing housing supply that is already relatively affordable; the recent experience of residents of the Tiki apartments has demonstrated what is at stake for this community.
- We call on the city to pass an ordinance designed to preserve 'naturally occurring' affordable housing.
- We call on the city to develop and pass ordinances designed to strengthen tenants' protections from displacement, eviction and abuse, and to support best practices for equitable and just landlord-tenant relationships.

3. Pass mandatory inclusionary zoning for construction in all zones that allow multi-family housing, with at least 10 percent at 50% AMI or below

Our community grows stronger in spaces where people of all backgrounds can interact and develop relationships

- The market alone will not meet the needs of all of our neighbors. At this time of economic boom, we must work together with public, civil and private sectors to agree on an approach to development that balances growth with justice.
- We need housing at all levels of the economy; inclusionary zoning that generates housing at 80% AMI can help to free up more affordable housing supply that is occupied by renters who could afford higher rents.
- Inclusionary zoning—particularly when paired with the Multifamily Tax Exemption—is an essential tool to ensure that new development brings opportunity to more than just the top of our economy.

4. Develop a local housing trust fund with seed funding from the city

The ancient practice of tithing affirms that our resources are not just our own, but are a gift intended for the service of the whole community. Our City resources are similarly held in common ownership by all the people of Tacoma and should be used wisely to serve all members of our community.

- We challenge the City to commit 1% of the general fund annually to begin to capitalize a Tacoma Housing Trust Fund, in addition to budgeted funds for other housing programs.
- Further capital may be sought from the private and non-profit sectors.
- We encourage the City to include such seed funding in the 2019-2020 budget as a priority at a time of crisis; in the longer term, we support the development of a dedicated local funding source for affordable housing.