

Talking Points

In Support of the Application of Bethany Lutheran Church for a Density Bonus in accordance with RCW 35.63.280

- Bethany Lutheran Church is strategically located for affordable housing. Its property lies south of High School Road between Sportsman Club and Finch Roads. It is within walking distance of more than 10 schools, 1.5 miles from downtown Winslow, and is the site of a Kitsap Transit stop and Park-and-Ride lot.
- The church's property is approximately 8 acres; the worship center, fellowship hall, offices, and school building occupy less than a quarter of the property available for development.
- Bethany has envisioned using a portion of its property for affordable housing for many years. By resolution at a congregational meeting in January 2017, Bethany reaffirmed its commitment to affordable housing. A task force was then created to begin to explore options. At a subsequent congregational meeting in October 2017, a follow-up resolution was adopted, stating that it was "not just advisable but urgent" to explore affordable housing opportunities.
- The October 2017 congregational resolution identified a number of guiding principles to inform its affordable housing vision. These guiding principles were as follows:
 - * The goal is to provide affordable, sustainable housing on Bainbridge Island.
 - * We would like Bethany's project to be a model for replication elsewhere.
 - * Stewardship of the property is important, so the preference is to maintain Bethany ownership.
 - * Housing management should be provided by someone else (HRB, for example).
 - * The property improvements must be aesthetically pleasing and attractive to the congregation and the neighborhood.
 - * We want to collaborate with other congregations/faith-based groups on Bainbridge Island on this project, but ownership/rental of units would be open to income-qualified occupants without reference to religious affiliation.
- The City of Bainbridge Island (COBI) is on record supporting affordable housing endeavors such as Bethany's. For example, the COBI Comprehensive Plan calls for "an innovative, aggressive and multi-faceted housing strategy." Policy HO 3.4 specifically calls on COBI to "partner" with non-profit organizations and churches to address housing issues. Policy HO 3.5 calls on the City to "support" organizations such as Bethany in "developing and managing affordable housing on Bainbridge Island." Policy HO 6.2 specifically identifies density bonuses as a mechanism to provide more affordable housing.
- As the affordable housing situation worsened, COBI has taken additional steps to address the crisis. In 2017, the City Council appointed an Affordable Housing Task Force to investigate and make recommendations. (Two members of Bethany with long-term local connections served on this Task Force: Stephen Deines and Ed Kushner.) The Affordable Housing Task Force Final Report was issued in May 2018. The Report underscored the worsening housing situation as prices escalated and affordable units decreased. It also pointed out that more than one-third of BI residents are "cost burdened" according to HUD because more than 30% of their household income is required for housing. In addressing possible approaches to address affordable housing, the Affordable Housing Task Force Report called for the adoption of an "Innovations Program" that would allow staff to permit experimental affordable housing projects, on a limited basis, that are not now allowed by code. Bethany's request for an increased density bonus to realize its vision for affordable housing would be an ideal "Innovations Program."

- Since the Final Report of the Affordable Housing Task Force, housing prices have continued to increase on Bainbridge Island. Currently, Zillow reports that the typical value of homes in 98110 is over \$1 million.
- In 2019, the Washington state legislature adopted a statute (SHB 1377 codified as RCW 35.63.280), which *mandates* an “increased density bonus” for religious organizations seeking to build affordable housing on their properties. It is up to the local municipality to determine the extent of that density bonus.
- In May 2021, Bethany formally requested an increased density bonus in accordance with RCW 35.63.280. The COBI City Council has now scheduled consideration of Bethany’s request for an increased density bonus at its meeting on October 26. Public comment is invited, including written input at this address: council@bainbridgewa.gov.
- The COBI City Council already has met and made preliminary allocation of available funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). In addition to \$2 million allocated to HRB for its 550 Madison project, the Council allocated \$1.75 million for other affordable housing projects to be determined in the future. Thus, the highest single priority identified by the City Council in allocating ARPA funding is affordable housing!
- Bethany seeks to develop a community with a combination of 2-, 3-, and 4-bedroom homes. No decision has been made whether a portion of the homes will be sold, but all will be “affordable” under applicable (HUD and/or local) income qualification guidelines.
- Housing Resources Bainbridge (HRB) has publicly stated its support for Bethany’s vision for affordable housing on its property.
- A number of members of Bethany, along with neighboring faith communities, are or have been actively involved in community groups that address and advocate for housing solutions. These agencies include HRB, Helpline House, Compass Housing Alliance, and Lutheran Community Services Northwest among others.
- In making its request for an “increased density bonus” to move forward with its long-time vision for affordable housing on its property, Bethany Lutheran Church is not only responding to a national and local housing crisis, but it seeks to respond and live into God’s call for us to truly be neighbors with one another and to exercise faithful stewardship of the congregation’s unique land asset. We strongly desire to help build a stronger, healthier, and more vibrant community.