

Creativity leads to multitude of housing options

This region is known for expanding the definition of affordable housing to mean far more than apartments with cheap rent. Affordable housing encompasses a multitude of housing options that serve a broad variety of specialized needs, and the methods used to develop and finance it are as varied as the populations they serve.

The Seattle area has a long and respected history of developing affordable housing. The Seattle Housing Authority has been around for more than 50 years and now provides housing for 4 percent of Seattle's population. Outside the city limits, the King County Housing Authority provides comparable housing initiatives. These agencies are the backbone of our region's affordable housing tradition.

Nonprofit organizations — Housing Resources Group, Plymouth Housing, Capitol Hill Housing Improvement Partnership, AIDS Housing of Washington, St. Andrews Housing, to name a few — are also very effective at developing and managing affordable housing.

Housing Resources Group alone has built and manages more than 1,600 units of affordable housing, including The Gilmore (now under construction) and the newly opened Stewart Court, both in the heart of downtown Seattle.

On the Eastside, A Regional Coalition for Housing has supported a number of nonprofits that have created a wide range of housing options, serving the needs of families, seniors, the homeless, and persons with special needs.

Local, state and federal governments provide significant funding through property tax levies, federal low income tax credit programs, the HOPE VI program, the Federal Home Loan Bank and the State Housing Finance Commission.

These programs, combined with private sources, have provided more than \$1 billion for new housing that has been, or is in the process of being built in our region.

Private developers, with experience in weaving together financial, community and construction concerns, are another significant piece of the complex affordable housing puzzle. Private sector expertise is particularly evident in three areas:

- Providing real estate expertise to nonprofits who don't have the staff in-house to manage real estate development projects.
- Including affordable housing components within projects which otherwise would be entirely market rate.
- Assisting colleges and universities with providing affordable student housing, using private sector development models.

Several projects both completed and under way exemplify the positive benefits of the public/private collaboration.

• AIDS Housing of Washington has worked with private developers to provide new housing for people living with HIV/AIDS since its inception in 1988. From its first project, the Bailey Boushay House in Madison Valley, to its most recent one, the Shirley Bridge Bungalows near Alki Beach, AHW has effectively combined its programming expertise with private outside project managers, resulting in housing that meets highly specific needs.

• Bailey Boushay House now serves as a national model of how effective skilled nursing care, daily health services and housing can fill a niche for those whose illness limits their ability to live independently. Meanwhile, the Shirley Bridge Bungalows, a complex of six small homes located one block from the beach, provides yet another type of housing.

Each project's success came from the

AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Harris Hoffman
▼

collective efforts of the sponsoring nonprofit, myriad public and private funding sources and private developers. With the help of effective predevelopment community relations, these projects now blend with their surrounding neighborhoods, enabling their residents to remain part of the community's fabric despite their circumstances.

• The Avondale Park project, soon to be built in Redmond, is a first of its kind Eastside development. Friends of Youth, Catholic Community Services and Hopelink have combined forces as the Eastside Housing Association to develop a 65-unit complex that will include an emergency shelter, very low-income apartments and a range of on-site social services.

To promote the inclusion of affordable housing within market rate projects, the city of Seattle initiated a property tax exemption program for selected neighborhoods. Uwajimaya Village Apartments in the International District was the first project to be completed under this program. Welch Apartments, sponsored in part by the Central Area Development Association and currently under construction in the Central Area, is the newest.

For the next 10 years, one-quarter of the apartments in each of these projects will be available to residents with incomes at or below 80 percent of median, in exchange for a real estate tax exemption on the buildings. Since the inception of this program four years ago, approximately 400 affordable apartments in seven Seattle neighborhoods have been built.

HARRIS HOFFMAN is a partner at Lorig Associates LLC. He sits on the board of AIDS Housing of Washington, and was on the board of the Seattle Housing Authority for more than 10 years.