



PUBLICLY OWNED PROPERTY AND ADAPTIVE REUSE IS A POWERFUL SOLUTION TO CREATING HOUSING THAT IS AFFORDABLE TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

Local governments across the country own properties that are vacant, underused, or no longer serve their intended purpose. Local governments also struggle with creating a pipeline of affordable housing for extremely low- and low-income households. Communities have seen an increase in the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Repurposing publicly owned property for residential use, in collaboration with developers who pledge to deeply affordable housing and/or supportive housing for persons who are experiencing homelessness, is one way to solve these issues.

If local governments are truly prioritizing ending homelessness and see that the pathway to ending it is through housing, they should adopt a decision-making process and policies to focus on affordable housing into the disposition process for vacant and unused buildings. Adaptive reuse of publicly owned properties converts existing buildings into affordable housing projects and aims to tackle the supply side issue of the housing crisis.

This strategy might also involve examining current locations that will be used for their current purpose but could be developed more intensively, such as low-density buildings where additional floors could be added. Some cities have successfully developed affordable housing on top of fire stations, public libraries or co-locate affordable housing and healthcare facilities. Underutilized parking lots have great housing potential, too.

Adaptive reuse utilizing publicly owned property is an excellent option for those tackling homelessness and wanting to increase the housing supply:

- **Lower construction costs.** When compared to traditional building projects, adaptive reuse has several significant financial advantages and cost savings. Overall, adaptive reuse uses more labor than it does building materials, and while material costs have skyrocketed in the last few decades, labor costs have increased only slightly. Adaptive reuse also forgoes all demolition expenses, which are often expensive and a sizable portion of a construction budget.
- **Speeds up construction.** Building a new structure usually takes significantly longer than rehabbing an existing building. Many spaces in an old building may be habitable after only minimal refurbishment, so even if the project is still ongoing, owners can open parts of the building for business.
- **Less Not in My Back Yard rhetoric.** Creative adaptive reuse projects seemingly have less of a NIMBY issue because people enjoy the historical preservation of the property or see the addition of living units a part of a healthcare facility, firehouse, or other public use less of a threat to their perspective of being neighbors.



Local Government Leaders Can Lead

Local governments can lead the way in ending homelessness through utilizing publicly owned properties, by adopting overarching goals and policies appropriate to the development portfolio reflecting community needs and resources available.

- **Pipeline and process management:** An initial step is to take stock of the publicly owned parcels under its control, creating a full inventory. This effort should be matched by robust engagement with the community, those who are experiencing homelessness and homeless service providers to determine community needs and opportunities across the portfolio of inventory. Policies and procedures for developing specific sites should be created to promote active developer participation in the development of permanent supportive housing and robust affordable housing while minimizing cross-agency overlap and bureaucratic inefficiencies.
- **Providing community benefits:** Local government should conduct a continuous, clear, and transparent communication process to identify community needs and opportunities for using publicly owned parcels to meet those needs for those who are experiencing homelessness. This should include engaging with existing planning efforts, exploring options for co-location with community facilities, establishing goals and mechanisms to support affordable housing and working across agencies to ensure that there are adequate resources to fund affordable housing and permanent supporting housing, and other community benefits.

Unused Federal Property Should Also Be Identified

Unused federal property is one resource that has not been used to full advantage even though states, local governments, and homeless service providers are able to acquire such property for free under Title V of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Title V is a common sense, cost-effective public benefit that provides homeless service providers with property that may otherwise be unaffordable to them, enabling even small nonprofits to provide the shelter and services needed in their local communities. Properties, including land and buildings, are made available strictly on an "as-is" basis. No funding is available under Title V. Leases are provided free of charge and range from 1 to 20 years, depending on availability.

The Biden Administration's Housing Supply Action Plan calls for disposing of federal properties to create affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness. While only a small percentage of disposed properties are suitable for this use, Title V is an important mechanism to create housing, especially in places with high rates of homelessness. GSA, HUD, and HHS are planning to issue new Title V regulations with the goals of making the disposition process easier to navigate for affordable housing developers and enable the creation of new affordable housing developments to serve people experiencing homelessness. In addition to the proposed regulations, HUD and GSA will strengthen the process to identify suitable properties, market them to potential developers, and enhance technical assistance.

Call To Action

Prompt your local government officials to identify available publicly owned property for adaptive reuse, which could create a pipeline of housing for those experiencing homelessness.