Mission-Driven Development

Introduction

To understand mission-driven development, it is helpful to review how affordable housing gets developed in Philadelphia. The overall poverty rate of 20.3% equates to one in every five Philadelphians living at or below the poverty line. With such a great need, subsidized affordable housing is especially critical. In conversations, the terms 'affordable housing' and 'public housing' are linked to the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA). The largest affordable housing landlord, PHA owns and manages approximately 24,000 residential units and oversees 18,000 housing choice vouchers, formerly known as the Section 8 program. In total, PHA directly helps 42,000 low-income Philadelphia families, or about 80,000 residents. ***But that only amounts to 20% of those in need.***

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) used to fund thousands of housing units for seniors and the disabled through the HUD202 and HUD811 programs. Nearly every community in the U.S. has HUD 202 senior housing; these properties were developed with federal dollars but administered by private developers.

The HUD programs were phased out and replaced by the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program to incentivize developers. In Philadelphia, the program is administered by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), with nearly 10,000 units of affordable housing developed under the program since the late 1980s. Once a year, developers assemble exhaustive applications to PHFA for competitive review. ***It often takes several rounds of applications to get a project funded.***

Mission-Driven Development

For the past 25 years, CBP Architects has worked with nonprofit developers in and around Philadelphia. Many clients aren't typical housing developers. Instead, they are successful social service agencies using affordable housing to expand their reach.

Mission-driven development – a means to fulfill or further an organization's mission – fits an important piece into the affordable housing puzzle. The multifamily projects these groups undertake transform individual lives or neighborhoods, often both. They provide not only subsidized housing, but also, in many cases, supportive services such as addiction counseling or administrative assistance to help residents maintain public benefits. Whether working with the unhoused, the disabled, seniors, or those in recovery, mission-driven development emphasizes a unique and powerful approach to combating the city's affordable housing crisis.

Mission-Driven Design

With with city's housing authority unable to meet the needs of many, it is crucial to elevate the work of mission-driven developers with quality architecture, and to communicate their experience with the wider development community, in pursuit of giving all Philadelphians a safe, healthy place to call home.

"Currently, 5,700 men, women and children are living without permanent, functional housing in the city of Philadelphia . . . Of that number, nearly 1,000 are unsheltered. The various degrees of this condition range from the highly visible to the virtually invisible, with a unique set or sets of circumstances, causes, solutions, impacts upon those experiencing it, and reactions from those observing it. In other words, nothing about homelessness is one-dimensional and any and all meaningful conversation on this topic must begin with that acknowledgment."

- Dioncia Roberson, Philadelphia's Housing Crisis, Generocity, April 2023

Poverty in Philadelphia click to read more

- Second-poorest large city in America (after Houston)
- Poverty rate at 20.3%
- Over 350,000 residents live in poverty
- Over 100,000 are children under 18
- 23% of residents live on less than $26,000 per year
- 11% of residents live in deep poverty, on less than $13,000 per year
- Over 350,000 people in daily financial crisis
- PHA wait list has 40,000 people and has been closed since 2013
- PHA can only help 20% of those in need
- Philadelphia awarded just 500 units of low income housing tax credits each year

Work with Nonprofit Mission-Driven Developers

Working in this space for over 25 years, CBP Architects has been directly involved with 26 affordable housing projects with nearly 1,000 dwelling units for nonprofit mission-driven developers. The firm is currently working with six developers on projects that are in the funding process; these will total an additional 310 dwelling units. Our contributions – from architectural design to industry engagement – have greatly impacted results for our clients and the populations they support. The most respected regional nonprofit entities look to CBP Architects to bring a level of design and care they often find missing in their other projects.

Mission-Driven Developer Relationships

- **HopePHL:** Formerly People's Emergency Center, the organization started as a homeless shelter for women and children in the 1970s. HopePHL determined that while they could continue to build more shelter beds, building permanent housing would be a much better way to fulfill their mission of helping the homeless.
- **New Kensington Community Development Corporation (NKCDC):** Committed to helping the working poor in Philadelphia's Kensington neighborhood, the organization provides employment counseling, afterschool programs, and other outreach. NKCDC found that doing all they do without affordable housing has limited impact.
- **NewCourtland:** Committed to serving Philadelphia's frail elderly population, NewCourtland pivoted from a nursing home approach to a joint approach of adult day health centers combined with affordable senior housing. CBP Architects has completed multiple projects with NewCourtland.
- **North10:** Working to improve life outcomes in Hunting Park – East Tioga, North10 facilites economic growth, increased housing options, enhanced learning opportunities, and wellness so that current residents and future generations can live happy, healthy, and civically engaged lives.
- **Gaudenzia:** A longtime provider of inpatient addiction recovery services, Gaudenzia now incorporates permanent, supportive housing into its comprehensive approach – and has found success rates soar. CBP Architects has completed two projects for Gaudenzia.

Impact of Mission-Driven Development

- **AIA Philadelphia Design on the Delaware:** CBP Architects Managing Partner Nancy Bastian, FAIA, NCARB, LEED AP, organized and moderated a panel at AIA Philadelphia's annual conference. Four nonprofit mission-driven developers spoke about the work they are doing and how safe, affordable, supportive housing helps them fulfill their missions.
- **AIA Philadelphia's journal Context:** Nancy also contributed a deep dive article about the affordable housing crisis in Philadelphia for the journal's Spring 2018 issue. She explained the city's severe need and illustrated how developers can use the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) to support their missions.

"The term affordable is all relative based on what your income is. We really did try our best to make this affordable to the average income. We are thrilled to bring this to fruition, we are thrilled to open these doors, and we are still digging in our heels and continuing to push this boulder up a mountain."

- Joshua Klaris, Executive Director, North10

Mission

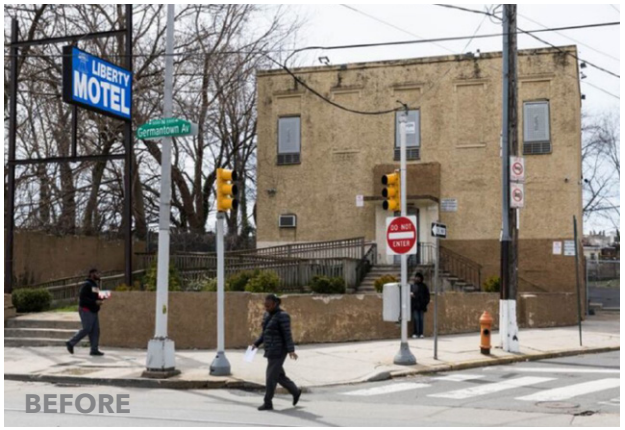
North10 works with neighbors in Hunting Park - East Tioga to address issues of poverty, systemic violence, and disinvestment that have affected the community. The organization makes impactful change by delivering high-quality programs and services based on the needs and preferences of the neighbors and serves as a community backbone for collective action.

Be a Gem Crossing

CBP Architects steered North10 through its first foray into affordable housing, leading planning and design that has transformed the neighborhood with affordable housing plus supportive services and protected outdoor play space.

Strategy

The strategy reclaimed a site opposite a school that once housed a nuisance motel and brought daily chaos and crime to the community. North10 purchased the property in 2018.



Solution

Be a Gem Crossing provides affordable family housing in a mix of 41 one-, two-, and three-bedrooms units. Six of the units are designed and dedicated for accessible housing. The architecture takes advantage of the deep site and L-shaped lot to arrange units around a landscaped exterior courtyard while presenting ground-floor retail and new vibrancy along the Germantown Avenue frontage. A mix of red brick and cement-board shingle siding shares a warm color palette with adjacent properties and the neighborhood context. The project incorporated sustainable design features to keep utility costs and operating expenses low, achieving Energy Star Multifamily High-Rise, Enterprise Green Communities, and Zero Energy Ready Home certifications.

Impact

Be a Gem Crossing marks the first instance of new construction in the neighborhood in 25 years. It is one of the first visible pieces of a larger effort to revitalize this section of North Philadelphia. In the future, North10 and CBP Architects will convert a former neighboring roller skating rink into a community health center.

Be a Gem Crossing Project Details

Location: Philadelphia, PA
Client: North10
Design Firm & Firm of Record: CBP Architects
Completion: 2024
Size: 56,515 gsf
Units: 41
Program: Affordable Housing

"Be a Gem Crossing is the best thing for our community in a long time."

– Arletha Pickens, Block Captain