



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
AFFORDABLE HOUSING  
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

abstract from  
AFFORDABLE HOUSING DUE DILIGENCE  
STUDY FOR HIGH IMPACT SITES



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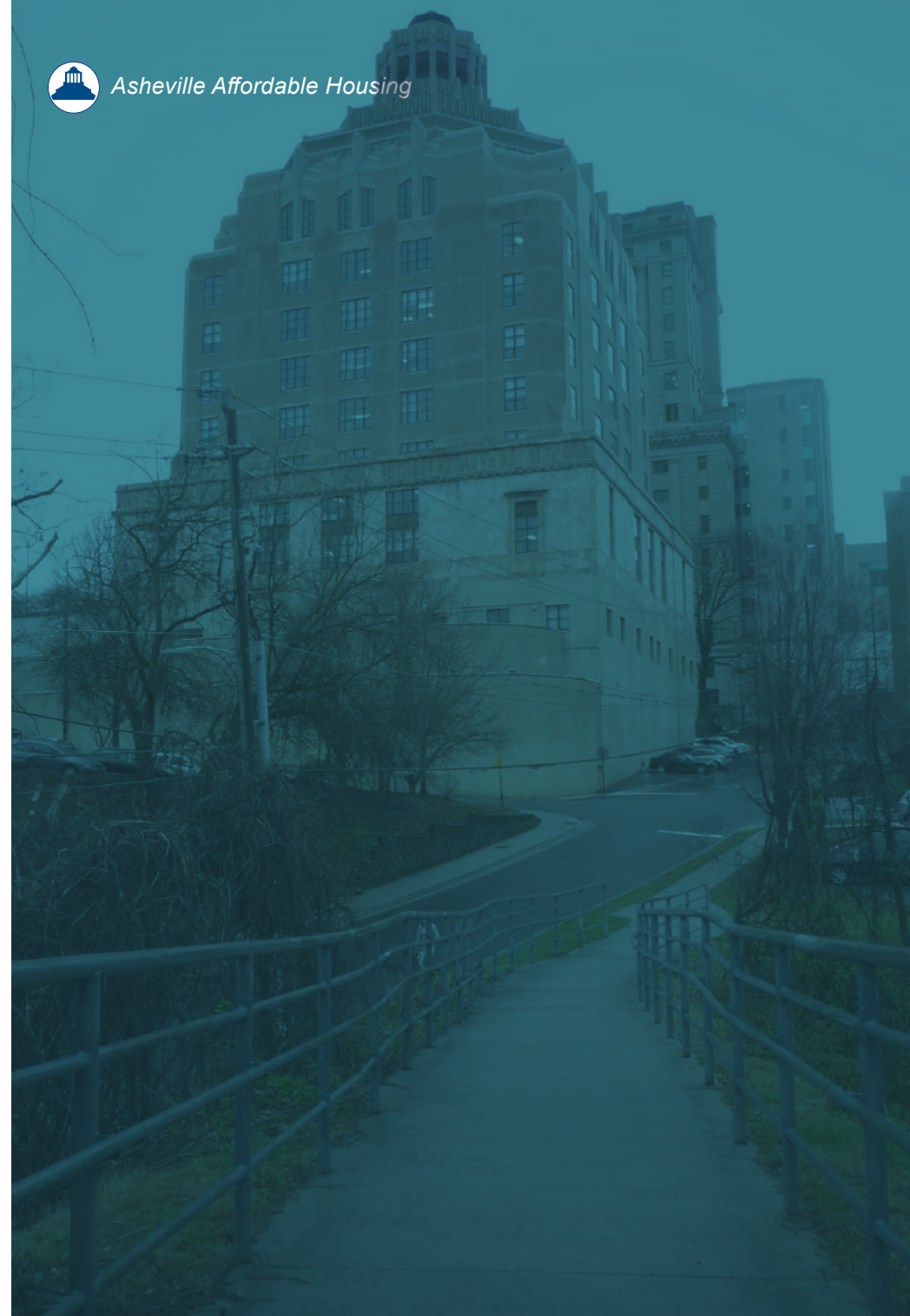
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Asheville Affordable Housing



# HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY

Providing affordable housing is a difficult and growing challenge in America's cities. Asheville is no different in this regard. In 2016, the City of Asheville approved a \$25-million bond to address the increasing demand for affordable housing. A portion of the bond funding was utilized for the Due Diligence Study for the three City-owned high impact sites. During the 10-month planning process and extensive involvement from the City staff, City Council and stakeholders, a list of recommendations were created for the three sites. The process and the findings from the study helped inform implementation strategies for other City-owned properties. The list below summarizes best practices that the City can pursue to further the community's vision for affordability and be proactive in its pursuit of affordable housing:



Strategy 1 - **Dedicate Significant Resources** to support the redevelopment of High Impact Sites and other affordable housing initiatives.



Strategy 2 - **Deepen the Engagement with the Community** in order to align new housing development with broader community goals.



Strategy 3 - By owning or purchasing land for housing, the City can **Reserve Land for Affordable Housing Development** and increase certainty in securing affordable housing.



Strategy 4 - **Analyze potential sites thoroughly in advance (Due Diligence activities)** so that it is clear what can be built on each site and what challenges exist on each site.



## Asheville Affordable Housing



Strategy 5 - Do some site preparation so that the City can **Deliver "Development Ready" Sites**.



Strategy 6 - The City should **Proactively Solicit Development** in a formal process once the sites and conditions are ready.



Strategy 7 - **Limit the Selling Price of City-owned Land** so that cost savings on the purchase price for the developer can be put towards housing.



Strategy 8 - The City should **Contribute Financially to the Deal** to get affordable units built.



Strategy 9 - **Leverage Other Resources & Partners** to achieve greater outcomes.



Strategy 10 - **Don't Overly Rely on External Public Funding Sources**, as they can be difficult and cumbersome to obtain or manage.



Strategy 11 - **Use Regulatory Carrots** to fast-track affordable housing projects through the development review process.



Strategy 12 - **Promote Mixed-Income Communities** to see better housing quality, neighborhood amenities and services.



# IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

When considering affordable housing implementation strategies it is important to understand that there are no “silver bullets” or “one size fits all” solutions. However, there are established and emerging best practices that could be considered for high impact sites in Asheville. In fact, the City of Asheville has already taken positive steps on several of these strategies. In this regard, the City is ahead of the curve compared to many other American cities who are just now recognizing the challenge.

The implementation strategies listed below provide a potential starting point, and come with several important considerations:

- These strategies are just recommendations at this point. Some will require additional conversation, debate and perhaps changes in public policy before being enacted.
- These strategies are based on successful local, regional and national best practices and direct experience by various participants in this plan.
- Some strategies are universal and could be applied beyond the high impact sites, whereas other strategies are more specific or unique to the three high impact sites.
- These strategies are geared primarily towards new development; but in some cases, could have applicability to rehabilitation/re-use projects.
- These strategies are structured from the view point of incentivizing and enlisting development partners to provide affordable housing.
- Some strategies the City of Asheville is already pursuing or in process.

## Affordable Housing Implementation Strategies

Far and away, the most important and successful affordable housing strategy for any municipality is to be proactive in the pursuit of affordable housing. Waiting for affordability to occur organically (in desirable locations) or with minimal effort by the public sector is not effective.



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES ARE NOT  
“ONE SIZE FITS ALL” SOLUTION

### STRATEGIES ARE:

- Just Recommendations
- Best Practices
- Universally Applied
- Geared for New Development
- To INCENTIVIZE development partners





## STRATEGY 1: Dedicate Significant Resources

The passing of the affordable housing Bond in 2016 is a good example of dedicating significant resources for affordable housing creation. A sustained and successful effort also requires the dedication of a specific team on City Staff to engage with the residents and development partners and manage projects. Depending on the level of complexity and timing, each site may need its own team and/or project lead. Consider matching the level of resources to the level of affordable housing needs.



Asheville Affordable Housing

**YEAR 1: 09/2016-10/2017**

**\$25-million Affordable Housing Bond**

**YEAR 2: 09/2017-10/2018**

**\$15-million Affordable Housing Due Diligence Study for High Impact Sites**

**YEAR 3: 10/2018-12/2019**

**-Affordable Housing Implementation Strategies  
-Policies for Implementing Affordable Housing on City-owned Land**



Asheville City Staff Engagement






## STRATEGY 2: Deepen the Engagement with the Community

It is important that the goal of providing affordability aligns with broader community development goals and desires in order to create “win – win” scenarios. Additionally, change can be hard for neighborhoods and developing open lines of communication and trust are critical to community acceptance of new projects and new neighbors.

Recommended Action Steps include:

- Create a multi-faceted communication plan that serves to deepen the conversation about affordable housing, and broaden the community’s understanding of the challenges of affordable housing and how to achieve successful and equitable outcomes.
- Create a city-wide forum/mechanism on the merits and challenges of affordable housing to help drive public policy decisions by elected officials.
- Utilize local forums at a neighborhood grass roots level to keep adjacent neighborhoods informed and supportive about impending development. It is important the input received at these forums is acknowledged and either incorporated into implementation or education is provided if certain communities desires are not realistic or achievable.
- Encourage active participation between the City, prospective tenants and buyers, and the developers to give intended users of housing a stake in neighborhood success.
- Asheville is fortunate to already have the Affordable Housing Advisory Committee in place. This group should be continually consulted with regard to any strategies being considered on the three high impact sites, and can help support and continue the community conversation around affordable housing.



 EastEnd Neighborhood Community Meeting



 Stakeholder Meeting  
Riverside Arts District



### STRATEGY 3: Reserve Land for Affordable Housing Development via City ownership

The City's ownership of a variety of potential housing sites provides an important level of certainty that leads directly to implementing affordable housing on the City's terms. Controlling the conveyance of land creates a definitive mechanism with direct ties to affordable housing performance measures (i.e. the City can tie the sale or lease of City-owned property to specific affordable housing outcomes). In addition, public sector land control can create certainty of price and timing for prospective developers and help eliminate some developer costs associated with acquisition. This in turn can improve project economics and the ability to subsidize affordability to greater levels.

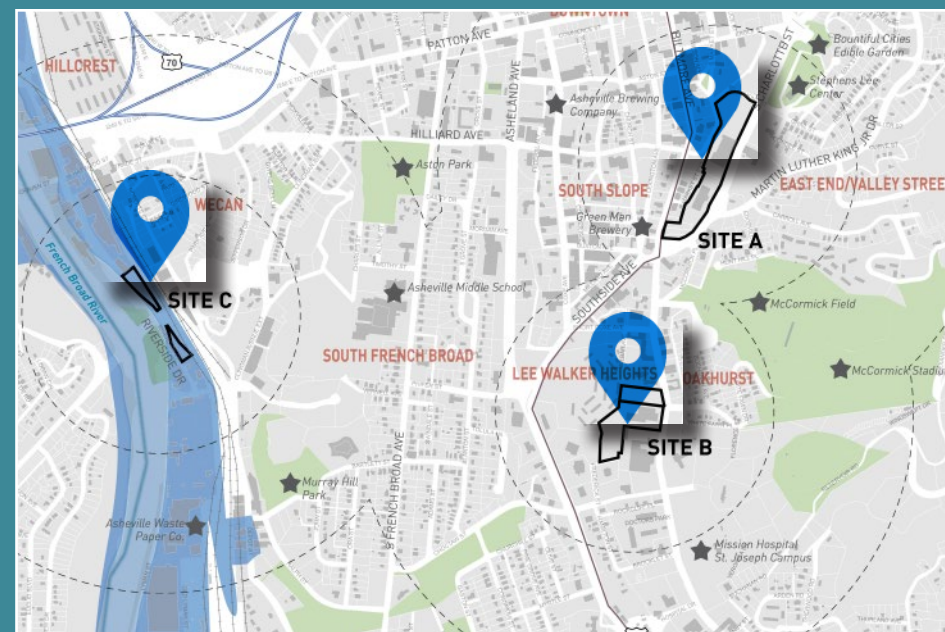
Recommended action steps include:

- Proactively seek new land upon which to develop affordable (i.e., beyond the initial three high impact sites) housing communities.
- Dedicate a long-term funding source for acquisition of sites for affordable housing.
- Develop and adopt a land acquisition policy for affordable housing to give staff clear direction on when and how to consider purchasing new property.
- Develop a consistent and repeatable process for acquisition of potential affordable housing development sites.
  1. Process should include preliminary site assessments relative to location, services, adjacent communities, visible/obvious site constraints, etc. in order to arrive at consistent "go, no-go" decisions.
  2. Be proactive and aggressive in reducing land acquisition costs in order to maximize affordability in projects. Where feasible (e.g. with like-minded institutional partners), seek land donations or below market sales by enlisting partners into a community benefit mindset.



### Asheville Affordable Housing

- Pursue Development on sites the City already controls:
  1. **Biltmore Avenue Site (Site B):** City of Asheville is exercising a purchase option with Duke Energy for \$5.3 million.
  2. **S. Charlotte Street Site (Site A):** City of Asheville already owns the site with no debt.
  3. **Riverside Drive Site (Site C):** City of Asheville already owns the site with no debt if public parking is included in redevelopment concept.
  4. Regularly assess other city owned properties for the potential and viability of affordable housing.

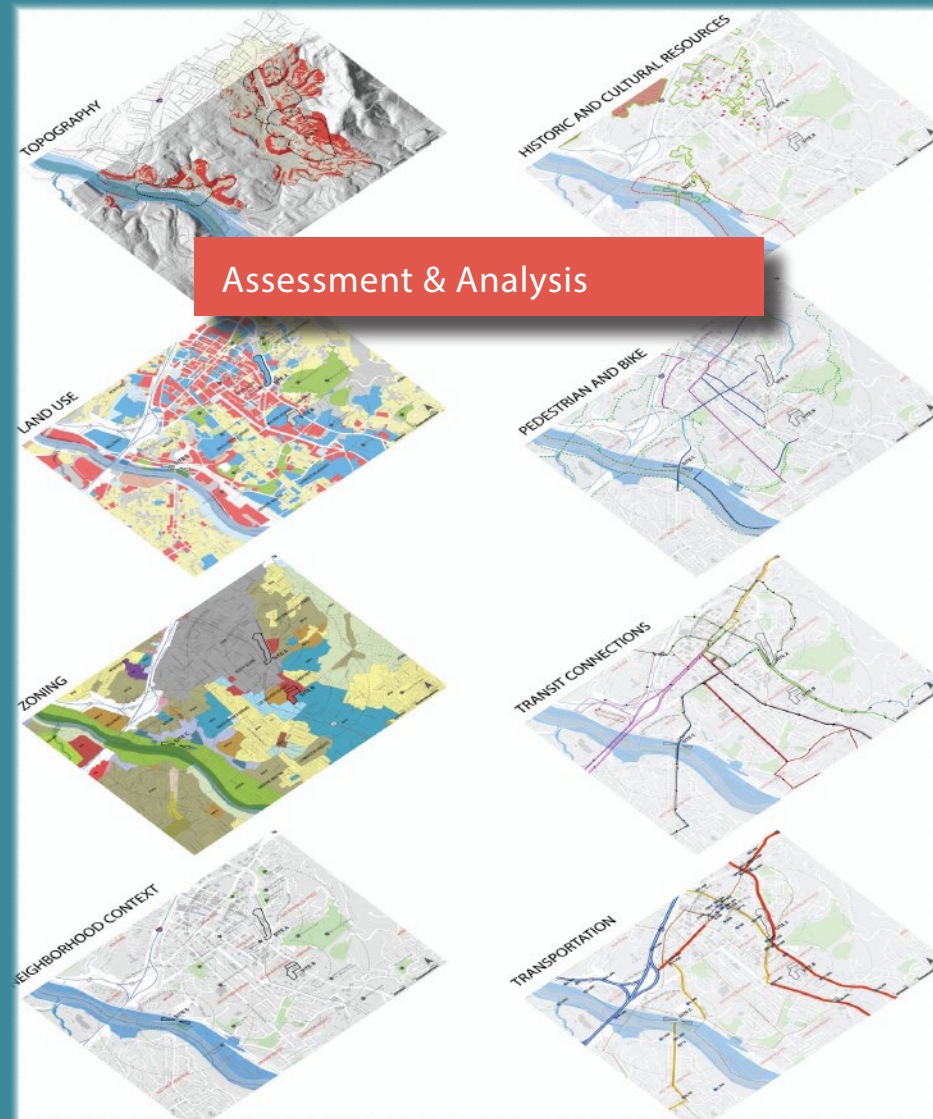




## STRATEGY 4: Analyze Potential Site(s) Thoroughly in Advance

For any private development project, there are a series of pre-development analyses that developers undertake in order to assess a site's viability. These efforts come with associated costs and take time (which also equates to cost; ultimately these economics are passed on to the project. To the extent the City can provide detailed assessments and information to prospective developers, those costs and times can be reduced. This improves project economics and the ability to subsidize affordability. These activities can include (among others):

- Geotechnical exploration
- Boundary and topographic surveys
- Environmental studies (Phase 1 and Phase 2 Environmental Impact Studies)
- Infrastructure capacity
- Build-out capacity, site development program
- Conceptual development costs and development pro formas
- Zoning limitations relative to desired development program
- Determine development vision in concert with community desires and concerns





## STRATEGY 5: Deliver Development Ready Sites

Many affordable housing projects suffer when municipalities deliver sites to developers that are not ready for development. This adds cost, time and ultimately inhibits the level of affordability subsidies that can be brought to bear. In order to put developers in a better position to start a project, several site preparation activities can be undertaken:

- Develop a broad funding strategy to deal with basic site preparation activities including (where applicable) relocation of existing uses, demolition of existing structures/impediments (once a deal is in place) and other infrastructure improvements.
- **Biltmore Avenue Site:** The Lee Walker development team (in collaboration with the City) will be demolishing the existing Matthew's Ford building and developing a new central connector road (with subsurface infrastructure) that will also serve the 319 Biltmore site. These are development costs that a prospective developer will not need to incur. The City may consider additional public infrastructure improvements to improve connectivity.
- **S. Charlotte Street Site:** If/when the City is ready to relocate the existing City services from part or all of this site and a developer is found for the City should demolish the existing structures and remove all surface pavement (and perform associated minimal amount of remediation as necessary).
- **Riverside Drive Site:** Depending on the cost required and specific project economics presented, the City may want to consider conducting necessary environmental remediation work on the site. This will remove any uncertainty and risk that a developer is likely to bear.





## STRATEGY 6: Proactively Solicit Development

Rather than waiting for development partners to express interest or development to occur organically, proactively and formally solicit development in a controlled and thoughtful manner as sites and conditions are ready. The clock is ticking on the City's Affordable Housing Bond Fund (set to expire at the end of 2023) so concerted effort is needed on multiple sites.

- Keep RFP and solicitation process as simple and as flexible as possible in order to attract as much interest as possible from developers, including regional and national organizations.
- Understand that there are numerous tradeoffs in the development of affordable housing. Encourage creative solutions to the problem of affordability rather than utilizing exhaustive prescriptions and requirements. There are many ways to approach affordable housing and the City should be open to all ideas. Rather than providing numerous prescriptive requirements, RFPs should objectively score respondents on the degree to which they address a wide variety of "community benefit objectives." This allows respondents to customize an approach that best fits their own model and gives the City choices on the tradeoffs. Potential scoring objectives could include (among others):
  1. Overall number of "affordable" units provided (the higher the better)
  2. Depth of affordability at a variety of levels (the more income levels served the the better)
  3. Length of time that affordability will be guaranteed/preserved (the longer the better)
  4. Amount of subsidy that will be required to be provided by the City, on both a gross and per unit basis (the lower/more efficient use of funds the better)
  5. Land sales revenues to City (the higher the better)
  6. Reliance on uncommitted external grant or loan funds (the lower the better)



**SIMPLE-FLEXIBLE RFP  
PROCESS**



**DEVELOPMENT  
COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT**

**COMMUNITY BENEFIT  
OBJECTIVES/TRADOFFS**

7. Inclusion of a variety of tenure options - unit size/mix, family units, homeownership, etc. (the greater the mix the better)
  8. Amount and type of non-residential commercial/institutional space including (the more the better, as long as it does not exceed market or significantly hurt the ability to provide affordable housing)
  9. Amount and type of community space provided – incubator/ start up space, community amenities, services, etc. (the more the better)
  10. Ability to achieve beneficial community design attributes - connectivity, mix of uses, open space, sustainability and energy goals, etc. (the more the better)
- Engage the development community informally in advance of formal RFPs. This will be critical to generate advance interest and demonstrate the City's desire to be a willing partner. It also provides the opportunity to explore the perspective of the private development community and craft RFPs that meet the City's needs, but also have the best chance of getting the most responses. City staff has already begun developing a list of prospective developers.
  - Prepare a development RFP for the Biltmore Avenue site.





## STRATEGY 7: Limit the Selling Price of Land that the City owns

Limit the selling price of land that the City owns so that cost savings on the purchase price for the developer can be put towards housing. The City can control the conveyance value of the land (i.e. sales price / lease price) as a mechanism to indirectly provide gap financing to prospective developers to build affordable housing. The cost of land is a significant factor impacting development economics and by conveying land at less than market values, the City can subsidize affordability.

- Develop a repeatable process for land disposition across City-owned sites.
- Develop and adopt a disposition policy for affordable housing; tie decisions related to disposition of land directly to affordable housing development proposals such that the relative value of the price being asked for the land can be weighed against the level of affordable housing achieved and other public benefits.
- Do not set fixed, across the board, land sales price parameters. Developers may have varying strategies for achieving affordability. Keeping flexibility on the determined value of land may provide for more avenues for exploration and negotiation.
- Be open to non-sales mechanisms such as long term land leases, community land trusts, etc. which can reduce equity required by developers and therefore increase opportunities to subsidize affordability.



## Asheville Affordable Housing

- **Biltmore Avenue Site:** City of Asheville is exercising a purchase option with Duke Energy for \$5.3 million. The price is non-negotiable, and the City's fixed, sunk cost will be a significant subsidy for the future developer.
- **S. Charlotte Street Site:** The City owns the site and therefore has some ability to incentivize affordability by asking for less in land sales. However, this site has significant site prep work associated with the relocation of existing City facilities. Land sales revenues are likely to be needed to fund part or all of these costs.
- **Riverside Drive Site:** City owns the site, but it was purchased with parking system enterprise funds. As long as public parking is produced as part of the development, the city has the flexibility to incentivize affordability by asking for less than the property is appraised for.



DEVELOPMENT  
FEASIBILITY  
AND HOUSING  
AFFORDABILITY



HOUSING  
TRADE-OFFS



LAND OWNERSHIP,  
PRICE AND SITE  
READINESS





## STRATEGY 8: Contribute Financially to the Deal

Providing affordable housing is hard, and generally not profitable for most developers. This is especially true in thriving real estate markets where investors and lenders expect returns that are similar to market rate housing and other commercial development returns. The City will need to be an active financial participant in some form or another in order to achieve meaningful numbers of housing units and a variety of levels of affordability.

- Provide Tangible Gap Financing:** At its heart, providing affordability means reducing rents or sales prices to residents. That in turn leads to a reduction in cash flow to the project and the potential for private developers to consider investing in the project in the first place. Providing a mechanism for cash to be directly inserted into the development deal provides the most effective tool to deliver meaningful levels of affordability. This can come in the form of low/no interest loans or in direct project grants. Creating a source of funding is typically the biggest challenge that municipalities face. Fortunately, Asheville voters recently approved a substantial affordable housing bond fund which puts Asheville ahead of the curve compared to most Cities. When paired with other funding strategies, the City is able to further stretch public dollars.
- Improve Tax Abatement:** As demonstrated in the economic models generated for this study, property taxes are another cost that impacts the profitability of any development and the ability to subsidize affordability. The City already has the Land Use Incentive Grant (LUIG) incentive in place; analyzing the policy for improvements and encouraging Buncombe County to adopt a similar policy would further improve the viability of projects. Typically, this strategy works best in scenarios where sites are not currently contributing significant (or any) tax revenue.



LEADERSHIP  
+  
PARTICIPATION



Affordable Housing Bond Fund  
Gap Financing Tools  
Low/No Interest Loans  
Direct Project Grants  
Land Use Incentive Grant (LUIG)





## STRATEGY 9: Leverage Other Resources/Partners

The burden of providing meaningful affordable housing in or around Asheville's Downtown core will be a heavy lift and often costs more than suburban development projects. This housing will benefit the City directly through economic development and improvements in quality of life and transportation/mobility (i.e., putting workforce housing closer to jobs providers). But it will also benefit neighborhoods, service providers, other governments and government agencies, and many private sector businesses. Therefore, this is a burden that should be shared. The City can be a powerful broker in leveraging numerous partnerships that will be critical for making each development a success. The City's active and on-going participation in building partnerships will significantly improve both the economic viability of a project for prospective private developers and the livability outcomes that align with the community's vision for these neighborhoods. Specific opportunities include:

### Biltmore Avenue Site

- The City of Asheville is already working with the development team for Lee Walker Heights to develop shared infrastructure and compatible mix of affordability across sites. Continue developing this partnership to consider things like shared residential amenities and neighborhood business opportunities.
- The City will also need to work with NCDOT to create a new signalized intersection at White Fawn – an important feature in the goal of creating additional community connectivity.
- Given its proximity, land-holdings, and size as an employer, Mission Hospital/HCA Healthcare is also a potential partner. The City can work with HCA leadership to better understand their needs and capabilities as an organization to better determine the structure of a mutually beneficial partnership. There are several national models of large-scale adjacent employers contributing directly to affordable housing projects by guaranteeing rents and/or contributing as equity partners. In addition, the hospital owns the land directly to the south and some development proposals may benefit from potential land acquisition.



## Asheville Affordable Housing

- The Minnie Jones Health Center (Buncombe County) is immediately adjacent to the Biltmore Avenue site. City staff can continue conversations with County staff to assess areas of partnership. For example, County staff have indicated that the Health Center is currently short on parking and some development proposals that include shared parking could warrant the City acquiring or controlling some County property as part of a larger development strategy.

### S. Charlotte Street Site

- NCDOT will be a critical partner for this site as well. The goal of physical connecting this site to the East End neighborhood relies heavily on changing the character of South Charlotte Street. The current street is overly wide with high traffic speeds and functions more like a barrier. The roadway capacity appears to be over designed relative to current and anticipated volume. Additional intersections and roadway connections (ideally signalized) along with streetscape and bike improvements are required to bring this road into a more pedestrian and neighborhood friendly character.

### Riverside Drive Site

- This site is significantly constrained in its size and configuration which will make new development difficult and inefficient. The best opportunity for success on this site will be to engage adjacent property owners and explore opportunities for consolidating land and/or shared/cross parking arrangements, or similar.
- In addition, a credible non-profit arts provider – ArtSpace – has expressed interest in the site/area with a vision that would include affordable studios for artists.





## STRATEGY 10: Don't Overly Rely on External Public Funding Sources

The Affordable Housing playing field is littered with examples of development deals that fell apart because of an overreliance of external public funding sources such as CDBG, LIHTC, etc. While these sources can sometimes prove useful, external funding sources (particularly State and Federal) can be difficult and cumbersome to obtain, often come with strings/limitations, increase the timeline for development (sometimes significantly) and are subject to the whim of political budgeting processes. Given the City's ticking clock on the Affordable Housing Bond Fund, time is of the essence. Therefore, the following approach to external funding should be considered when soliciting private developers for the three high impact sites or where bond funds are anticipated:

- Do not require or encourage prospective developers to use Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) financing, particularly 9% credits which are highly competitive.
- Give preference to prospective developers that do not rely on external public funding, unless those funds are already firmly committed.



Asheville Affordable Housing



AFFORDABLE HOUSING  
BOND FUND TIMELINE  
**EXPIRES IN 2023**



IDENTIFY RELIABLE  
FUNDING SOURCES  
DON'T RELY ON

State and Federal Funding  
Low Income Housing Tax  
Credit (LIHTC)  
Community Development  
Block Grant (CDBG)



*City Staff Work Session to discuss  
Development and Financial Scenarios*





## STRATEGY 11: Use Regulatory Carrots

Affordable housing initiatives frequently suffer due to difficulties with existing entitlement regulations. Frequently, projects require rezoning which adds time and expense to any project, thus stifling opportunity for affordable subsidies. There are several regulatory tools that cities frequently apply that could be considered (or are already used) in Asheville. Among others, these include:

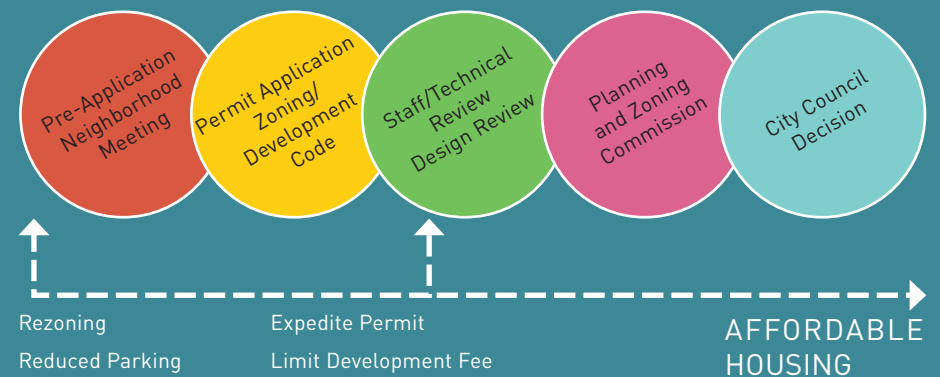
- **Proactive Rezoning:** Getting a property into the most advantageous zoning category to allow flexible mix of uses, higher densities, and reduced setbacks – all of which can improve project economics. This is particularly useful when the rezoning comes in advance of land conveyance to private developers, rather than coming with a “promise” that the city will support future rezoning. In the case of Asheville, all three sites already contain advantageous zoning relative to any likely development proposals, again putting the City of Asheville ahead of the curve.
- **Reduce Parking Requirements:** Allowing (or requiring) reduced parking counts can have a large and positive impact on project economics, which could be translated into increased affordability. Structured parking can cost up to \$20,000 per space (in some cases more). Therefore, even small reductions could add quickly. However, it will be important to be thoughtful in order to understand potential impacts on adjacent neighborhoods (e.g., overflow parking) and “right size” parking counts. Conversely, in the case of Biltmore Avenue and South Charlotte Street, adjacent public parking demands (hospital/baseball stadium and Downtown, respectively) should be explored in more detail and could lead to revenue generation.



## Asheville Affordable Housing

- **Expedite Permitting:** One “no cost” way for the City of Asheville to facilitate and incentivize affordable housing is by reducing the cost and time of permitting for developers. The City should consider putting all affordable housing projects into a priority cue (assuming an established minimum level of affordability is met) with guaranteed turn-around times. The resulting cost and time savings will positively impact project economics and, therefore, the ability to subsidize affordable housing.
- **Limit or Eliminate Development Fees:** As shown in the economic analyses conducted for this study, development fees do have an impact on project economics. To the extent they can be reduced or eliminated (contingent upon meeting minimum affordability requirements), it creates opportunities to improve levels of affordability subsidy.

### DEVELOPMENT PROCESS





## STRATEGY 12: Promote Mixed-Income Communities

The desire for achieving affordability should be balanced with the goal of not creating concentrations of poverty or single-income developments. The need for affordability in Asheville cuts across many income levels and the model of mixed-income development has proven successful across the nation, specifically as it relates to improved housing quality, neighborhood amenities and services. In order to achieve mixed income results, consider the following strategies:

- Give preference to prospective developers who offer units at multiple income levels (e.g, some units at market rate and some units at 80% AMI and some units at 60% AMI or lower).
- Give preference (or require) prospective developers to provide affordability beyond a baseline of 20% of the units at 80% AMI.
- Encourage designs where all units are built to market rate standards. Subsidize rents and mortgages, not units. You should not be able to distinguish an affordable unit from a market rate unit. In fact, they should be interchangeable so as to avoid isolating and stigmatizing residents in those units.
- Do not require a generic affordability requirement/mix that is the same for all projects and sites. Each project should be looked at within its context. For instance, the Biltmore Avenue project will be adjacent to the redevelopment of Lee Walker Heights which will be 100% affordable, including many units at 30% AMI. Therefore, the Biltmore Avenue mix should be different than the South Charlotte mix.
- Require that all residents, regardless of income level, will be provided equal access to on-site amenities.
- The most sustainable long-term developments of affordable housing includes elements of shared community resources and resident empowerment, where residents have a sense of ownership (literally or otherwise) and feel at home in their community. Foster an inclusive, people-drive process in the vision, design, and maintenance of developments so that ultimately, pride and sense of belonging shape the foundation of the community.



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