

Discernment for a Faith Land Housing Project

A note to Tacoma Friends Meeting

Brian Humphreys, Associated Ministries

Why you are receiving this

Dear Friends,

Over the past several months, members of the Land Stewardship Discernment Team have been meeting with me and Associated Ministries (AM) to explore whether a housing project might be feasible on or adjacent to your property, should you decide it is an appropriate investment of your valuable time and energy. They asked me to write this note as a precursor to an upcoming conversation.

Crucially, this conversation does not commit the Meeting to any particular answer at this time.

What Associated Ministries is offering

AM is willing to pay for a feasibility study and the early predevelopment work, so the Meeting can reach a clear answer without spending any of its own money.

We believe congregations should not strain their budgets just to reach a “no.” So AM wants to use some funding we have received to vet, provide, and pay for the next steps: a contractor to manage the technical work and seed funds for the survey, title research, utility and fire access questions, and early design. These can become major logistical and financial factors that inform a final decision.

Either answer is valid. Pierce County needs more housing, especially permanent housing for seniors. But our communities also need congregations that are free to focus their energy where they are truly called. If the Meeting discerns that housing is not the right path, AM is glad to help explore other ways the land and the Meeting can meet neighbors’ needs.

A few things Friends have already asked:

- **Would the Meeting carry the financial risk?** By the end of predevelopment, the Meeting would know what a project would require, what AM’s financial share would be, and whether it is realistic, all before committing to anything or breaking ground.
- **Would we become landlords?** Not necessarily. The Meeting can act as a steward of the facility while a trusted partner manages the property, with case management support from county-funded programs if the Meeting chooses to serve a specific group. What that looks like depends on who the housing would serve, which is part of what discernment will clarify.

Housed, healed, and whole

Associated Ministries works toward a simple, ambitious vision: every person in Pierce County housed, healed, and whole. One of the most hopeful aspects of that work is helping faith communities discern whether the land they hold could become housing.

Together with Design for Peace and partners across the county, AM walks alongside congregations from discernment through feasibility, predevelopment, and, when it is the right call, to breaking

ground. That process begins with the congregation itself: its history, context, and story. It continues with an honest look at the growing economic needs of its neighbors and whether a housing project is a fitting commitment.

We do not pressure faith communities to build housing. We want each congregation to fully understand what loving its neighbors entails. If that means housing, at least in part, we will help figure out how to make it happen. If discernment shows that housing is not the most fitting or feasible next step, that clarity often frees energy for other creative ways to meet the community's needs. We are just as glad to help with those conversations.

Our region needs more homes, especially transitional housing for families and permanent housing for seniors. It also needs strong communities anchored by trusted faith organizations that advocate for their neighborhoods and find creative ways to meet those needs. Both matter.

The idea we would test

The idea to test is a small cluster of affordable homes at the end of South 39th Street on what is presumed to be city land. The land could remain in ownership by the city, title could be transferred to Tacoma Friends Meeting, or some other operational agreement could be reached.

This is a picture to react to, not a plan. It comes from a longer concept document prepared for the Land Stewardship Discernment Team, which is available to anyone who wants the details.

Why this land is promising

- **The rules already allow it.** Since 2025, Tacoma has permitted buildings of up to six homes in every residential neighborhood. No rezoning or variance would be needed.
- **State law favors faith communities.** Washington requires cities to allow additional housing on land owned or controlled by a religious organization, provided the homes remain affordable for at least 50 years.
- **The City can help with land.** State law allows the City to lease or transfer unused property at little or no cost for affordable housing. City leaders, including some council members, have shown genuine interest.
- **The location serves seniors and families well.** A bus line runs one block away on South 38th Street, and groceries, a pharmacy, and a clinic are nearby.

The shape of this housing

Who might live there? Low-income seniors, including those with disabilities, are among the fastest-growing groups facing a housing emergency. Friends have also raised families and young people in need of transitional housing. Some have wondered whether the project might one day connect with the Puyallup Tribe, the original stewards of this land. Each of these is worth weighing.

More than a building. The concept imagines the entire property as a single place: homes at the street end, a garden or orchard in the meadow, and a playground with picnic tables near the meeting house. A garden could begin next spring, regardless of the Meeting's decision on housing.

What a feasibility study would tell us

The study would turn today's open questions into facts the Meeting can discern, in a matter of months, with AM paying for it.

- **The land:** where the Meeting's property ends, what the City actually holds at the street end, and how the City could make it available.
- **The site:** whether water, sewer, power, fire access, and soils will support new homes without costly surprises.
- **The money:** which public funds and partners could make it work, and whether the homes could remain truly affordable over time.
- **The partners:** whether an experienced housing developer and a property manager are willing to take on a project this size.
- **The ask:** what, concretely, the Meeting would be asked to give, decide on, and steward if it went forward.

If a project moves ahead, the path from here to people moving in would take a number of years. That is normal for this work, and the Meeting could pause or stop at any point along the way.

In friendship,

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