



Yes in God's Backyard (YIGBY): Supporting Housing on Faith-Based Land

As cities strive to increase affordable housing, finding suitable land for new developments has become a critical challenge. Faith-based organizations, with their long history of partnering with nonprofit developers, are uniquely positioned to help. Many of these organizations own underutilized land or structures that could be repurposed to expand affordable housing options. YIGBY legislation enables faith-based and nonprofit organizations to unlock this potential by streamlining building processes and providing tools for community leaders to create safe, stable, affordable homes for local residents and families.

YIGBY allows faith-based organizations to pursue mission-aligned development opportunities using their own land:

Faith-based and nonprofit organizations often have missions rooted in social justice and community service, making housing development a natural extension of their work. A 2020 Turner Center report identified about 38,800 acres of church-owned potentially developable in California alone. Still, much of this land is not zoned for multifamily housing, requiring rezoning—a costly and complex process that many organizations can't navigate alone. Without YIGBY legislation, these organizations are effectively blocked from using their land to create housing that serves both their mission and the community.

YIGBY projects benefit faith-based and nonprofit organizations:

In addition to advancing their missions, housing developments can provide new revenue streams that help sustain long-term operations. Faith-based institutions face growing financial strain as church membership and subsequent giving declines. Leveraging real estate allows these institutions to generate income and expand their community presence. Projects can also offer on-site housing for staff or members, strengthening community ties and boosting retention.

YIGBY developments can create a greater diversity of affordable developments:

Faith-based organizations serve diverse communities, and their housing projects can reflect this by addressing a range of local needs. YIGBY legislation enables these institutions to develop both affordable and mixed-income housing, creating inclusive communities that welcome people from all walks of life. For example, Compass Housing Alliance's Ronald Commons, developed under HB 1377, is a mixed-use project that includes affordable housing, a food bank, family services, and financial education programs to support low-income households.

YIGBY encourages vibrant, walkable communities:

Many faith-based properties are located near public transit, schools, and other amenities. The same 2020 Turner Center report identified 256.5 acres of church-owned, developable land in higher-resource California neighborhoods. By developing housing on these lands, YIGBY projects can reduce the need for excessive car use, promote walkability, and lower emissions, fostering connected and environmentally friendly neighborhoods.

Successful YIGBY reforms are already taking place:

Across the U.S., states are adopting policies to make it easier for faith-based organizations to develop housing. These reforms unlock the potential of underutilized land and address critical housing shortages. For example, Oregon's SB 8 aims to remove obstacles for affordable housing developers and religious institutions by simplifying approval processes and allowing creative housing solutions on faith-based land. Similarly, California's SB 4, known as the Affordable Housing on Faith Lands Act, provides a streamlined approval process for religious organizations and nonprofit colleges to develop affordable housing on their properties. These initiatives, alongside reforms like reducing parking minimums and allowing greater density, enable faith-based organizations to more easily contribute to addressing housing shortages and increasing access to affordable housing.