



## A Syracuse church is opening its doors to create 10 apartments for those in need

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Syracuse, N.Y. — St. Paul's Episcopal Church and [A Tiny Home for Good](#) are teaming up to put 10 permanent apartments for homeless men inside the church's old parish house.

The unusual effort — the first of its kind in Syracuse, according to the organizers — will create hotel-room-sized apartments for the people Tiny Home aims to help: Anyone who might not have a home otherwise.

“It's a pretty unique partnership with both of the organizations continuing to function on their own but doing this together,” the Rev. Philip Major of St. Paul's said.

The project marks new territory for both groups. St. Paul's has been around since the 1820s and is opening its doors to house 10 strangers. A Tiny Home for Good has spent the past nine years building single-person homes in the city. Its founder and executive director, Andrew Lunetta, said this is the group's first venture into housing clients in a more communal setting.

“It's a way to support some of our older tenants now with more accessible, closer to services living, and for St. Paul's, it was a way for them to provide really strong mission-driven work in their space,” Lunetta said.

The partnership comes [amid a housing crisis in the Syracuse area](#). A recent housing study [pointed out some of the challenges](#): The city has too much housing that needs renovations. One solution is building more homes for low-income people.

THG and St. Paul's project would take a tiny step toward that goal.

St. Paul's will provide the space for the apartments. THG will spend an estimated \$3.2 million on building the apartments. After renovations and the apartments are built, THG will eventually lease the space from the church for \$1 a year.

The apartments will have one bed and bath. Four apartments will have in-unit laundry, while the others will have a shared laundry space. All residents will share a community kitchen and have

access to two caseworkers working out of an office in the space.

Lunetta sees the shared space as a unique component of the project. He said the tenants will be a mix of older residents moving over from other tiny homes and new residents who need housing. Having them live together, Lunetta said, can feed into the community connections tenants may seek.

“It opens up a space in what in our minds is the best possible living situation for someone facing chronic homelessness, which is a tiny home,” Lunetta said. “Their own four walls, no roommate situations, a really strong support network and our staff.”

The project came about through shared connections. Betsy Elkins is a longtime member of St. Paul’s. Her husband, Bill, is a retired architect and was an original board member at THG. Elkins went to Lunetta in the spring of 2022 with the idea to collaborate.

“I guess I could say it started with me, but it didn’t stay with me very long,” Elkins said. “I talked to Andrew, and he was all over it, and we mentioned it to the church. From the very beginning, everyone said that it has great possibilities.”

Major said the church has wanted to offer affordable housing to the Syracuse community for years. However, two things always stood in the way: finances and the state of the church’s 14,000-square-foot parish house.

Major said fundraising for the renovations of the parish house was possible, but adding on the apartments was a bridge too far. However, partnering with THG allowed them to provide housing and have someone else take on building the apartments.

The apartments inside the church will be around the same size as the homes Lunetta has already built. He said there isn’t a target tenant for the apartments, but all residents will be men because it’s partly a shared space. The apartments will cater to men without homes who need accessible living conditions. Rent will be 30% of a tenant’s monthly income.

Earlier this year, the Greater Syracuse Land Bank [announced](#) its plan to buy and convert the Delaware Street Baptist Church into apartments. Many churches, nationally and locally, have sold their buildings and turned them into affordable housing or apartments.

However, there are fewer examples of churches leasing to organizations like THG, Major said.

“We spent a couple months seriously looking,” Major said. “We had to see if there were other examples, and we could not find any. We wanted it because we thought OK, we can figure out what kind of partnership they did and how did they work this out. But we didn’t find any.”

The renovations and attachment of the apartments are part of St. Paul’s overall \$2.2 million Open Doors church improvement plan. The Open Doors plan includes building a new

accessible entrance, replacing the church's roof, removing hazardous materials from its parish house and adding a \$182,590 elevator to the second floor, where the apartments will be.

Former and current church members have raised money for the renovations since 2021 and have raised more than \$1 million so far. The church also received \$817,00 in grants from New York and the National Fund for Sacred Places.

Lunetta said THG hopes to use a mix of state grants and private contributions to fund the apartment construction. After the apartments are built, THG will be solely responsible for the financial upkeep and maintenance of the space.

St. Paul's has started renovations of the parish house, and Major estimates the construction will be complete within the next year. Once the space is ready for THG to come in and start building the apartments. Lunetta estimates the apartments will be done by 2026.

All THG homes and the church apartments use an internal waitlist to determine which residents will get housing. Anyone without a home can apply to be on the list. But, Lunetta said, the vast majority of their applicants are based on a coordinated list compiled by homeless service providers in the city.

Major said the tenants are welcome to participate in church activities, but that will be up to the individuals. The real mission, he said, is to offer housing and help Syracuse's homeless population.

Lunetta appreciates the church's generosity in creating the partnership. The church is proving THG with the space, Lunetta explained, and giving up a potential real estate sale.

"They could have turned these into a couple of townhomes and made a ton of money," Lunetta said. "They certainly could have done that, but as a community said, that was something they didn't want to do. They wanted to invest it into something that sits right with their congregation. And to that end, we're going to have a blank slate very much thanks to them."

**Editor's note:** An earlier version of the article incorrectly said the church was paying for renovations of the common spaces. That work will be done by THG.