

# YOUTH HOUSING STABILITY

San Antonio, Texas



San Antonio



Design Workshop | February 18, 2025



## About the Partners

This workshop was sponsored through a grant from the ULI Homeless to Housed Initiative and was a partnership with the San Antonio Housing Trust, the City of San Antonio Department of Human Services, and Close to Home. These trusted partners aligned with ULI San Antonio and the ULI Homeless to Housed (H2H) initiative to further consider the potential for developing more housing units for youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness and brought together local experts in the housing development field along with national experts to develop practical real estate solutions.

### ULI San Antonio

The ULI San Antonio District Council brings together real estate professionals, civic leaders, and the San Antonio community for educational programs, initiatives affecting the region, and networking events, all in the pursuit of advancing responsible and equitable land use throughout the region. With nearly 600 members locally, ULI San Antonio provides a unique venue to convene and share best practices in the region. ULI San Antonio believes everyone needs to be at the table when the region's future is at stake, so ULI serves the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines—from architects to developers, CEOs to analysts, builders, property owners, investors, public officials, and everyone in between. Using this interdisciplinary approach, ULI examines land use issues, impartially reports findings, and convenes forums to find solutions.

### ULI Terwilliger Center for Housing

The mission of the Terwilliger Center for Housing is to ensure that everyone has a home that meets their needs at a price they can afford. Established in 2007 with a gift from longtime member and former ULI chairman J. Ronald Terwilliger, the Center's activities include technical assistance engagements, forums and convenings, research and publications, and an awards program. The goal is to catalyze the production and preservation of a full spectrum of housing options.

### ULI Homeless to Housed

Recognizing that ULI members are well positioned to help address the U.S. housing and homelessness crisis, the Homeless to Housed (H2H) initiative aims to catalyze the production and preservation of deeply affordable supportive housing. H2H identifies best practices and solutions through research, awareness-building activities, and local technical assistance in partnership with ULI's network of District Councils. The initiative began with the publication of the 2022 report *Homeless to Housed: The ULI Perspective Based on Actual Case Studies*. Driven by the foundational support of Carolyn and Preston Butcher, the initiative is supported by a growing number of ULI members and partners. [uli.org/homelessness](https://uli.org/homelessness)

### San Antonio Housing Trust

The San Antonio Housing Trust's (SAHT) mission is to create and preserve housing in San Antonio that is affordable, accessible, attainable, and sustainable. SAHT does this by providing education, resources, and strategic partnerships with housing developers, affordable housing-related nonprofits, social enterprises, and builders to build, maintain and rehabilitate affordable housing. Specifically, it provides provide grants and low interest loans along with utilization of tax-exempt bonds, property tax/sales tax exemptions, and other creative financing mechanisms in partnership with various housing non-profits and for-profit housing providers.

### City of San Antonio Department of Human Services

The City of San Antonio's Department of Human Services (DHS) promotes life-long success by engaging with communities and connecting people to resources through comprehensive direct and contractual services in the areas of youth success, financial security and stability, homelessness services and older adult services.



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Cover photo: Workshop participants gathered at the Urban Ecology Center in San Antonio. (ULI)

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## A New Approach

In 2019, [Close to Home](#), San Antonio's continuum of care lead agency, and Bexar County secured critical funding for the region's unhoused and at-risk youth through HUD's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). This funding enabled the delivery of a new youth drop-in center, shelter beds, and rapid re-housing programs. Since 2020, these resources have supported 1,416 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24, a highly vulnerable population requiring specialized interventions and services.

### Part 1: System Analysis and Summit

Building on this progress, the City of San Antonio Department of Human Services and Close to Home, San Antonio's continuum of care agency, convened a day-long Youth Housing Stability Summit in October 2024, focusing their attention on the needs of youth and young adults at-risk or experiencing homelessness. The Summit identified the existing components of the housing and stability system of care, identified gaps in the system, and created a set of recommendations and preliminary plans for filling those housing and care gaps for this vulnerable population.

***More housing units are needed for youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness.***

Focusing on four priority populations within the youth and young adult population, the Summit looked carefully at the needs of those with experiences in foster care, those

with behavior or mental health challenges, LGBTQ+ youth, and those with experience in the justice system. The Summit discussions revealed three priority gaps where services are not being adequately delivered: case management/systems navigation; housing systems; and mental/behavioral health support. [A summary report of the October Summit may be found here.](#)

**The Housing Gap.** One fundamental gap in the existing system is the lack of housing. There are simply not enough transitional or permanent supportive housing units today to serve youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. Added to the dearth of housing are the inconsistent and disjointed access points that mark the path toward finding and securing housing. It is a confusing system to anyone at any age and far more difficult to navigate for youth and young adults.

The October Summit identified the following programmatic goals for a housing options continuum:

- Site-based campus housing solutions
- Small independent groupings (10-20 units)
- Cohousing/group homes/transitional
- Emergency shelter/housing
- Rapid rehousing/scatter site
- Permanent supportive housing for specific subpopulations/cohorts
- "Alumni" housing/welcome back if needed

## Workshop Leaders

### **Seema Kairam**

Real Estate Development Manager  
San Antonio Housing Trust

### **Patrick Steck**

Assistant Director  
COSA Department of Human Services  
ULI San Antonio Impact Committee Chair

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Senior Director  
ULI Terwilliger Center for Housing  
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### **Elizabeth Van Horn**

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ULI Homeless to Housed Initiative

### **Gordon Wayne**

Intern  
ULI Homeless to Housed Initiative

### **Kelly Annis**

Report Writer



Additionally, programmatic goals for housing retention support options should include:

- A continuum of services
- Youth-specific, individualized case management services
- Youth-specific coordinated entry with a specific hotline and youth-specific outcomes/goals
- Access to transportation
- Access to education, physical/mental health care, childcare
- Less focus on transitional housing and faster access to permanent housing
- Cohort options

## Youth and Young Adult Voice on Summit Outcomes

The following cross-cutting themes emerged from a youth and young adult focus group held to review the Summit outcomes:

- **Broad Approach.** The Summit identified a host of organizations and entities working with the youth and young adults. All of these entities should employ a "no wrong door" approach for those young people seeking access and assistance.
- **Coordinated Messaging.** Although the needs of these young people may be unique, the messaging around their needs should not be. Coordinated and consistent messaging is required to facilitate and coordinate policy change and advocacy. Everyone needs to have a coordinated message going to policy makers.

- **Motivation.** "Recognize that sometimes being motivated to do all the things we need to do is hard. We need help staying motivated."
- **Gamify.** "Gamifying activities (like through the App) would help make what we have to do seem less of a drudge and keep us motivated to make progress."
- **Hands-on Help.** "We need more hands-on support. Provide us with visual maps and written lists so we don't forget all the steps and can keep the big picture in mind. Check in with us more often to make sure we do what's needed."
- **Goals.** "While keeping us focused on the details, help us see the big picture and the ultimate goal—a satisfying career and a place to call our own. Show us through maps and field trips where we can end up if we stick with it."
- **Help Us Help You.** "We value our peer relationships and want to help each other."

We need your help to make sure there is a process in place for that to happen. Keep us motivated to help by providing financial and other incentives."

- **Ask Us.** "We appreciate your time and expertise, but we have some ideas for how things could be done better. We want to be asked, but don't always want to go to some official meeting to do so. Meet us where we are and provide transparency in how you respond to our suggestions."

## Part 2: Design Workshop

In order to explore the housing supply concern more deeply, the San Antonio Housing Trust, Urban Land Institute, and City of San Antonio Department of Human Services gathered once again, this time in February 2025, to find paths forward in delivering more housing and tailoring housing design and services to best meet the needs of youth and young adults.



This workshop brought together youth, young adults, service providers, and real estate professionals—including developers, architects, and urban designers—to identify opportunities and make recommendations for potential housing development and real estate solutions that could more deeply support Bexar County's vulnerable youth.

The learnings from the October Summit helped inform and served as a framework for the February Workshop. In particular, February Workshop highlighted the importance of lived experience in the design of spaces. The systems that are developed to serve youth and young adults are typically developed for and not with this population. Every effort

should be made to incorporate the voices of youth and young adults at every stage of developing and delivering services.

## Workshop Goals

The following goals were set forth for Workshop participants:

### LEARN

- Learn about the solutions and strategies identified by participants of the October 2024 Youth Stability Housing Summit.
- Learn from national subject matter experts about best practices in housing youth at risk of homelessness.

- Learn from local experts about current opportunities and challenges in housing development, housing finance, the provision of services, and building social connectedness.
- Visit existing sites where services are currently being provided to understand best practices and existing gaps.

### PLAN

- Develop an evaluation matrix to vet future development sites and community assets deemed desirable for youth-based permanent supportive housing (PSH) developments.





- Articulate architectural program needs for housing each population of focus.
- Diagram ideal relationships between housing and supportive services within a housing development.
- Identify funding structures and sources that could be used to realize future housing projects and wraparound services.

## CONNECT

- Develop and expand relationships between stakeholders.
- Identify potential future partnerships and/or specific projects.
- Share lessons learned with other non-profit and for-profit developers interested in providing PSH for youth at risk of homelessness.

## Agenda

The first half of the day was dedicated to learning from national experts with experience developing and managing similar youth housing developments.

- **Laura Rossbert**, Shopworks ARC, Denver, Colorado
- **Dawn Hicks**, Owner and Community Designer, Design Cyphers; Venice Community Housing, Los Angeles, California
- **Alex Roque**, President and Executive Director, Ali Forney Center, New York City, New York
- **Lance Gilliam**, Concentric Community Advisors, Managing Partner; Senior Fellow, The Urban Lab at The LBJ School of Public Affairs, Houston, Texas

The afternoon design session encouraged participants—including both practitioners and youth impacted by homelessness—to work together in teams to select a potential development site from a list of two sites owned by the San Antonio Housing Trust. The teams spent time discussing and prioritizing the most important elements that would influence their design choices. They then put those ideas to work, building out a site plan and identifying building configurations that would bring their concepts, goals, and vision to life.

The following pages summarize the key takeaways from the presenters and case studies and outline the priorities for potential housing developments as envisioned by the youth, young adults, and industry professionals.





## Site Tour, Towne Twin Village

The day before the February Workshop, participants toured Towne Twin Village, a permanent supportive housing development in eastern San Antonio. When fully developed, Towne Twin Village will provide permanent homes for approximately 200 people in a combination of apartments, tiny homes, and RV trailers. Each unit will be between 400-500 square feet and include a kitchenette, an ADA bathroom, a living area, sleeping area, and front porch or balcony. Rents are designed to not exceed more than 40 percent of a resident's income, which is generally comprised of social security benefits.





A group of seven diverse young adults are walking along a wide, light-colored concrete walkway in front of a modern building. The building features large glass windows and dark wood paneling. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with a greenish tint. The text 'Housing Presentations and Case Studies' is overlaid in white, centered on the image.

# Housing Presentations and Case Studies



## Laura Rossbert Shopworks Architecture

With a focus on urban infill development and community-driven projects, [Shopworks Architecture](#) seeks to impact the community through collaborative design.

[Arroyo Village](#) was Shopworks' first project focusing on supportive housing development. The development included a new shelter facility, 35 units of low-income permanent supportive housing, and 95 units of affordable housing for individuals and families in the workforce. Since then, Shopworks has continued to refine its dignified design approach, which centers multi-disciplinary research to create places that protect, promote, and celebrate quality of life.

The design team considers who is making the decisions for design—moving beyond the finance department and chief executive officers to also include the youth, case managers, and security personnel who work in the shelter overnight and understand where the safe spaces are and are not.

Shopworks follows a [trauma-informed design \(TID\) process](#) that focuses on comfort, connection, and choice and puts safety at the core. The TID approach seeks to promote physical health, mental health, and well-being and begins with vision setting. From there, TID moves to pre-development evaluation, design and collaboration, and finally review, debrief, and improvement.

“

This building is what  
love looks like in  
physical form.

—MAYOR MIKE JOHNSTON  
DENVER, COLORADO

A 2024 project of Shopworks, [The Mothership at Urban Peak](#), in Denver, CO, evolved over an eight-year design process. Based on feedback from youth and staff, The Mothership incorporates space where youth feel valued, nurtured, housed, and supported so that they can break the cycle of homelessness.

Serving youth aged 12-24, the 136-bed shelter at The Mothership incorporated youth voices,



Trauma informed design process. SHOPWORKS

LAURA ROSSBERT  
Shopworks ARC, Denver, CO

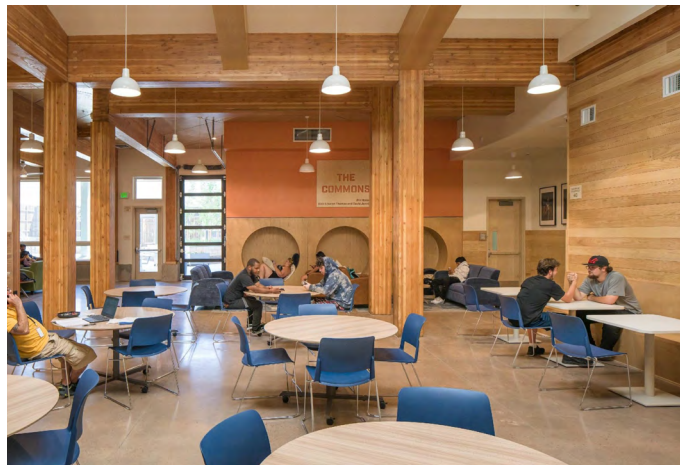




experiences, and needs into the design. Features like locking lockers for secure storage and dorm areas for youth with similar interests were incorporated into the design. One floor houses a kitchen, teaching kitchen, medical clinic, and gathering space, and other floors provide spaces for staff where they can go and process their vicarious trauma.

Shopworks continues to infuse TID into its work across the region, helping shape safe, comfortable, and inspiring spaces where vulnerable youth who have experienced homelessness and the traumas that come with it can find stability and hope—and a path toward healthy independence.

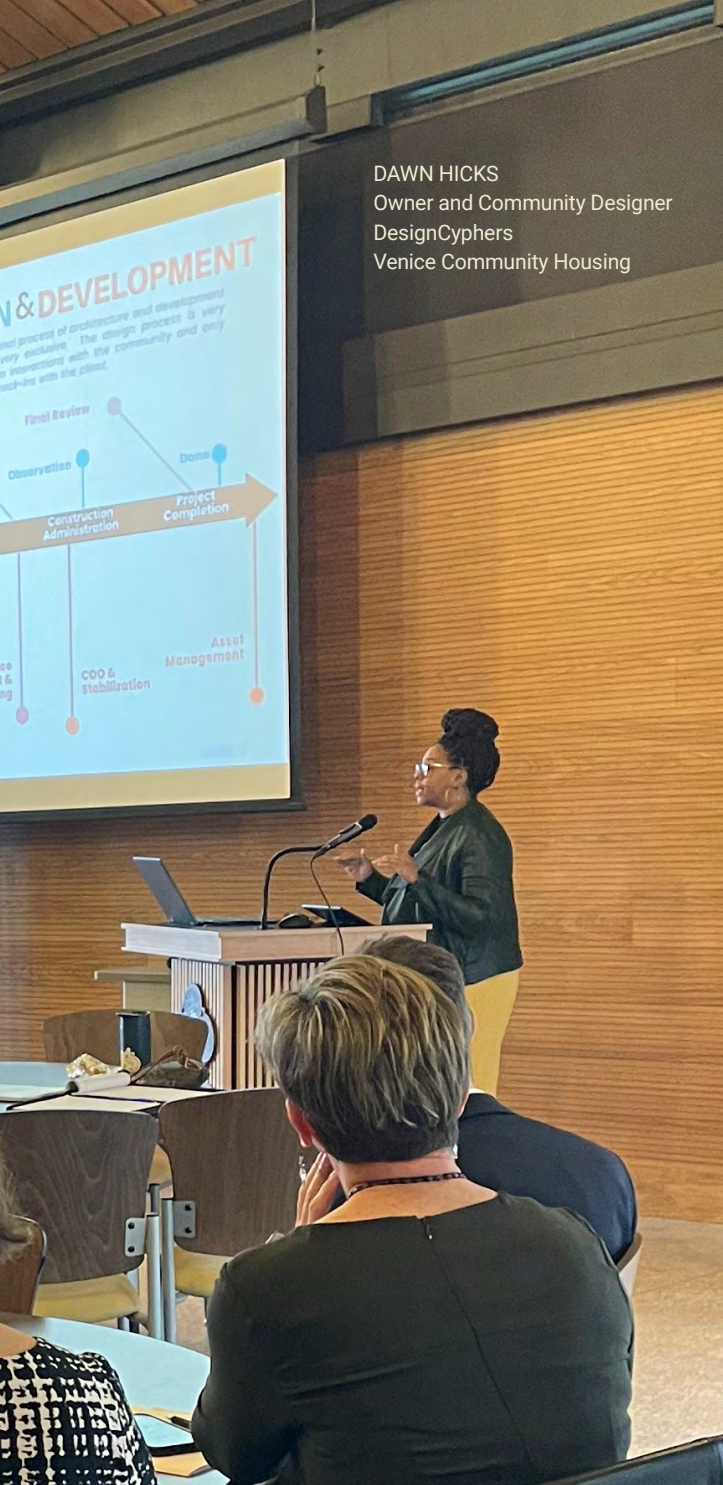
(top and middle) The Mothership at Urban Peak in Denver, Colorado, is colorful, welcoming, and secure. Common areas on the ground floor and on the rooftop terrace provide youth with space to gather and spread out. Comfortable dorm rooms give residents the quiet spaces they need for sleep, study, and recharging.



(bottom) Laurel House in Grand Junction, Colorado, is a trauma-informed supportive housing apartment community for youth. The apartments are fully furnished and have full kitchens and single bathrooms. The building features beautiful common spaces for cooking, art, community gatherings, ensuring the youth have a variety of places to gather and connect.







DAWN HICKS  
Owner and Community Designer  
DesignCyphers  
Venice Community Housing

## Dawn Hicks Venice Community Housing

Representing Venice Community Housing, Dawn Hicks detailed a community-first housing model where engagement lies at the core and is a continual process.

Venice Community Housing (VCH) is an affordable housing developer that currently provides 357 units of housing (211 of which are PSH) within 21 buildings. VCH serves transition-age youth (18-24 years old) experiencing homelessness using a transitional home model. VCH purchases homes in an existing neighborhood and retrofits the space for multiple youth by installing bunk beds and study spaces with everything the youth might need. Case managers are in the home 24 hours a day, seven days a week providing support and assistance and meeting with the residents. Youth may live in a home for up to 18 months with the option for six-month extensions if they remain in school, are working, or if they are awaiting permanent housing.

While the youth must abide by VCH's "good neighbor" policy, NIMBYs in the surrounding neighborhoods can create challenges for the youths' sense of belonging. Other challenges include staff burnout, due to the around-the-clock nature of the placement, and youth who may be experiencing difficulties stabilizing.

The on-site services provided include case management, substance abuse support, mental and behavioral health support, education and employment assistance,

assistance with transportation needs, and food and meal assistance.

VCH's work is funded through the public sector, primarily by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority Grant. Los Angeles County ballot measures H and A also support interim housing.

In addition to finding opportunities for inserting PSH into existing neighborhood homes, Venice Community Housing has begun developing ground-up new construction projects for people experiencing homelessness. Recent developments, including the Rose Apartments and the Journey Apartments, both in Venice, provide residents with supportive housing in an apartment-style environment. The 35-unit Rose Apartments, completed in 2022, used community-led design to elevate the features that residents would prefer the most, resulting in a finished building that has ample open spaces and spaces to be alone, fewer dead-end corridors, natural light and cross ventilation, and community gardens where residents can enjoy the healing powers of nature and cultivate flowers and food.

Looking ahead, VCH will be adjusting their model to include a number of improvements to their approach. These improvements include limiting the number of shared rooms and bunk beds to improve the sleeping accommodations. For staff, improvements include separate living quarters, ensuring access to wellness opportunities, and ensuring human resources connections to help reduce burnout and related turnover.



## DesignCyphers

Dawn is also the owner of [DesignCyphers](#), a community-led design team. In its approach DesignCyphers works deeply in communities, moving well beyond outreach and community engagement, to ensure that residents and end users are able to eventually lead the work that takes place in their spaces.

“

When community collaborators assist in making design decisions for spaces they occupy, they become design leaders... DesignCyphers is starting a 'revolution' by helping to build strong and diverse community voices and neighborhoods, ultimately creating equitable communities.

—DAWN HICKS  
DESIGNCYPHERS

The Rose Apartments in Venice, California, provide 35 units of permanent supportive housing for transition age youth and with special needs.





## Alex Roque Ali Forney Center

In New York City, the Ali Forney Center is providing critical housing support to LGBTQ+ youth. With 90 percent of the LGBTQ homeless youth experiencing homelessness because of family nonacceptance, the Ali Forney Center strives to provide a caring and supportive living environment for this particularly vulnerable population.

Using a shared housing model, the Ali Forney Center focuses on small co-living environments with space for 20 people in each unit. The homes feature shared kitchens and bathrooms and private bedrooms for each resident.

Alex Roque, Executive Director of the Ali Forney Center (the Center), described one of the Center's recent shared-housing projects.

On a roughly 52-foot by 100-foot New York City site, the Center built a structure that houses nine floors. Each floor features four shared housing units with four individual bedrooms and a shared kitchen, living space, and bathrooms. In total, 36 young people are able to live in this safe and supportive housing environment that also gives them the feeling of quality-designed, New York-style penthouse living. The building was developed by Ascendant Neighborhood Development and was financed with nine percent low income housing tax credits (with a \$75,000/unit subsidy).

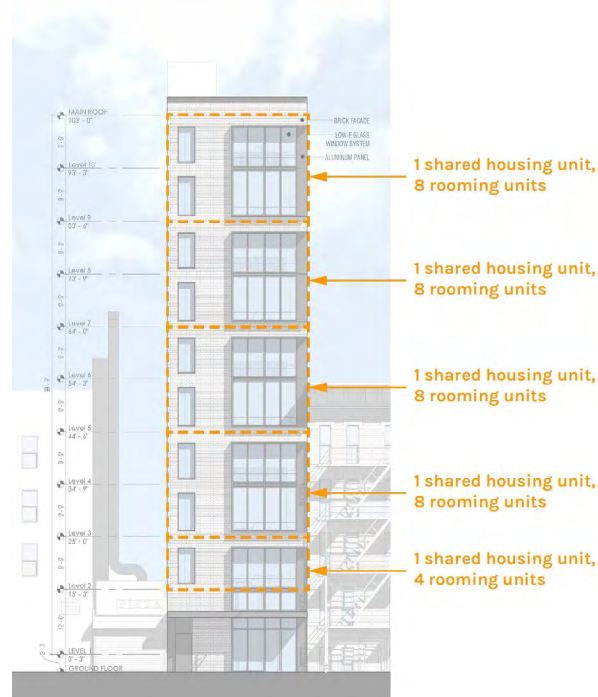
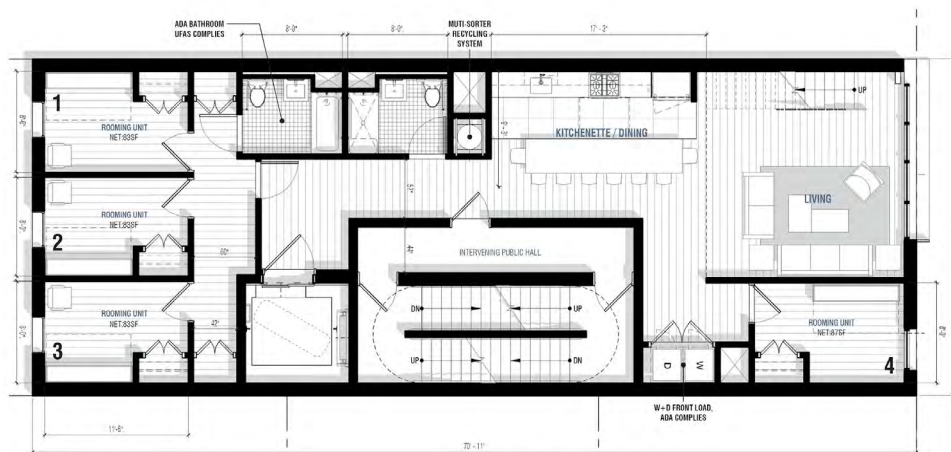
In a second case study, the Ali Forney Center was invited by a church to operate an emergency shelter in the church's basement, which could fit 20 beds, a living room, kitchen, and gaming space. The church then asked the Center to expand its services by building a new shelter on excess church property. During the design phase of the new project, the Center engaged the community with "Milk & Cookie Nights" to share potential concerns around a new building on the land. The

Center also conducted a shadow study to better understand the impacts that the height of their building would have on surrounding neighbors. In doing so, they learned of an artistic neighbor's need for natural light and that it might be blocked by an overly tall new building. With these important insights from neighbors, the new shelter was built to a height that matched the tallest portion of the church's existing buildings and the design has been broadly well received.



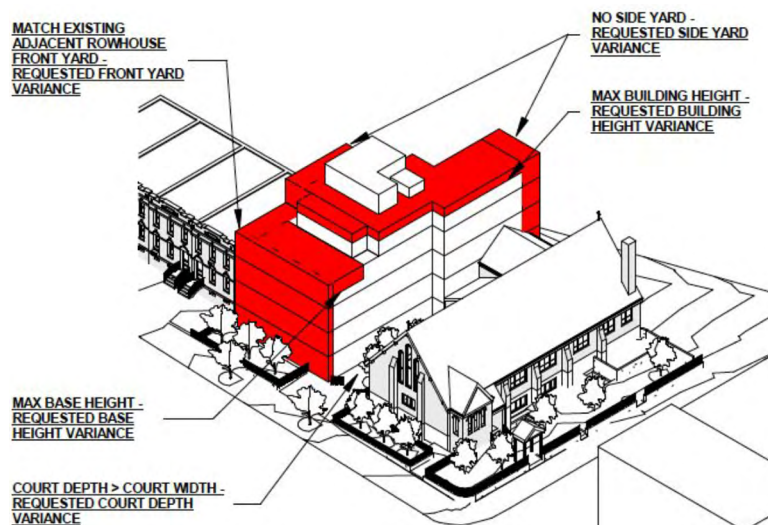
ALEX ROQUE  
President and Executive Director,  
Ali Forney Center / New York City





(top and right) The East 106 Street permanent supportive housing development provides four housing units and one kitchen on each of nine residential floors, providing youth with penthouse-style living in New York City.

The Ali Forney Center's partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island began with a shelter in the church basement in 2007. That partnership has evolved into a more robust approach to serving youth through the construction of the Asotira, an independent permanent housing development providing 21 studio apartments complemented by a community room and space for supportive programs.





## Panel Discussion

Following the presentations of housing case studies, the speakers engaged in a panel discussion with the assembled participants. The following key points were highlighted during that panel discussion.

### Engagement and Expectations

#### Create safe spaces for open conversation.

"Yes, we need to meet people where they are but we also need to get them in the room for conversation." Community members experiencing housing instability do not want to be talked at and many are worried about losing their housing if they speak out with criticism, even if constructive, about current housing support resources.

#### Prioritize people who look like the youth.

Designers and contractors who may also be LGBTQ+ are prioritized on Ali Forney Center jobs and are encouraged to linger, relax, and share a meal with the residents.

#### Gathering constructive criticism is

**challenging.** Young people are able to spot insincerity in a process. Instead of extracting information and plying them with food or snacks, young people should be paid for participating and sharing their insights. Being authentic goes a long way.

#### Transparency and early expectation setting

**helps the process.** People, including the youth entering these spaces, will want the whole world built into the designs. Helping them understand early what is and what is not feasible is important.

**Understand and embrace different wants and needs.** The different populations involved in these projects are often dealing with and may want different things. For example, youth residents may want balconies, yet staff who have had a traumatic experience with a suicide may not. In one panelist's example, the design choice landed with the residents and guests who "really deserve to have what they want," which left the staff to manage their emotions and begin to move beyond their comfort zone.

#### Job descriptions and structure are

**important.** The young people who work on Ali Forney Center projects must apply for the Center's jobs and follow the requirements of a job description. The structure provides them with a sense of responsibility, and they are paid and taught how to maintain employment.

### "Where" is Important

**Housing choice is welcome.** Site-based campuses, small and independent buildings, group housing, and more can provide a welcome range of housing options and choices for residents. Mission and faith-based landowners in San Antonio are willing to provide land for affordable housing needs, which may help expand housing opportunities using donated land.

**Locating near transit is helpful.** Transit that provides ready connections between housing and the broader community, for school or employment, is critical to supporting youth in their pursuit of stability and independence.



**Locate within existing structures.** Folding supportive housing into existing homes in neighborhoods (instead of building new on a site) can help connect the youth with the neighborhood and help them become comfortable living in a community.

#### Neighborhood acceptance is important.

There are often assumptions of who is going to live in supportive housing. By working with neighbors prior to site design and renovation, housing providers can better understand key points of concern—and work to address them—long before youth move in. Moving youth into a space that lacks community acceptance is not fair to the youth and may deepen their feelings of not belonging. The Ali Forney Center also helps the surrounding residents know what could happen if other developers were to build on the site instead, pointing to the challenge of a new high-rise building next door instead of a six-story neighborhood-scale development.



## Density, Sizes, and Staffing

### Co-location of housing can be helpful.

In an example shared by panelists, co-locating supportive housing and affordable apartments provided important visible pathways for “graduating” from supportive housing to independent living—residents can see former roommates now having access to apartment living. This visible pathway helps residents believe in the opportunity beyond the promises shared by a counselor or case manager. Additionally, co-locating within the same building can give former shelter residents helpful access to the services (e.g., meals) and people they have relied on and even called family. Alternatively, being alone in an apartment, separate from those services and friends, can be isolating for some former shelter residents.



**Youth shelter beds are needed.** One panelist noted that on any night, 5,000 youth are trying to access only 2,000 available youth beds in the panelist’s city. At the same time, roughly 50-70 beds in large shelters often remain vacant each night as youth are afraid to enter these larger institutional facilities.

### Focus on creating smaller communities.

For VCH in Los Angeles, the size of the population served is limited by the housing they can find. VCH seeks to place no more than two youth in a shared bedroom to avoid crowding, which may trigger traumas for certain youth. In a New York City example, Laurel House provides space for 36 youth, which “feels good” for residents and staff; supportive housing funding parameters do not allow New York City buildings to house any fewer than 32 residents.

## Housing and Employment

**Housing supports future employment.** VCH provides job-seeking support but does not require that residents be employed. In many of their cases, the residents are living at 0 percent of the area median income (AMI) and need foundational assistance in obtaining a state-issued ID and potential job skills. At that point, they are supported by staff in their job search. One panelist noted that studies have identified issues when housing is dependent upon the resident’s ability to align with a faith, be sober, hold a job, or follow another performance measure. In these instances, the housing has less impact on fostering independent and stable living.

### Foundational employment assistance.

The Ali Forney Center has a six-month supportive stabilizing period and then offers a year of job development, training, and life coaching. Following these steps, likely in Year 2, residents are asked to spend 35 hours per week in school or work. The Center’s residents are also allowed to pursue writing, art, or advocacy as a similar work path.

## Childcare Services

The panelists noted that their housing developments do not directly provide childcare, yet each provides ready and close access to childcare services.

- VCH has a home for women with children where they are able to receive more support and donations of food, clothing, supplies, and transportation to support daily living, but direct childcare is not provided.
- The Colorado examples follow a similar system of support and access to childcare, but do not provide the care directly.
- The Ali Forney Center refers youth to other agencies that provide support for individuals with children.

## Incorporating Trauma-Informed Design

The State of Colorado now incorporates trauma-informed design (TID) requirements into its Qualified Allocation Plan by asking three questions of residents relating to their engagement in the design of the building in which they live. TID does not cost more money, but it does require deeper thinking and more intensive and collaborative processes.



## Lance Gilliam Concentric Community Advisors

Financing affordable housing, permanent supportive housing, and emergency shelters requires a deep understanding of the economics of a community, the potential sources of funding across public and private realms, and expertise in the types of public-private partnerships often required to weave these vital resources together to make project budgets financially feasible.

The work at hand, building housing for youth and young adults at risk, falls into AMI levels that are "very low" or "extremely low income" according to the U.S. Housing and Urban Development data sets. The financial path for deeply affordable housing, addressing the needs of individuals earning less than 30 percent AMI, requires deep public subsidy and philanthropic funding for development, construction, and maintenance. At the same time, housing developers who utilize federal funds as a part of the capital stack have discovered that this funding path actually results in higher development costs due to procurement rules, regulations, design

specifications, compliance requirements, and reporting obligations associated with the federal sources. The cost of land is also an important part of the capital stack and a tool that can be used by municipalities to help offset some of the development costs when donated to a project or sold at a below-market rate.

Gilliam, a senior fellow with The Urban Lab at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, shared an example of how this funding quandary further exacerbates the affordability challenge. Using a scenario where market rate housing can be built for \$210,000/unit, if that same development uses federal subsidies and is thus bound to those processes, costs rise to \$325,000/unit. That is, the same unit is now one-third more expensive to build than the exact same product built without federal subsidy. The result is a development project and pro forma that is more complicated and requires even further funding support to bring into reality.

Additional funding challenges come in the operation and maintenance of the buildings once complete. "The government gives us money to build but not the money to maintain or operate the buildings." This has left some

This table, shared by Gilliam at the Workshop, depicts the financing and operating challenges faced by developers of affordable and supportive housing.

	Supportive Housing	Tax Credit / Public Housing	Middle Income Housing (Pre-Exemption)	Market Rate Housing
Income	\$ 250	\$ 500	\$ 1,000	\$ 2,000
Expenses	\$ (1,000)	\$ (1,000)	\$ (1,000)	\$ (1,000)
Net Operating Income	<b>\$ (750)</b>	<b>\$ (500)</b>	<b>\$ 0</b>	<b>\$ 1,000</b>



LANCE GILLIAM  
Concentric Community Advisors,  
Managing Partner  
Senior Fellow | The Urban Lab at  
The LBJ School of Public Affairs



“

There is a failure of the private market to meet these needs... We're investing in this not for a financial return on investment but for a community return.

—WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

buildings sitting empty and unused while the housing crisis steadily grows more dire. Developers and their partners are often able to build the units, but the projected costs of operation far exceed the financial capacity of the operating entity charged with managing the building. In Colorado, the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Qualified Allocation Plan now allows developers to include a five percent developer fee to go toward programs as a way to begin to offset this future funding and operational challenge.

For developers and investors, making money and doing the right thing does not have to be mutually exclusive. Today, there are investment funds operating in the market that

are interested in supporting socially-equitable outcomes. Blackrock and JP Morgan are known to hold investment funds of this nature, but the market needs more of those types of investors who are willing to provide "patient capital" to build more housing and shelter more people.

## Gordon Wayne ULI Homeless to Housed

The workshop's final presenter was Gordon Wayne, an intern with ULI's Homeless to Housed Initiative. Gordon shared his personal story of facing homelessness as a young adult and how he walked the 550 miles from

where he was living in Virginia to Boston College, where he was enrolled as a new student. Gordon used his incredible journey to raise awareness of and funds for those facing similar challenges with housing insecurity and homelessness.

Today, Gordon is attending law school and working with ULI to help emphasize the importance of incorporating the lived experiences and perspectives of those who have experienced homelessness into the design and delivery of housing.



GORDON WAYNE  
ULI Homeless to  
Housed Initiative



A photograph of a group of people in a meeting room, overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. In the foreground, a man with a beard and glasses sits on the left, looking towards the right. A woman with long dark hair sits next to him, looking directly at the camera while holding a large sheet of paper with architectural drawings. The table in front of them has water bottles, a paper bag, and other items. In the background, other people are seated at tables, and the room has a modern, wood-paneled interior.

# — Design Ideas and Approaches



Following the workshop presentations, participants spent the afternoon exploring their individual and collective design ideas that could support youth housing stability in San Antonio. Participants were divided into tables, with each table benefiting from youth participation and perspectives and an architect or designer to help bring the ideas to life.

Each table was equipped with a set of LEGOs, large-format site plans for two potential development sites in San Antonio, and worksheets that provided helpful information about relevant terms and mechanisms for identifying populations served, housing priorities, and development goals. The tables were asked to discuss and identify the following guiding principles for their designs.

**Focus Population.** The seven tables were assigned one of the following populations to serve through the development design and were invited to add additional populations as they wished:

- Permanent supportive housing for LGBTQ youth
- Permanent supportive housing for youth aging out of foster care
- Permanent supportive housing for youth who are navigating mental health / substance abuse
- Permanent supportive housing for formerly unsheltered youth
- Transitional housing for youth existing the criminal justice system

- Transitional housing for unsheltered youth
- Transitional housing for unsheltered LGBTQ youth

**Project Goals.** The tables were asked to name three project goals that would bring the most positive impact to the priority population.

**Project Site, Location Criteria.** Participants were asked to rank the following site selection criteria in order of importance to their priority population: transit employment



opportunities; university and college; childcare and elementary schools; food and grocery; medical services; walkable, bikable safety, and secure campus; and any others they wished to add to the list of criteria.

**Project Site, Development Goals.** Similarly, the tables identified goals for their development based on the following list: maximize number of units; opportunity to serve surrounding populations; partnership opportunities; innovative design; maximize site density; develop new area; infill development; neighborhood integration; and any other they wished to add.

**Resources, Amenities, and Services.** Finally, participants were asked to consider what types of resources their developments would provide to the youth living there. The prompts included questions on potential on-site supportive services, funding to support those services, and amenities.

The tables were presented with two development opportunities. One site, a T-shaped site, was located close to downtown San Antonio, with proximate access to transit, grocery stores, and other city amenities. The second site was located further afield, in an area that is undeveloped but near the Texas A+M San Antonio Campus, a hospital under construction, a growing mixed-use community, and near expanding employment opportunities.

The following summaries outline each table's goals, ideas, and designs for new youth housing in the region.



## Table 1, Facilitator: Javier Paredes, Studio Massivo

**Focus Population.** This group focused on permanent supportive housing for LGBTQ youth and transitional housing for unsheltered LGBTQ youth. They further identified youth in San Antonio's downtown and in city neighborhoods who are in need of these services.

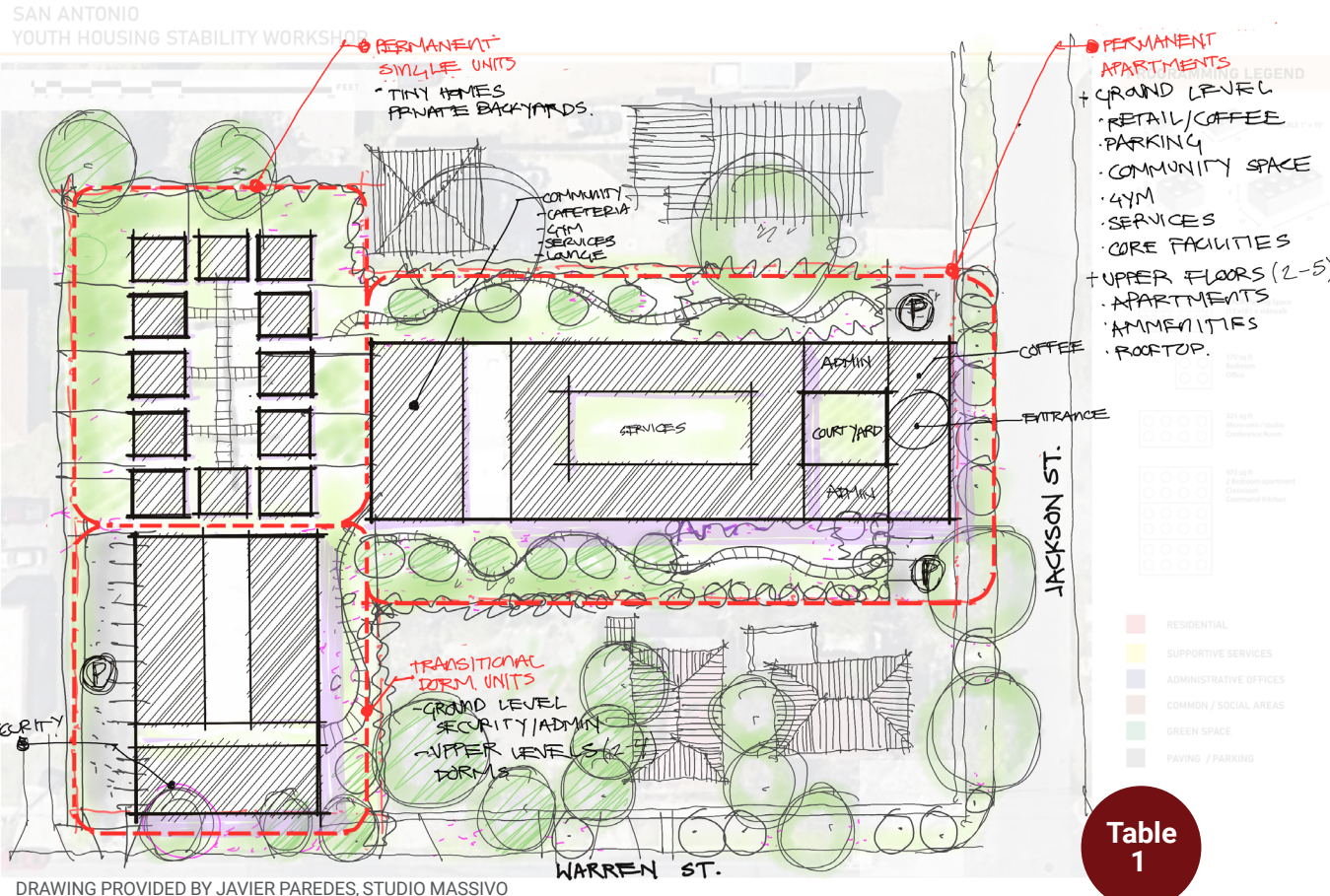
**Project Goals.** This group's goals were to create a safe and welcoming community that would be connected to transit and other

mobility resources. They also wished to provide on-site health and wellness services as well as job and career placement services, and access to food and WiFi. The group sought to design a full spectrum of housing options, including duplex and fourplex units, at varying scales and sizes that might appeal to a broad array of youth in various stages of their journey toward housing stability.

**Project Site, Development Goals.** This table identified employment opportunities, safety and security, and a walkable and bikable environment as their top three criteria in

a development site. They wanted their development to integrate into and provide services to the surrounding neighborhood, provide partnership opportunities at the site, be readily accessible, and feature an innovative design.

**Resources, Amenities, and Services.** On-site supportive services would include physical and mental healthcare as well as nutrition, fitness, and wellness services. Gender-affirming care was also important to this table as was the potential for job and career placement services. The table envisioned much of these services coming together in a community center that could feature a coffee shop in front, which could help engage the community, and could include space for the San Antonio Pride Center. They also envisioned a gym, nutritionist, food pantry, and community classrooms for training and learning. Secure outdoor spaces would provide residents with safe places to enjoy the outdoors while more public-facing green spaces could be open to the surrounding community.



DRAWING PROVIDED BY JAVIER PAREDES, STUDIO MASSIVO





## Table 2, Facilitator: Adrianna Swindle, Perkins & Will

**Focus Population.** This table focused its efforts on permanent supportive housing for youth aging out of foster care.

**Project Goals.** This group identified goals for their development that would provide a safe place for youth while also fostering a sense of community and ownership in the spaces. Peer support and access to resources were also of high importance, as was the ability to address mental health needs onsite and provide case management for residents. Infusing color—on the buildings and within the spaces—was also important to this table's participants.

**Project Site, Development Goals.** With transit, safety, and security identified as priorities, participants at this table used the proposed built environment to create spaces within the development that would be sheltered from the surrounding neighborhood and would provide enhanced access controls. Parking was placed in a manner that was near the buildings for good staff access and they created space for a gate through which movement into the development could be controlled.

**Resources, Amenities, and Services.** This table focused on the benefits that green open space can provide the youth living in and receiving support in these buildings. A central green lawn and green spaces between buildings provide everyone in the development with space to enjoy for

their own. The team also considered the placement of the buildings on the land, angling them to take advantage of natural

sunlight and incorporating sustainability features into as many aspects of the buildings and landscaping as possible.





## Table 3, Facilitator: Paola Aguirre, Borderless Studios

**Focus Population.** This table focused on designing permanent supportive housing for youth who are navigating mental health and substance abuse challenges.

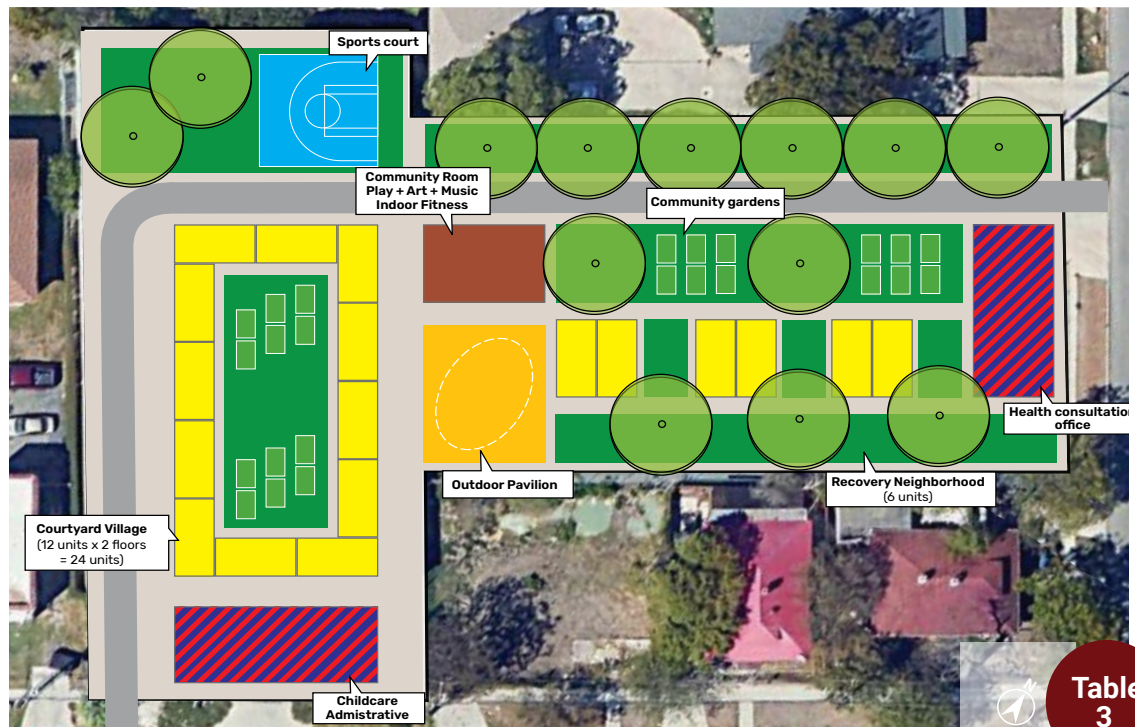
**Project Goals.** This table's goals were to create safe and healing spaces where youth would be welcomed and invited to explore both housing and services within a secure environment that would assist with their feelings of wellbeing. The team also sought to address trauma, create a low-barrier youth-specific pathway for engagement, remove the stigma of those experiencing homelessness, and encourage engagement before, during, and after the site is fully built.

**Project Site, Development Goals.** A central concept in this proposal is the intentional creation of two distinct yet complementary spaces—one focused on intensive recovery

support for individuals facing substance use and mental health challenges (recovery neighborhood), and the other offering stable, supportive housing for youth (courtyard village). Each space is tailored to meet specific resident needs while reinforcing shared goals of access, safety, and community integration. The priorities for this group's design focused on the proximity and access to transit, safety and security for residents and those navigating services onsite, and the provision of and access to medical services in the buildings. This table also identified the development's potential to connect, partner, and even integrate with and into the surrounding community. This viewpoint would provide care and healing to residents but also hold potential to share those

services more broadly, enhancing access to these vital services for the broader community.

**Resources, Amenities, and Services.** The design for this development took care to make the resources and support services and integrated with the neighborhood. They also placed green spaces alongside housing to aid in healing through nature. The team considered how common spaces built around gardens and a courtyard could assist in healing and provide choices in either individual or community spaces. This group even considered how green spaces on top of buildings could aid in the healing nature of this environment through natural cooling and water management.



DRAWING PROVIDED BY PAOLA AGUIRRE, BORDERLESS STUDIO

Table  
3



## Table 4, Facilitator: Mario Pena, Able City

**Focus Population.** Table four was charged with providing permanent supportive housing for formerly unsheltered youth.

**Project Goals.** This table's goals were to create a design that could provide the most possible services onsite, allowing youth to remain safely within the development and avoid venturing into the downtown area, which was perceived by the youth at this table as unsafe.

**Project Site, Development Goals.** Key priorities and goals for the site included:

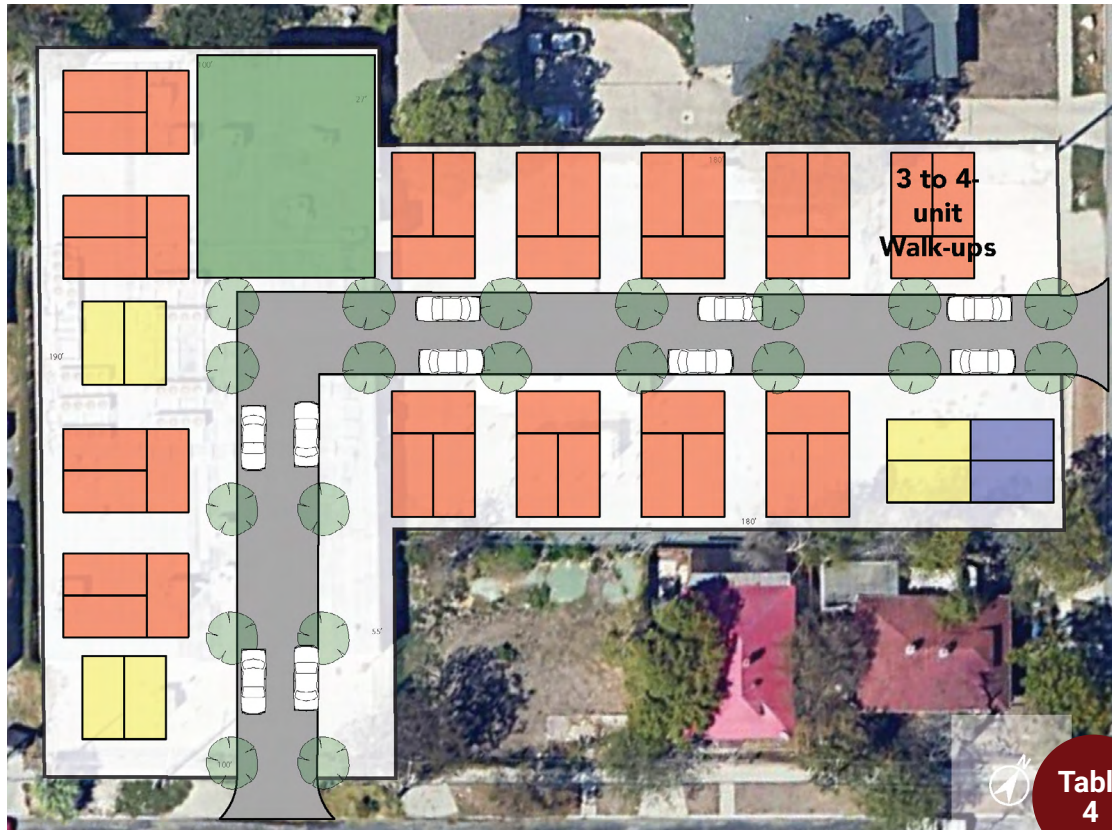
- Ensuring basic needs and accessibility by establishing a sign-up-free food pantry and creating a safe and welcoming environment with experienced staff.
- Addressing education and youth support, particularly for the approximately 3,500 students identified as homeless, many of whom are Black and bilingual, by providing targeted support.

- Providing tailored community support, with an emphasis on transit-oriented development for accessibility, life skills training, and community services that help youth navigate assistance programs.
- Creating flexible and supportive spaces by incorporating adaptable areas that meet the needs of youth, peer support and coaching, and access to basic necessities such as laundry facilities.
- Focusing on holistic support, addressing immediate needs while also providing education, life skills, and stability for long-term success.

The priorities for this table focused on creating a safe environment where residents could have easy access to medical services, food, childcare, and transit resources all within a walkable environment. Neighborhood integration was also noted, as were partnership opportunities, but safety and security remained their primary goal.

### Resources, Amenities, and Services.

Housing on this site plan would take the form of group homes of three to four one-bedroom units separated by green spaces between the buildings. A larger green, open recreation space also provides gathering space for residents. A two-way entrance and exit would provide secure access points into the development. Medical offices and a food bank would line the edge of the site and remain accessible to both residents and the neighboring community.



DRAWING PROVIDED BY MARIO PENA, ABLE CITY

Table  
4



## Table 5, Facilitator: James Lancaster, Overland Partners

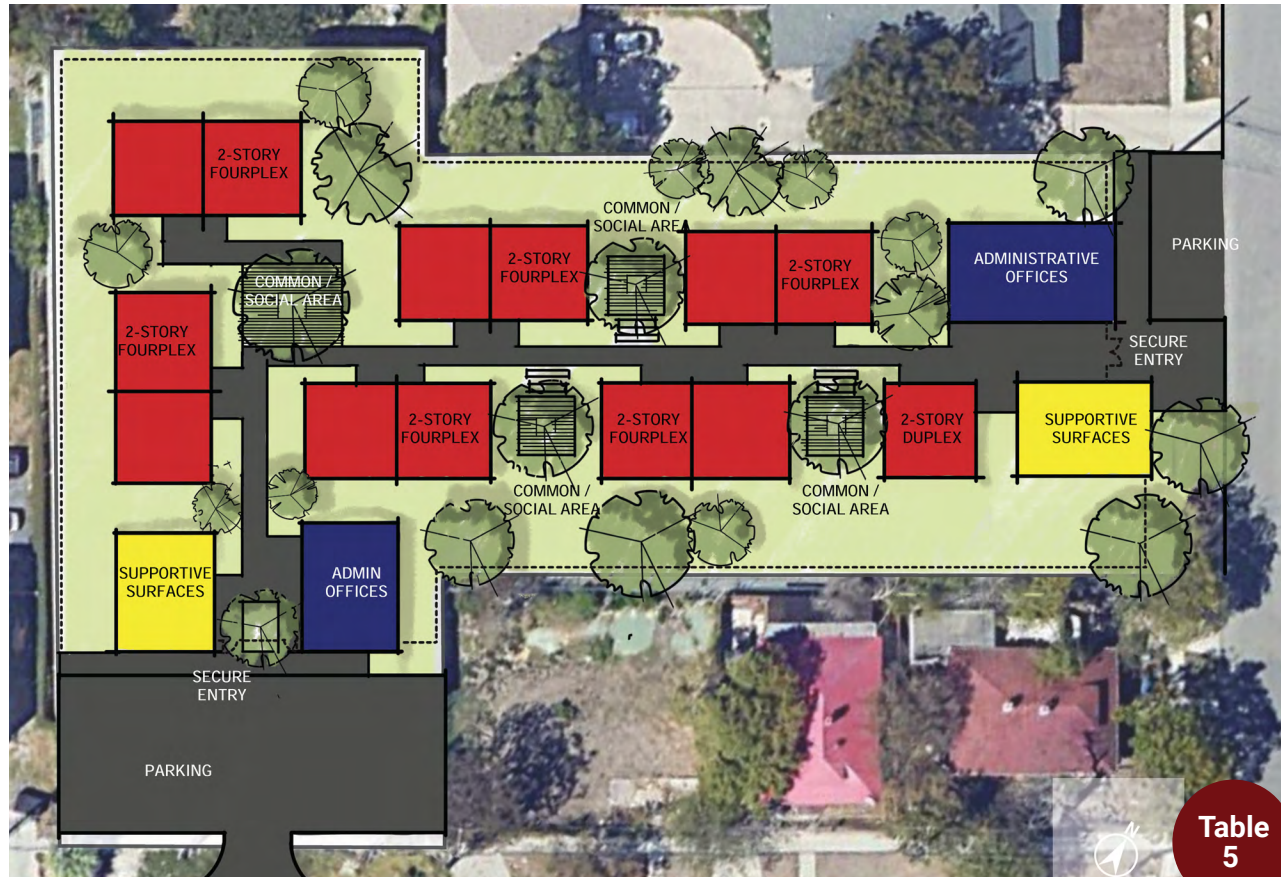
**Focus Population.** This table was asked to focus on transitional housing for youth existing the criminal justice system.

**Project Goals.** This table's project goals were to create housing that provides a positive path to transition back into society and reduce recidivism. The team also sought to create an environment that is secure, provides healing, and is connected to opportunities that would help youth with economic self-sufficiency and economic mobility. As an infill development site, the team sought to balance a large number of units with the opportunity to also provide smaller homes that could integrate with the neighborhood and provide residents with an experience that is closer to single-family living.

**Project Site, Development Goals.** With an eye for safety, the team placed security checkpoints and visitor parking at the corners of the site closest to the street and provided staff parking along the back to create an additional buffer or barrier alongside neighboring uses. The team also considered how transit and food access as well as proximity to surrounding employment opportunities could factor into their design.

### Resources, Amenities, and Services.

Resources and amenities onsite include supportive services, meeting areas, a



DRAWING PROVIDED BY JAMES LANCASTER, OVERLAND PARTNERS

workout facility, and outdoor gathering and recreation spaces. Housing, common areas, and social spaces are organized by themes to help build and strengthen resident support networks. A laundry was also designed onsite to support those living in the 65 housing units. Finally, space for employment services and career counseling was also factored into the design, helping to connect youth with potential employment opportunities in the areas surrounding the development and greater downtown.



Table 5



## Table 6, Facilitator: Mark Toppel, Card & Company

**Focus Population.** The focus for this team was transitional housing for unsheltered youth.

**Project Goals.** This site was envisioned as a safe space that fosters personal development while the youth work on their transition to permanent housing solutions.

**Project Site, Development Goals.** This table's design goals included providing safe housing on a secure campus that would complement the neighborhood, which is marked by single-family homes. This table devised 64 units across eight semi-separated buildings, inspired by the fourplexes often found within urban neighborhoods. Every four units would share a communal kitchen in addition to large scale communal spaces shared by all units. The team sought a contextual design that would encourage neighborhoods to welcome more housing and set a model for residents to transition to similar sized full time housing. The spaces were also envisioned with multiple connection opportunities for the youth living on campus and, with proximate transit, to employment opportunities and university classrooms beyond.

**Resources, Amenities, and Services.** Close to transit and downtown opportunities, this development features spaces for personal growth, such as computer rooms, as well as common areas for events, programming, and workshops. A series of small outdoor shared spaces, outdoor kitchens, and a lounge or



DRAWING PROVIDED BY MARC TOPPEL, CARD AND COMPANY ARCHITECTS PLLC

other convertible service/common areas also provide opportunities for small gatherings, meetings, and enjoyment. A clinic, food pantry, and private offices for confidential meetings with case managers are designed into the development as are green spaces,

which surround the buildings and provide privacy and a buffer from surrounding uses. Parking lines the edges of the development for residents who have cars and the service providers coming onto the site.

Table 6



## Table 7, Facilitator: Siboney Diaz Sanchez, City of San Antonio Neighborhood Housing Services Department

**Focus Population.** This table focused on providing transitional housing for unsheltered LGBTQ youth.

**Project Goals.** This team selected the greenfield site so as to infuse the relatively blank slate with compassion, joy, and safety. The goal was to address and manage trauma, including trauma suffered during experiences with religion and lack of acceptance. The youth also noted that the selection of this site, geographically further from the amenities of the city, did allow space for other businesses to locate on the parcels surrounding the development site.

**Project Site, Development Goals.** Working with the knowledge that many in this population have been systematically placed outside of society and pushed aside, this table pursued designs that placed housing in taller buildings where the youth could rise above and see the rest of the development. The design included a building for housing those recovering from substance abuse and another building for housing youth who are ready to focus on their own housing stability skills.

**Resources, Amenities, and Services.** The idea of future employment for youth drove a number of resource decisions for this table. They designed places for youth to be employed at the shelter—to both live and work

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It's a place that is resort like, where people will feel loved and cared for. We're all human and deserve to feel happy and show that we're capable. So I was really particular about how it should look.

—WORKSHOP YOUTH PARTICIPANT



Table  
7

there. They also designed common areas for socializing, which provides opportunities to deepen social skills, and spaces for common-interest clubs, where service providers and youth can share information about their respective services, needs, and experiences. This team also included a car-share lot and a driving school as they noted that employment often requires driving, either to/from employment or on the job, as in the case of delivery services. Green space was included for those who might be interested in gardening or are curious about careers in related fields.





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## Key Takeaways



As the people of San Antonio continue to find improved paths toward housing and supporting young people facing homelessness, the lessons from these workshops should help inform better design practices, more sustainable development decisions, and thoughtful approaches that support the youth through their entire journey toward independence and housing stability.

Involving youth in the design workshop and ensuring that their voices represented the lived experiences that every other participant lacked was critical.

*"There was a lot of expertise at the table but the ideas then felt grounded when we had the perspectives of the end user there at the table."*

However, positioning these youth as experts, putting them "on the spot" to lead a conversation, teach, and inform the adults at the table could be challenging, placing them outside of their comfort zones. Moving forward, great care must be taken to ensure that youth engagement is not extractive. Both individuals with lived experience and the "professionals" need to be coached on how to create inclusive and positive conversations. It was important to take a moment to level-set with the entire group and check participants' energy to ensure that everyone felt comfortable with the conversations and process.

## Key Takeaways

The youth who participated in this workshop and the broader population of youth for

“

How do we create even better spaces where we can handle this co-design process even better—that aren't extractive or full of pressure?

—WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT

whom the designs are intended are really quite vulnerable and are often subject to bullying and heckling. This process brought their needs to the forefront and provided valuable insights regarding the positioning of buildings, corners, walkways, and other spaces that could create safety concerns or hidden areas where troubling behavior may be more easily hidden from view.

When presented with the two potential development sites, the more urban site was the more popular selection. That site was easier to envision as the surroundings were already in place while the greenfield site did not yet have a surrounding neighborhood or built environment. It is also worth noting that most of the design professionals facilitating the table discussions are urbanists and may have played an unconscious role in influencing the selection of the urban site. Access to transit is such a strong urban

resource that the facilitators may have referenced its utility more often than the youth may have considered it on their own.

**Safety is key.** Safety was a key factor in nearly every table's design considerations and the ability of lighting and infrastructure to influence safety was important.

**Proximity to other people is a mixed benefit.** Some youth participants desired connection to Main Street. They wanted to be in a part of town where similar populations and services, including transit, were nearby. At the same time, other youth noted concerns that placing housing in a more populated area would also put the youth in more frequent contact with adults and that might make them feel less safe. Similarly, others noted that the walk from the bus stop to the location can be an opportunity to be exposed to harassment along the route.

**Food access is critical.** Most of the tables spent time considering food access and used access to food as a driver in some of their decision making. Adjacencies and accessibility to food resources and a central area that could provide greater access to food were a feature of every design.

**Amenities can extend into and help connect with the broader community.** For many of the teams, the considerations for on-site amenities included considerations of how those amenities could potentially serve and support the surrounding community. A food store or pantry onsite was noted as an amenity for the neighborhood.

**Play is important.** Play can inspire creativity, help form connections, and break down walls. In addition to each table designing places to play within their site plan, the addition of the LEGOs to the design workshop infused with a sense of play among participants. Bringing play to the table was important and helpful in creating an environment where youth would feel comfortable working alongside and contributing equally with the industry professionals at the table. After deep conversations about financing and very technical matters, encouraging all participants to spend time working with their hands and with the LEGOs brought joy to the experience.

## The Outcome

The workshop and process resulted in several possible designs for supportive youth housing that would meet the needs of the communities at hand. Perhaps more importantly, the workshop highlighted the need for a design approach that incorporates a trauma-informed lens. This outcome, the practice of trauma-informed design that brings the youth to the table, is an important element that should be shared with other design practitioners and developers.

## Next Steps

The workshop sponsors, SAHT, ULI, and CoSA DHS view this day as the kickoff to a long-term process for developing real housing solutions to deploy throughout the city of San Antonio. The sponsors hoped to



Thank you to the youth participants who generously shared their insights and experiences with the other workshop participants.

break down barriers between the traditional silos of housing development and supportive service provision, building strong partnerships between the development community and skilled service providers to create new housing opportunities with robust services that can make a meaningful difference in the lives of San Antonio's youth.

*If you or your organization are interested in participating in this process and contributing to this movement by adding your skills or resources, please contact [Seema Kairam](#) at the San Antonio Housing Trust.*