

Residents, Commons CDC

By Toriana Williams

Residents gathered at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Hebron on March 12 for a public conversation about a proposed housing development called Church Street Commons. The event was hosted by Commons Community Development Corporation (Commons CDC), a local nonprofit working to increase housing options in town.

Speakers at the meeting explained the need for affordable housing in Hebron, described the project's design and funding and answered questions from community members. The proposed development would create 50 mixed-income housing units on land owned by St. Peter's Church, near the town center.

The evening included presentations from church leaders, project organizers, an architect and a development partner, followed by a community question-and-answer session.

A Shortage of Affordable Housing

Organizers began by explaining why they believe the project is needed. Data presented at the meeting showed that less than 3% of Hebron's housing is considered affordable. At the same time, many residents are struggling with housing costs. About 23% of homeowners spend more than 30% of their income on housing, which experts call being "cost-burdened." For renters, the number is even higher at 53%.

In simple terms, housing is considered affordable when a household spends no more than 30% of its income on rent or mortgage payments. Rob Mangiafico, president of Commons CDC, said the problem affects many different people in town.

"Maybe it's a teacher, a teacher's aide, a health care worker, someone working at the bakery or a local business," Mangiafico said. "It could be a senior who wants to age gracefully in the town they love. It could also be a young professional just getting started."

A housing study conducted by the town estimated that Hebron needs at least 150 affordable housing units to meet current demand, according to the presentation.

A Church-Led Effort

Church Street Commons would be built on property owned by St. Peter's Episcopal Church. The church has a long history of allowing its land to serve community needs. The Rev. Ron Kolanowski, pastor of St. Peter's, said the project grew out of a conversation with town leaders about what Hebron needs most.

"As faithful stewards of this land, we asked: what would God have us do with it? The answer came in meeting the community's needs through affordable housing," he said.

Kolanowski explained that the idea of stewardship – caring for land responsibly rather than simply owning it – helped guide the decision. The church has used its property for several public purposes in the past, including farmland, a baseball field and parking for a nearby school.

What Development Would Look Like

The proposed project would include 50 housing units, made up of apartments and townhouses. Most units would have one or two bedrooms, with a smaller number of three-bedroom units.

The development would combine new construction with the renovation of the historic church rectory, which is the house traditionally used by the clergy. Plans also include a community room for residents, bicycle racks, electric vehicle charging stations, parking areas and landscaped green areas.

Architect Kathy Dorgan said the design is an attempt to blend into the town's already existing character. The townhouses near the road are planned to look like single-family homes, while the apartment building would sit further back on the property among the trees.

Sustainability Features

Organizers said the project would focus heavily on environmental sustainability as well. Sustainability refers to designing buildings that use less energy and water while attempting to protect natural resources.

The development is expected to include solar power, energy-efficient windows and lighting, native and drought-resistant plants, pollinator gardens to support bees and butterflies and all-electric building systems. Developers will also track the building's energy and water use to make sure it operates efficiently day to day.

Mixed-Income Housing

Church Street Commons is planned as a mixed-income development. This means residents with different income levels would live in the same community alongside one another. Most units would be considered affordable, while a few would be rented at regular market rates.

Affordable rents are based on something called Area Median Income (AMI). AMI is a number calculated by the federal government that shows the average income for households in a specific region.

Affordable housing programs usually divide income levels into tiers. For example, 30% AMI, which are households earning about 30% of the area's average income; 60% AMI, households earning about 60% of the average; Market Rate, households paying standard market rent.

Mangiafico said the goal is to create a community where residents of different income levels live side-by-side. "We want a mixed-income community so that people of different income levels are all living together," he said. "It helps break down the stigma that sometimes comes with affordable housing."

Funding and Approvals

The project has already received several approvals and funding commitments. The Hebron Planning and Zoning Commission approved the project unanimously. The Town Council also approved a tax agreement to help support the planned development.

Hebron • Hebron

Discuss Affordable Housing



Rob Mangiafico, board president of Commons CDC, explained the pressing need for affordable housing in Hebron at a recent community meeting.

So far, organizers have secured funding from several sources, including state agencies, non-profit groups and federal programs. Grants and funding commitments already amount to millions of dollars, including \$300,000 from the CT Department of Housing, \$2.1 million from the CT Department of Economic and Community Development, \$250,000 in federal funding and \$850,000 from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston. Additional funding applications are still underway.

Timeline for Construction

Affordable housing projects often take years to plan and finance, according to the presentation. Mangiafico said the team hopes to begin construction in early 2027, depending on final funding approvals. Construction is expected to take 15 to 18 months.

"If everything falls into place, we're hoping to break ground in early 2027 and have people moving in by 2028," Mangiafico said.

Community Questions

During the public discussion, residents asked

questions about several topics, including school enrollment, property management and housing eligibility. One question raised concerns about who would live in the development.

Since the project will receive state and federal funding, housing laws prevent giving preference to local residents. However, organizers said that in many similar developments, most applicants come from nearby towns.

The meeting was one of several community conversations about the project, and organizers said more will follow as plans move forward. Mangiafico emphasized that the group wants ongoing public input. "There's no question that we don't want to hear," he said. "This is too important not to take seriously."

For now, organizers hope Church Street Commons will help address a growing challenge that is facing many small towns, especially in Connecticut: how to create housing options for workers, seniors and young families who want to stay in the communities they call home.

St. Peter's Yankee Pot Roast Dinner

St. Peter's Episcopal Church will hold its first community dinner of the year on Saturday, March 28, starting at 4 p.m. All are invited for a meal of pot roast and vegetables (potatoes, carrots, onions, celery, turnip), salad, and roll, as well as a choice of desserts. The cost is \$18.

This meal is take-out only. You will be given a ticket for each meal you order. A server will come to your car, take your ticket(s), your payment, and your dessert order. They will bring your change, meal and dessert back to your car,

and place all in your back seat or trunk. You won't need to get out of your car.

As part of the St. Peter's outreach programs, a portion of each meal sold this month will go to the AHM Youth and Family Services. The church is located at 30 Church St. (Rt. 85) in Hebron.

For more details, call the church at 860-228-3244 or visit the church website at www.StPeter-sHebron.com.