

Falls Church Engagement

A Community Effort to Develop a Group Home

The Miller House Project, initiated by the City of Falls Church and completed in partnership with Community Residences, Inc. (CRi), is an example of inclusive affordable housing and community engagement.

This project:

- Demolished an existing City owned vacant building to create new affordable housing options for people with disabilities, not existing within City boundaries.
- Expanded accessibility and income integration.
- Promoted inclusionary practices by supporting people with disabilities and engaging them in activities and events with other people in the community.
- Provided integrated housing opportunities for the special needs population that still lived in the Commonwealth's Training Centers and Institutions, long after the DOJ 2012 ruling.

In response to a request from the community, staff explored possible future uses of a vacant parcel of City owned property. The property, originally donated by the Miller Family for use as a group home for people with disabilities, was now closed and was recommended to be condemned.

Staff convened a study group to explore possible uses for the property. The study group included representatives from: places of worship, developers, Planning Commission, Human Services Advisory Council, Housing Commission, City staff (Zoning, Recreation and Parks, Public Works, and Housing and Human Services), and Fairfax County staff (Fairfax/Falls Church Community Services Board and the Georgian Way Group Home). Others who were invited to participate and comment were from the Disabilities Services Board, Friends of Falls Church Homeless Shelter, Homestretch, and Sunrise of Falls Church.

The study group considered several options for use of the property including as a community garden, a pathway to Madison park, parking for Sunrise with a pathway to the park; housing for persons with disabilities; affordable housing; affordable home ownership; and creation of group housing for displaced or disadvantaged populations, e.g. battered women or human trafficking. Additionally, Economic Development staff contacted a network of local commercial brokers to gauge market interest in the property. There was none. Due to the significant need, the study group recommended that housing be constructed for persons with disabilities, to include appropriate services.

The new home involves many community partners such as the Christ Crossman Church which is providing parking to Miller House staff at a reduced rate. The Sunrise Assisted Living facility next door has offered a position of employment to a higher functioning resident of the home, and a USAA veteran's volunteer group worked as staff to make the open house for the home a success.

The Miller House project utilized a City Council adopted Comprehensive Agreement between the City of Falls Church, CRi and Community Havens Inc., the property affiliate of CRi, for design, construction, and operation of the residential group home. The agreement included an approval by ordinance of the sale of City owned property to Community Havens, Inc. for the price of \$1.00. The deed for the sale included a restrictive covenant on the use of the land and the City's rights to reclaim the land in the event of a change in use.

CRi also obtained a grant in the amount \$300,000 from the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to facilitate the expansion of CRi by four group home beds. This State resource was provided to match the contribution of land by the City.

The City now has a group home as an option for its adult disabled residents. As many of the parents in the "Parents of Adult Children with Disabilities" group have mentioned to City staff, they are aging and very close to no longer being able to care for their adult children. This causes them great stress and concern. Many of them have not ever had a vacation or been able to leave the house for long periods of time. The City of Falls Church School System has excellent programs for students with disabilities, however when these students age out of the school system, these services are no longer available. It is particularly beneficial to have a facility that has services in proximity to families so that they are able to visit their child.

Today, Miller House is a group home for four young adults with high needs. The residents, three of whom for the very first time in their lives, are living with greater independence outside of their family home. Miller House is also home for one young adult who is the recipient of a State Rental Housing Voucher (SRAP) for people with disabilities who want to live on their own.