

How metro Phoenix churchgoers are fighting against NIMBYs

By [Jessica Boehm](#)

A coalition of Valley religious organizations has united to combat opposition to [new affordable housing](#) and shelters.

Why it matters: Neighborhood groups across metro Phoenix have [killed](#) or [greatly reduced](#) housing projects across the Valley because they believe they're [too tall](#), [too dense](#) or may [attract lower-income people](#) to the area.

- Meanwhile, the Valley is [short around 120,000 housing units](#), and that has driven up home prices and rent to unattainable rates for many families. And [homelessness has increased by almost 30%](#) in Arizona since 2020.

What's happening: The [Valley Interfaith Project](#) (VIP), a nonpartisan coalition of congregations and nonprofits, is stepping into the housing fight to push for affordable options and shelter space in the community.

- VIP has organized its members around other social issues in the past, but its East Valley members last year decided to take up housing after hearing stories from parishioners who were struggling to afford their living expenses, said Barb Quijada, the Valley Unitarian Universalist liaison to VIP.

The intrigue: Neighbors have a natural organizing advantage because of their physical proximity to one another.

- But VIP is trying to empower its members to be a part of the conversation, too, by showing how these projects impact the entire city and their fellow parishioners.

What they're saying: "Often they may not show up to a meeting because they don't vociferously oppose something, but that does not mean that they're not supportive," Chandler VIP member Larry Dumka tells us.

Flashback: The group secured its first housing win by countering a vocal neighborhood group opposing the [purchase of a Mesa hotel](#) for conversion into a shelter for seniors, families and domestic violence survivors experiencing homelessness.

- VIP lobbied Mesa City Council members and encouraged parishioners who live in Mesa to speak in favor of the shelter at the November meeting, where the council ultimately voted 4-3 to move forward.

Now, VIP has its sights set on a [Chandler-area development](#) that includes 282 subsidized senior housing apartment units.

- Dominion, the developer, had [originally planned](#) 518 affordable apartments, but after intense neighborhood pushback it scaled back. However, some community members are still opposed.

Zoom in: VIP is assembling Chandler residents, like retiree Susan Davis, to share their personal experiences of housing insecurity with elected officials in hopes of garnering support for the project.

- Davis, who is a member of Saint Matthew's Episcopal Church, moved to Chandler in 2019 to be closer to the church. At the time, her rent was \$1,100. It's now \$1,900, plus fees.
- "I'm struggling now to survive month to month. I'm just making it by the skin of my teeth," she tells Axios Phoenix.

The bottom line: "I think as a community, as a church, most of us are looking out for each other. It's important we stay together as a congregation and the people we know and love aren't forced to move away," Davis says.