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**Realtors support Seattle churches, decry amended bill
that limits churches' efforts to create housing in Seattle**

SEATTLE, Washington (July 16, 2021) – Building much-needed affordable housing requires the skillful use of partnerships and incentives, not 11th hour regulations that limit the use of scarce urban land for housing, according to leaders from the Seattle King County REALTORS® (SKCR).

Reacting to the City of Seattle's last-minute amendments to a bill to help faith-based organizations create housing, Realtors suggested the changes were misguided and could derail some plans. Broker Eddie Chang, a vice president on SKCR's board of directors, said Seattle's measure, signed by the mayor on July 9, could pose insurmountable challenges for the faith-based groups the bill was designed to benefit – especially Black churches, and their potential construction partners.

“To be viable, housing developments need to pencil,” stated Chang, a managing broker at Realogics Sotheby's International Realty. He said Realtors share concerns expressed by three faith-based organizations and a University of Washington Dean that asked the Council to reconsider the proposed amendments. The groups preferred to have Seattle's requirements be consistent with state laws.

Instead, Seattle's amendments alter provisions in a bill state legislators approved in 2019 by an overwhelming 83-9 margin; it became effective on July 28 of that year.

Under the state law, religious organizations were incentivized with density bonuses to create affordable housing on properties they owned or controlled. Seattle's amendments, as approved, change thresholds set by state legislators in SHB 1377.

“Increasing the supply of housing is a long-standing priority for our association and Realtors statewide,” Chang emphasized. He contends Seattle's amendments will hamper efforts by faith-based groups and their private sector partners to build affordable housing and would likely have other adverse impacts for low-income minority populations.

Chang said SKCR concurs with objections raised in letters to Seattle City Council by leaders of Nehemiah Initiative Seattle, Damascus International Fellowship, the Church Council of Greater Seattle, and Renee Cheng, professor and Dean at U.W.'s College of Built Environments.

Quoting one of the letter-writers, Chang noted many parishioners in communities of color “suffer under the weight of soaring rents and unequal access to housing.” Having earned community trust, he said religious institutions with underdeveloped properties are poised to partner with developers to fill some of the crucial needs for their cost-burdened neighbors.

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Objections to Seattle's amended bill are based primarily on two elements:

- Lowering the average household affordable median income (AMI) from 80% to 60%;
- Increasing the minimum term of affordability from 50 years to 75 years;

As a member of the Coalition for More Housing Choices, Seattle King County Realtors support creating new opportunities and collaborations, and leveraging available tools and resources, such as the density bonus that help make affordable projects succeed financially, Chang stated.

“Instead of helping historically Black churches and other faith communities create self-sufficient, low-income developments to house the unhoused on underused properties, Seattle is exacerbating our housing crisis.”

The Seattle King County REALTORS® is a nonprofit professional trade association whose goals include promoting ethical business practices and supporting policies that preserve and expand real property rights and housing affordability. Based in Bellevue, SKCR has more than 7,200 members and is a local board of the National Association of Realtors®.

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