

Statement to the Pennsylvania House Housing & Community Development Committee
Informational Meeting on Housing Development

Monday, October 23, 2023

by Robert Bowman, Founder, Charter Homes & Neighborhoods

www.charterhomes.com

Good afternoon and thank you Chairman Sturla and the committee for the opportunity to address you today.

I founded Charter in 1990 in Lancaster a month after graduating from college. I thought being a builder would be a good fit for me as a student of design and as someone who would enjoy working with the people that make our industry work and the people we serve. As it turns out, it has been the right decision.

Since then, Charter has built more than 7600 homes – both for sale and for rent - in some of the most recognized neighborhoods in the state including Meeder in Cranberry Township, Arcona in Mechanicsburg, Grandview in Lancaster, and our newest neighborhood that we opened this last Saturday – Grange - in Carlisle.

These neighborhoods are built thinking differently about how our state can look and live. More than twenty years ago, we began to explore why some places become more valuable to people in a way that endear themselves to those who live in them, and to the communities of which they are a part. What we learned is now how we create places like these that include:

We design for people

We start and end our thinking when creating neighborhoods with people. While many of the ordinances and rules regarding the development process are necessary, we spend much of our time in the approval process reminding various stakeholders – most often the general public and municipal leaders – of the needs and wants of the people who will live in these neighborhoods. A example of that is the idea of a *multigenerational neighborhood*, with people of all ages living together on the same street. Another is including small businesses that people can walk to, giving them a chance to connect with friends - old and new. Neither of these are new ideas, but both are a challenge to include in opportunities today under many of today's zoning ordinances.

We respect what came before

With our roots in Lancaster County and like much of our state, some properties have been cared for by one family for generations. We have learned, our team has always had a deep commitment to the stewardship of land, especially as part of the community. Some properties within our communities should never be developed. Many of the historical, environmental, and cultural should be preserved as part of the heritage of our past and entrusted as our legacy to future generations.

We find “what’s possible” by design

Creating these special places requires a tremendous creative effort. Many of the examples of places you are fond of happened before the complexity of today's ordinances and codes were enacted, which are often necessary but don't consider or allow for more creative solutions. As designers – with a clear objective of creating places of enduring value – we believe there are always alternatives to solving problems as long as everyone involved shares the objective and is open to new ways to make these places evolve.

At Charter we begin each meeting reminding ourselves *we are in the people business*. You are too. In your role on this committee I would ask you to continue to ensure the codes, ordinances, plans, regulations you put forth and consider to allow and encourage creating places that are as special as the people - and the communities – they that call them home.