



# Chestnut Housing

## Background

Every day in Lancaster County more than 500 people are experiencing homelessness, and countless others are at risk of losing their housing. According to an estimate by the Economic Development Company of Lancaster, we need 7,000 additional homes countywide. We simply need more housing options at every income level to meet the demand of a growing population.

## Our Mission

Chestnut Housing provides affordable rental housing to people experiencing homelessness because a home is the foundation of a healthy and fulfilling life. We connect people and communities of faith with tangible ways to create more affordable homes in Lancaster.

## Why Chestnut Housing

Chestnut Housing is unique among its local peers in key ways. First, we were started by a local Mennonite church and we partner with local congregations who are ready and able to do more to create new housing solutions in our community – including adapting underutilized areas of their properties to create new housing. We have projects in the works with several local congregations ranging from one apartment to as many as 10 or more new affordable homes. More importantly, we actively seek opportunities to inform and inspire communities of faith about housing challenges in our community and to become advocates for affordable housing.

Second, we are *doers* and we specialize in hands-on work with volunteers to keep our properties affordable. We have experience putting volunteers to work contributing hundreds of hours of donated labor to our projects, and we work closely with our builders to identify strategic ways volunteers can help lower construction costs.

Third, Chestnut Housing works with local social service agencies to provide person-based support to our residents. Our partners refer potential residents and provide one year of case management support to clients successfully placed in CHC housing. And we recently added a layer of support through a new partnership with CAP available for residents who experience crises that put them at risk of losing their housing.



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## Our Plan For More Impact

2023 marks Year One of Chestnut Housing's strategic plan, where we have set an overarching goal to create or preserve 100 affordable homes in five years. Over the last eighteen months we have grown from operating 12 affordable homes, to 21 today. We have projects and partnerships in place to increase that number to 30+ by the end of 2024, including Milburn Apartments, a development of eight new affordable apartments in the City of Lancaster.

## How State Lawmakers Can Help

We believe we have a unique model at Chestnut Housing to leverage significant resources and assets from the local faith community in new ways. But for all the untapped potential there, we still need public resources to achieve our mission. We are just beginning to explore state funding opportunities. But programs like the Neighborhood Assistance Program of DCED, and the recent ARPA-funded Home Options Grant Program administered by PHFA are examples of state funding that fit our program model. More dollars and credits available in programs like these help make our mission more achievable.

I take every opportunity I can find to provide accurate information about housing needs in our community, and to break down stereotypes about affordable housing. Perhaps the greatest impact you can have as state lawmakers is to do the same with your constituents and your colleagues – speak up often and with moral clarity about the need for people of goodwill to do more, together to address housing needs in our communities.

**Thank you for your time this afternoon!**