

American Rescue Plan

My name is Steve Wiser and I am a local architect. Addressing the need for affordable housing should be a high priority for the American Rescue Plan.

Louisville has many wonderful social service organizations that care for our less fortunate citizens. And they could do a lot more if they had more units of affordable housing.

Here are some direct ways ARP funds can create more affordable housing in Louisville in the near future:

1. Provide more vouchers for affordable housing.
2. Provide 'gap' funding between what it costs to construct units and the actual voucher amount that pays for the rent.
3. Fund a study to determine the feasibility of converting Louisville Gardens into a multi-unit affordable housing complex that also contains a healthcare clinic, grocery, job training, counseling, and other needed supportive services. Chicago transformed a former Sears warehouse into such all-in-one facility. This could possibly result in hundreds of units.
4. Buy back the vacant property on Muhammad Ali between Second and Third that Omni owns and create a similar affordable residential community with first floor retail. The city gave Omni over \$140 million dollars for a luxury hotel and 220 upscale apartments. You need to ask Omni to reciprocate our taxpayer generosity by helping us solve this housing crisis.

These are just several of the many options available in solving our urgent affordable housing needs. I am willing to work with you on this strategy. Providing funding for more affordable housing is the best use of these ARP dollars. Thank you for considering this request.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: BIG, BOLD, GREEN, & NOW!

By Steve Wiser, FAIA

31,412: that is the quantity deficit of affordable housing units in Louisville per a 2019 study. To put that in perspective, this is equivalent to the population of Elizabethtown. This large shortage is not unique to Louisville. Almost all major cities have similar dilemmas. Nashville has a comparable shortage, and Cincinnati's gap is over 40,000. Indianapolis likewise has a big deficit and Chicago is lacking over 110,000 units.

There is a myriad of reasons why affordable housing is in such a state of urgency. With construction material escalating in cost, the implementation expense is becoming a crisis as well. But there is just one answer to meet these challenges: produce more affordable housing ASAP!

In Washington D.C., Mayor Bowser has set a goal to create 12,000 units in 4 years. For Louisville, this would take us up to 10 years to meet the demand. Economically disadvantaged individuals need lodging now, not in 2031.

New construction typically takes longer to build than renovation and costs more. Site work, approval objections, weather delays, etc., can prolong a project like the one proposed in 2017 for Prospect. Renovation though can expedite the process since the structure and site already exists, with less dollars. In fact, renovating older structures is the "greenest" approach to housing.

In Chicago, a former Sears warehouse was converted into 181 units along with a clinic, childcare, gym, job training center, and computer facility. Former large-scale buildings like hotels, hospitals, churches, and schools from North Carolina and Maryland to Arizona and Colorado have been repurposed to serve vulnerable populations.

Louisville has similar examples: the Puritan Building in Old Louisville now has 250 affordable units. Several vacated schools have been renovated and the former National Candy Building at 1405 W Broadway will soon undergo an extreme mixed-use makeover that includes 51 units. The former Presbyterian Community Center in Smoketown is another excellent model with 32 units.

There are many historic structures that can be revitalized for affordable housing. What about former bourbon rickhouses like the one at Payne & Lexington that is about to be demo'd or the former Holy Name Convent on Fourth that Catholic Charities wants to raze. With a bit of creative site planning, both the proposed new building and low-cost units could be achieved. The former church at Jacob and Floyd that recently burned could be another candidate for more units.

And, now let's think really big and bold. What if the mega square-foot Louisville Gardens was converted? It perhaps could house hundreds of units. Using assembly line prefab construction on the interior, this could be rapidly transformed: Insert an atrium, pop up some dormers and many units are possible. Like the Chicago Sears Warehouse, this could be a mini-city inside with clinic, grocery, etc. And the city already owns this real estate!

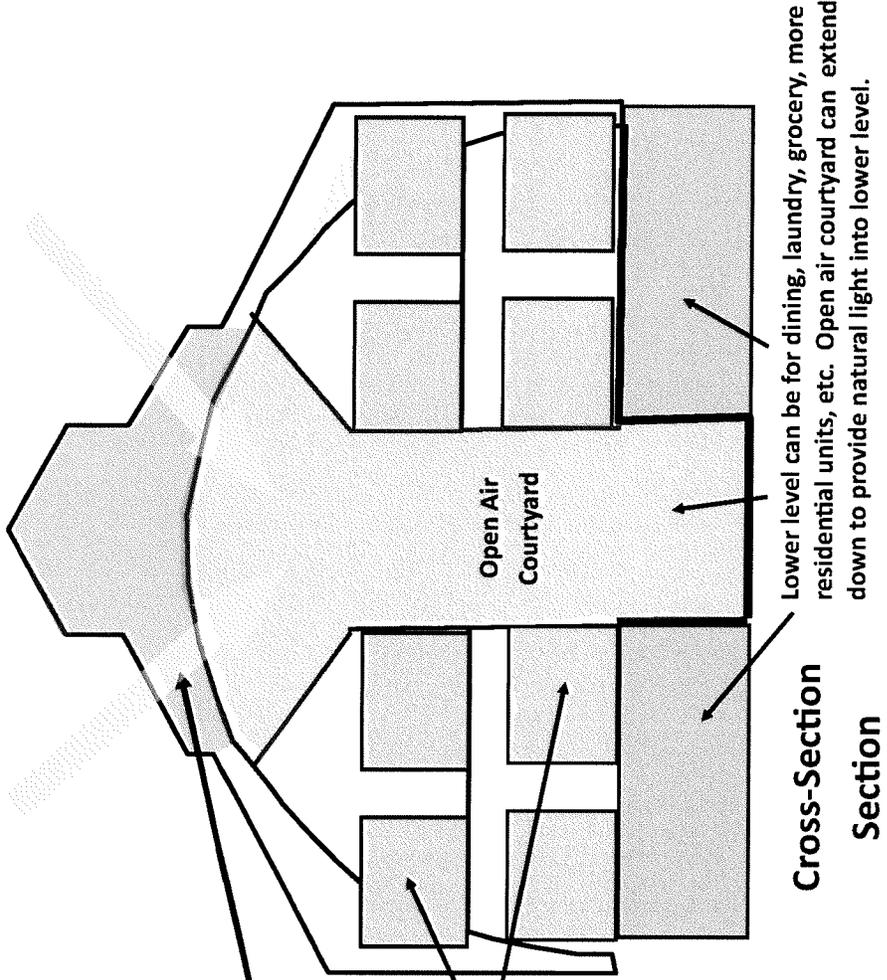
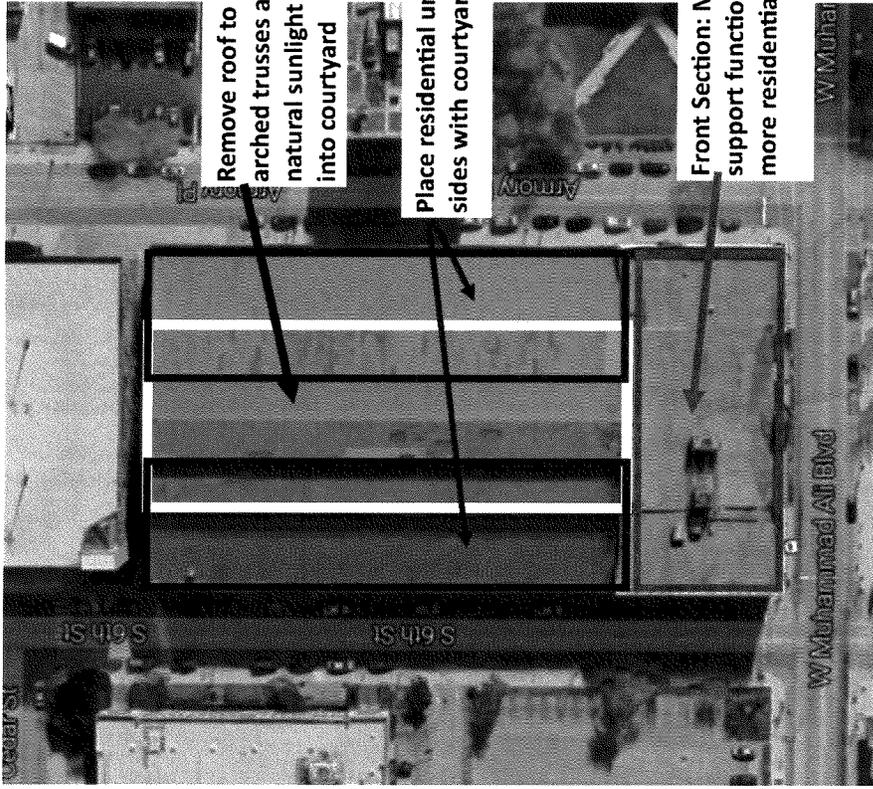
Imagine how many units could have be placed in the former psych hospital near Anchorage which was razed in the 1980s. That sprawling complex had hundreds of thousands of square feet.

One final thought: the city gave Omni over \$140 million for a high-end hotel and 220 luxury apartments. It's now time for Omni to reciprocate our tax-payer generosity to help solve this crisis. The city can repurchase the vacant property to the south of Omni Hotel and build multiple units there with first floor retail. And toss in the endangered Liberty Hall which also would make for wonderful affordable housing.

As to funding, there are a variety of public and private financing options to get these units on-line sooner than later.

Recently CBS Sunday Morning featured the 'Housing First' initiative program used by the Veteran's Administration, as well as in Denver, which demonstrates the remarkable 'quality of life' success rate among the residents. Louisville needs to attain similar results now and cut this 31,412 deficit in half within 4 years. Historic properties can fast-track us to this vital goal.

Steve Wiser, FAIA, is a local architect.



Cross-Section

Floor Plan

Louisville Gardens: Proposal

Proposal Description:

Convert Louisville Gardens into an affordable housing complex. Total square feet within Louisville Gardens is about 200,000 GSF (this needs verification). Management facilities could be located in the front section which has about 66,400 GSF. Dining, laundry, grocery, etc., support functions can be provided within. The center section of the roof could be removed and a natural light courtyard created with the residential units looking out into it. Interior parking spaces could also be incorporated.

Benefits of this proposal: Construction performed indoors which expedites the time schedule; Less expensive to build; Tax credits for renovation; located near social service functions.

