

20 November 2020
Ms. Olivia Dias
City of Salem Planning Commission
Community Development Department
555 Liberty Street SE, Suite 305
Salem, OR 97301

Sent by EMAIL to:
Odias@cityofsalem.net

INRE: Case No. CPC-NPC-ZC-SPR-ADJ-DR20-03; Application No. 20-108811-ZO; 20-108812-ZO; 20-112373-RP; 20-112375-ZO; 20-112374-DR; for Dev NW Request for Rezoning and Site Plan/Design Review for 905 and 925 Cottage St NE.

Dear Ms. Dias:

Community Action writes in support of DevNW's effort to create affordable housing at the former location of the Evergreen Church at 905 and 925 Cottage Street NE. Salem is facing an enormous homeless crisis, which has grown much worse in this year of social unrest, a global pandemic, and colossal economic disruption. Our Agency has spent much of the past six months providing more than \$7 million in emergency rental and energy assistance to low income families in Marion and Polk Counties, many of whom live in Salem. And while we may have prevented an unprecedented wave of new homelessness here in Salem, the truth is we already had a large and growing homeless population when this crisis began, and there is a real chance that many more will still be added to that homeless number in 2021, as any economic recovery will be slow to impact those in poverty. Many of our working poor, in particular, were already heavily rent-burdened. The most crushing reality, for many in poverty in our community the past decade, has been the skyrocketing costs of housing, and in particular the lack of affordable housing options. That already inequitable condition has been compounded by COVID, which has hit those in poverty and members of communities of color disproportionately hard.

Community Action began more than 50 years ago as an experiment, giving voice to the needs of those in poverty. A core part of our mission is to provide the vital services that lead people to self-sufficiency. We provide energy assistance, weatherization, affordable child care, training and technical assistance to child care providers, nutrition programs, re-entry services for those exiting incarceration, services for endangered youth, and we are the region's largest homeless services provider and (along with Salem Housing Authority) the backbone of the City of Salem's homeless response system. Across all that work we do in the community is a central unifying principle: We want individuals and families to lead healthy, safe, and productive lives that contribute to the commonwealth of the community. We want to encourage them to participate in our democracy, to feel a sense of ownership, belonging, and responsibility to their community. None of those things are possible, however, without housing security.

Our city is more than a decade behind in meeting the affordable housing demand in Salem. When families are heavily rent-burdened, critical domestic needs often go unmet. Rent is usually paid first. But other essentials, like food, transportation, clothing, medical care, and adequate child care often go unmet when the rent burden pushes above 40 percent of a family's income. Salem is in *desperate* need of hundreds of more units of affordable housing, and we believe that the DevNW project is of vital interest to the general welfare of those in poverty in our community. Part of our charter, a critical part of our place as a service provider in Salem, is to engage the community in a conversation that changes the way the community *as a whole* see those in poverty. We're not here just to change the lives of the people *in poverty*, but also to change the lives of those *not in poverty* by encouraging them to see those *in poverty* differently, as valuable and constructive members of our society. As people with unique dreams and perspectives, whose experiences can contribute to a public conversation that makes us all a better people. This is another opportunity for those *not in poverty* to welcome those *burdened by it*, and say to them that their needs are just as important as our own.



COMMUNITY ACTION

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**HELPING PEOPLE
EXIT POVERTY**

These 19 units may seem to be a small matter, but that affordable housing will have a generational impact on Salem. Every single unit has value, because the people in them have value. Each unit has utility, measured not just in the cold mathematical reduction of homelessness in Salem. But measured also in the grace and dignity that comes in helping those struggling to survive in the face of economic challenges. In the end, each one of those 19 units is a life, one with meaning and infinite worth, and worthy of our support.

Community Action supports DevNW's project. These one-bedroom units in Salem are especially difficult to find at an affordable cost, and are ideally suited to seniors, veterans, young adults and couples, those with disabilities, and people on very low, limited and fixed incomes. They will promote human dignity and an opportunity for the residents to live fuller lives.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact me at the address and phone numbers to your left.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jimmy Jones", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jimmy Jones
Executive Director