
Growing Together

Fourteen years ago, Habitat completed Paton Street, our first mixed-income community. This year, things come full circle as we submit a building permit for two homes on another lot a few streets over in the Fifeville area of Charlottesville.

Besides their adjacent location in one of the most important and historic African American communities in Charlottesville, what do the two projects have in common?

Well, a lot it turns out.

For one, both strategies – building intentional mixed income communities and reinvesting affordable homeownership in neighborhoods faced with gentrification pressure – not only provide wealth building opportunities for families, but also counter more than a century’s worth of housing policy and practice that has led to extreme housing segregation and gentrification here and nationally.

“We cannot continue to grow apart,” said Habitat President and CEO Dan Rosensweig. “When we don’t live with each other, when we no longer share a common destiny, our ability to work together, to achieve a more perfect union, fades away.”

A decade and a half ago, Paton Street brought together 34 families to forge connections among Charlottesville residents who had until then lived in the same city but existed worlds apart. It was the first mixed income Habitat community in Virginia and one of the first in the nation.

Today, Habitat is planning to build two homes on a lot on 6 ½ Street, one of the first projects to make use of **the new City zoning ordinance** which provides extra allowances for affordable housing. These homes will be a demonstration project to show how increased density at a neighborhood scale can bring affordability without harming the existing character of the neighborhood and without gentrifying. These homes are designed to integrate seamlessly within the existing physical fabric of the community and will be sold to families who otherwise would struggle to remain in the City.



Rendering of future homes at 6 1/2 Street that will mimic those at Harmony Ridge

As we celebrate Black History Month, these two projects remind us of the challenges and achievements Habitat has experienced in sensitively developing affordable housing in underserved communities. Fifeville is one of the most significant neighborhoods in Charlottesville. Originally mostly farmland surrounding the City of Charlottesville, the roughly 60 acre area surrounding the Oaklawn plantation was subdivided and sold off by the Fife family by the 1890s.

For much of its history since that time, the area was emblematic of Southern race relations, with middle class white families living on the west side and working class African-American families living on the east side, divided by 7 1/2 Street. Overtime, prominent black builders like Allen and James Hawkins constructed many of the homes that give the neighborhood its unique character. Institutions like Tonsler Park – named after the principal of the Jefferson School - and the many black owned businesses on Cherry Avenue have provided the community meaningful places to gather and socialize for more than a century.

The new RN-A zoning designation for Fifeville is one of the first zoning classifications in the nation to allow reinvestment in a historically African American community while providing an extra level of protection. The zoning district provides incentives for preservation of existing structures – like the homes built by the Hawkins – and allows an increase in density if the extra units are affordable. City planners hope that it will become a model for the nation.

Creating Bonds that Last a Lifetime

Paton Street homeowner Elizabeth “Bunny” Wrenn got to know Dr. Jim and Wendy Craig through the Habitat process while the neighborhood was being built. The Craigs volunteered as Bunny’s advocates, walking side by side with her as she learned about homeownership, as she performed sweat equity and as she closed on her home. In the process, they formed a friendship that all three describe as

among the most meaningful ones of their lives.

In talking about Dr. Craig, who passed away last month just five days shy of his 103rd birthday, Bunny became emotional. "He was a beautiful person - him *and* his wife. He would always come up to see me. They stood by me to the end!"



From left: Wendy Craig; Elizabeth Wrenn, Jim Craig 2011

Jim epitomized the most transformative elements of the Paton Street experiment, which has now blossomed into 14 mixed income communities in the area featuring Habitat homes. He and Wendy served on both the Habitat Advisory Board and Board of Directors, providing countless hours as volunteers and significant financial support as donors for decades. The Craigs were instrumental in convincing other board members to take risks for the good of the community. Without their moral authority Habitat might not have taken a leap of faith at Paton Street or purchased Sunrise and Southwood to save the mobile home park residents from displacement. Their vision for the good Habitat could bring our community was far-sighted and courageous.

"Jim was incredibly warm, giving, and smart...he was a very quiet man but when he spoke, you wanted to be sure that you were paying attention," stated Shelley Cole, Habitat Compliance Officer and employee of nearly 20 years who started her family services journey in partnership with the Craigs, then the co-chairs of the family support committee, "he was also a real good liaison between families and the Board of Directors, [bringing] perspective to lend guidance."

Although we are deeply saddened by the loss of Dr. Craig, we celebrate his memory and cherish his legacy that will live on forever in communities like Paton Street and in the hearts of the people – like Bunny – who he touched deeply.

A Celebration of his Life was held earlier this month at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville. To submit a virtual memory to Jim's obituary page [click here](#).

Urban Institute Panel on Zoning Reforms: featuring Dan Rosensweig

Earlier this month, our president and CEO Dan Rosensweig participated on a panel of practitioners and national thought-leaders on the subject of zoning reform at the Urban Institute in Washington D.C.

It's an engaging conversation about zoning, inclusion and advocacy, and **it's worth a watch!**



Urban Institute Panel from left: Christina Plerhoples Stacy (moderator), Angela D. Brooks, Yonah Freemark, Alyia Gaskins, and Dan Rosensweig

You can learn more about our advocacy work and the efforts of Habitat affiliates across the country who are working for more equitable zoning policies [in this video by Habitat for Humanity International](#).

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