

Establishing A Policy Requiring Evaluation Of Surplus Or Idle County-Owned Real Property For Tiny Home Developments To Support Unhoused Persons

Referred to: The Housing and Transportation Committee (Chairman Collins and Legislators Clinton, Corcoran, Harmon, Kitchen, McCollough, and Stewart), and The Ways and Means Committee (Chairman Gavaris and Legislators Collins, Hansut, Kovacs, Nolan, Roberts, and Uchitelle)

Legislator Herbert Litts, III, offers the following:

WHEREAS, Ulster County is committed to addressing the critical issue of homelessness and housing insecurity, recognizing that access to safe, dignified, and affordable housing is a fundamental need for all residents and in particular for our housing challenged veterans; and

WHEREAS, recent data has identified approximately 1,178 unhoused individuals in Ulster County, excluding 48 unhoused veterans who had served our nation but now lack a suitable place to live in the very country they served, highlighting the urgent need for targeted housing solutions, including solutions for our unhoused veterans; and

WHEREAS, according to data and sources noted in and published to the Participate Ulster website (<https://participate.ulstercountyny.gov/uc-housing-initiatives>), in 2023, Ulster County placed 428 individuals in emergency housing, primarily in motels and hotels due to insufficient shelter capacity, with the average stay for unhoused families exceeding two (2) years, reflecting a significant increase from prior years; and

WHEREAS, the cost of emergency housing has placed a substantial burden on the public fisc with the County incurring approximately \$13,300,000.00 in emergency housing related costs in 2024, contributing to shared County and State expenses that underscore the need for cost-effective, long-term housing solutions; and

WHEREAS, in addition to the high and inefficient costs associated with emergency housing, such housing is temporary in nature, often inhospitable and sub-par, and does not foster the stability and dignity associated with permanent housing, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty and economic disadvantage experienced by those suffering housing insecurity; and

WHEREAS, surplus or idle real property owned by Ulster County represents an underutilized resource that could be leveraged to create innovative housing solutions, such as tiny home developments, which have proven effective alternatives for providing sustainable, affordable housing for unhoused individuals, including for our Ulster County veterans in need of permanent housing; and

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WHEREAS, tiny home developments, consisting of small-scale, energy-efficient dwellings, can offer a compassionate and scalable solution to provide immediate shelter and support services, fostering stability and self-sufficiency, particularly for unhoused veterans who may also be suffering from service-related afflictions such as post-traumatic stress disorder or similar disabilities that could improve or benefit from the comfort of having a permanent home; and

WHEREAS, establishing a policy requiring evaluation of all County-owned properties for such developments aligns with Ulster County's goals of promoting equitable housing access, supporting environmental sustainability, and addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, including veterans, possibly through collaboration with local nonprofits, housing organizations, and community stakeholders; and

WHEREAS, the Ulster County Legislature, pursuant to Ulster County Charter §C-11, is the legislative, appropriating and policy-determining body of the County; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Ulster County Charter §C-47 among the powers and duties of the Director of Planning is advising the County Executive, County Legislature, County departments, and other agencies with respect to any matter relating to the development or redevelopment of the County; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Ulster County Charter §C-47 The Director of Planning and/or the County Planning Board shall perform such other and related duties as required by the County Executive or County Legislature; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Ulster County Legislature hereby establishes a policy requiring that all surplus or idle real property owned by Ulster County be evaluated for its suitability for tiny home developments intended for the use and occupancy of unhoused residents of Ulster County, with a priority on addressing the needs of unhoused Ulster County veterans; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Ulster County Director of Planning shall develop a process to assess the feasibility of such developments, including site suitability, infrastructure needs, compliance with local zoning and building codes, the availability of grant funding from federal, state and local sources and public-private partnerships with nonprofit organizations to minimize fiscal impacts and support the development and operation of tiny home communities; and, be it further

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RESOLVED, that the evaluation process shall consider integration with existing veteran-focused housing initiatives in the County, and consultation with the Ulster County Veteran Services Agency to ensure comprehensive support for unhoused veterans and with the Ulster County Department of Social Services to assess the housing needs of the general population; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that a report on the findings of this evaluation, including recommendations for specific County owned properties, cost projections and implementation plans, shall be submitted to the Clerk of the Ulster County Legislature within six (6) months of the adoption of this Resolution; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that such report shall be updated at least biennially to account for newly acquired properties, and those properties that have become the subject of a proposed County project or change in use by the County, or become idle or vacant since the last report was issued; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that this Resolution shall take effect immediately,

and moves its adoption

ADOPTED BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES:

NOES:

Passed Committee: Housing and Transportation on _____.

Passed Committee: Ways and Means on _____.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:
NONE