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PENN IUR ROUNDTABLE ON ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

# Universities and Affordable Housing

## DUKE UNIVERSITY

**CASE STUDY**

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*Image via Cappex*



## The Model: Empowerment (and Reciprocity), Purposeful Partnership with Public Commitment, and Transformative Action

### INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

Duke University is located across three campuses (Central, East, and West) that claim more than 8,600 acres in Durham, N.C. Established in the late 1800s, Duke's campuses were largely acquired in the early 1900s, pushing westward and negating early conflicts with Durham's urbanization to the east (Moyné 2004). As of 2021, Duke enrolls approximately 17,600 students (almost entirely on a full-time basis), including roughly 6,900 undergraduates and 10,700 graduate students (enrollments based on 2021 statistics from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System; Ginder, Kelly-Reid, and Mann 2018). The scale and location of its landholdings have lessened student housing demands—though not removed them entirely. The university mandates three-year on-campus residency for its undergraduate population (Duke University n.d.), resulting in approximately 80 percent of its undergraduate students living in Duke owned and/or operated housing.\*

Duke's relationships with Durham neighborhoods, however, have still experienced tensions over the years. Historically, Duke's perceived ambivalence and inaction, especially towards Durham's African American population, generated ill will (Moyné 2004; Talhelm 1995a). At neighborhood meetings and in newspapers, local residents expressed suspicion about Duke's motives, as well as the sentiment that Duke did not embody unilateral opportunity—particularly for residents in low-wage Duke jobs (e.g., housekeeping, groundskeepers, and seasonal workers; Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership 1996; Talhelm 1995b). As Durham experienced economic decline in the 1990s (and Duke's academic stock was rising), there was a moment of recognition that Duke could not isolate itself from neighborhood decline without consequence. Alongside the appointment of the university's first woman president, Nannerl Keohane in 1993, Duke embarked on a multi-faceted anchor institution strategy that prioritized a community-led model intended to change the “story [from] look at what Duke did,” to “can you imagine what's happened in Durham?” (Ehlenz 2020).

Duke's anchor model has been built upon community-defined needs rather than institutionally established priorities (Ehlenz 2020). Conceiving of institutional resources as tools for change, its strategy relies on three factors: empowerment, partnership, and evolution. Empowerment engages community leaders and community members in a bottom-up neighborhood planning process on Duke's behalf. Partnership embodies Duke's primary investment strategy, distributing Duke investments among nonprofit community organizations to mobilize local change. Evolution allows neighborhood-specific problems to dictate solutions over time, enabling Duke to invest differently within neighborhoods. And, most recently, Duke has expanded its strategy to facilitate coalition building among regional stakeholders and invest in affordable housing preservation at a larger, coordinated scale.

### BACKGROUND: DUKE IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS NEIGHBORHOODS

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Duke's anchor strategies largely engaged with 12 of its surrounding neighborhoods; more recently, its efforts have expanded to 14 neighborhoods (the original 12, plus two additional communities including Bragtown, a historically Black community that sought Duke's partnership in the face of gentrification pressures and the need for advocacy support). The neighborhoods include five communities to the north-east of the Duke campuses, situated approximately north of Main Street (and the Durham Freeway) and south of I-85, and seven neighborhoods to the south-east of the campuses, roughly south of the Durham Freeway and north of Cornwallis Road (see Figure 1 for the original 12 neighborhood partners).

\* Portions of this case study are excerpted from the author's published research on Duke University. The full article can be found here: Ehlenz, Meagan M. 2020. “Can You Imagine What's Happened in Durham?: Duke University and a New University–Community Engagement Model.” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, August, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2020.1782766>.

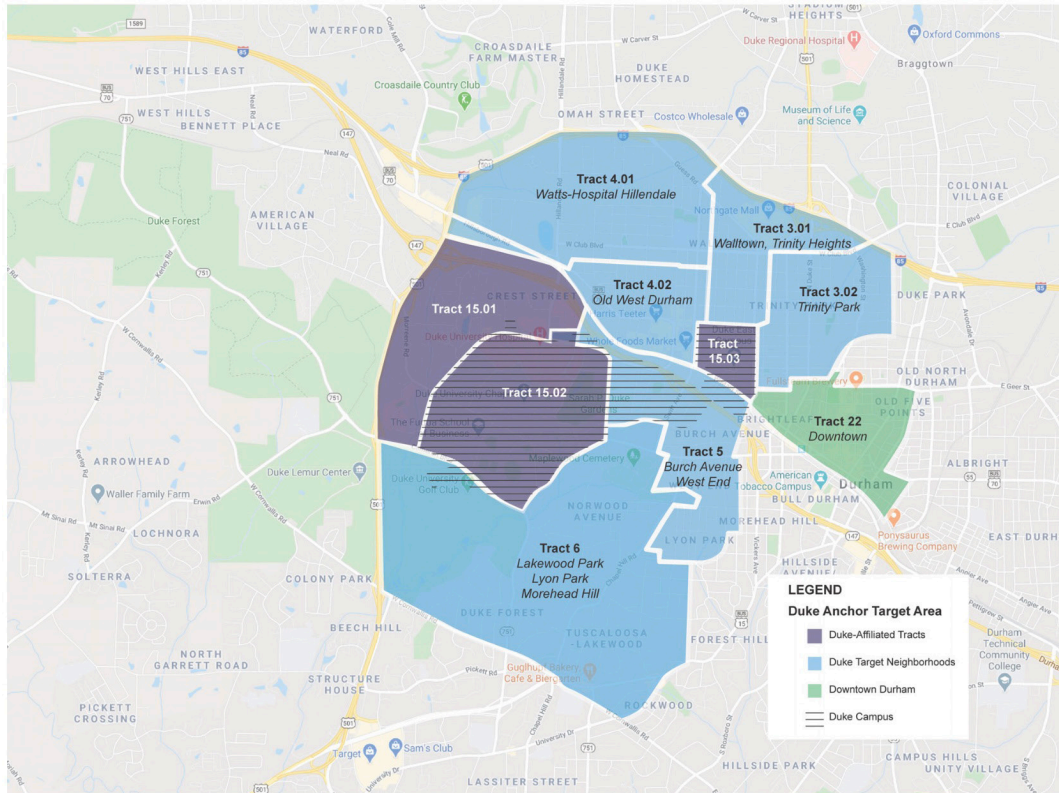


Figure 1. Duke University and the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership Study Area (Ehlenz 2020)

Broadly, the target neighborhoods are varied: five can be classified as traditionally low-wealth neighborhoods with higher poverty rates, lower median household incomes, lower median home values, and higher rentership rates; meanwhile, the remaining seven are categorized as traditionally middle-to-high-income neighborhoods, inclusive of higher homeownership levels and median home values (see Tables 3, 4, and 5, Ehlenz 2020).

Given the diversity of neighborhood conditions and perspectives (and long-standing town-gown tensions), Duke’s anchor strategy began with an explicit commitment to community engagement designed to understand the challenges and opportunities. Before Keohane’s tenure, the perception was that Duke was “so wrapped up in its own affairs that the city on the other side of the East Campus wall was little more than an afterthought” (The Herald-Sun 1995). In contrast, Keohane set a distinct tone for Duke’s anchor model: collaboration would come to mean not only engaging Duke’s own ranks, but also the community itself.

**ANCHOR STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS AFFORDABLE HOUSING: PARTNERSHIPS AND STRATEGIES TO GROW OPPORTUNITIES FOR DUKE-AFFILIATED HOUSEHOLDS**

The foundation of Duke’s anchor institution strategies began with deep community building and trust. Prior to any institutional strategy development, Duke invested in deep community outreach that enabled residents to set their own priorities and identify needs. At the center of this work was an effort to invite residents to the table by establishing a consensus-building process that would put community priorities at the forefront.

Duke initiated a series of neighborhood meetings, intended to generate priorities for Duke to carry forward within an anchor strategy (Ehlenz 2020). Owing to its standoffish reputation, however, Duke administrators



**Table 1. Summary of neighborhood-identified priorities from DDNP community meetings (circa 1996).**

Neighborhood	Tract	Neighborhood issues								
		Communication	Housing	Economic development	Crime	Volunteers	Traffic	Student decorum	Health	Youth
Traditionally LI neighborhoods										
Crest Street	15.01-2									
Walltown	3.01									
Burch Avenue	5									
West End	5									
Lyon Park	6									
Traditionally MI or HI neighborhoods										
Watts Hospital-Hillendale	4.01									
Trinity Heights	3.01									
Trinity Park	3.02									
Morehead Hill	6									
Lakewood Park Community	6									

Notes: Two downtown neighborhoods in the study—Old West Durham and Downtown Durham—were not included in DDNP’s neighborhood meetings report. DDNP = Duke–Durham Neighborhood Partnership; LI = low income; MI = middle income; HI = high income. Source: Adapted from Duke–Durham Neighborhood Partnership, 1996, 2019.

Figure 2 Summary of Neighborhood Priorities from Duke–Durham Neighborhood Partnership Meetings (see Table 1, Ehlenz 2020)

recognized the conversation could not—and should not—be Duke-led. As a first step, Duke hired two former elected officials, who, while still being outsiders, had deep community ties to lend credibility and establish trust (Dickinson 1996). Over a year, Duke’s community engagement team listened to community leaders and residents, eventually generating a list of key priorities for each of the 12 neighborhoods. These priorities ranged from communication (across the board) to housing and crime, as well as concerns about traffic and student behavior (more prevalent in the affluent neighborhoods) or health and youth supports (more prevalent in lower-income neighborhoods) (see Figure 2).

Duke’s community engagement process and the resulting neighborhood priority process led to the formalization of a university-community partnership at Duke: The Duke–Durham Neighborhood Partnership (DDNP) situated within Duke’s Office of Durham & Community Affairs (DCA) (Duke University 2021c). DCA serves as the central hub for Duke’s neighborhood-focused efforts.

To follow up on this research in the five neighborhoods of Southwest Central Durham, Duke hired a long-time neighborhood resident with organizing and facilitation experience. Using a facilitation strategy, Technologies of Participation (TOPS), hundreds of residents, local business owners, and nonprofit leaders decided to work together forming the Quality of Life Project (QOL). An arduous two years of meetings surfaced four primary areas of work: Affordable Housing, Economic Development, Nonprofit Sustainability, and Celebrations & Traditions. QOL leadership then collaborated with Duke to develop strategies aimed at the changes they sought.

DDNP staff worked with the remaining neighborhoods to distill their concerns into four thematic objectives: (1) academic enrichment and youth achievement, including partnerships with Durham schools; (2) neighborhood stabilization, including safety, housing, amenities, and neighborhood engagement; (3) strengthened partnerships, including efforts to develop, support, and improve communication with community partners; and (4) university engagement, including programs to engage Duke students and faculty in Durham (Center for Assessment and Policy Development and Marga Incorporated 2006).



## Highlights of Duke's Anchor Strategy: Housing Partnerships

1993 to 2019

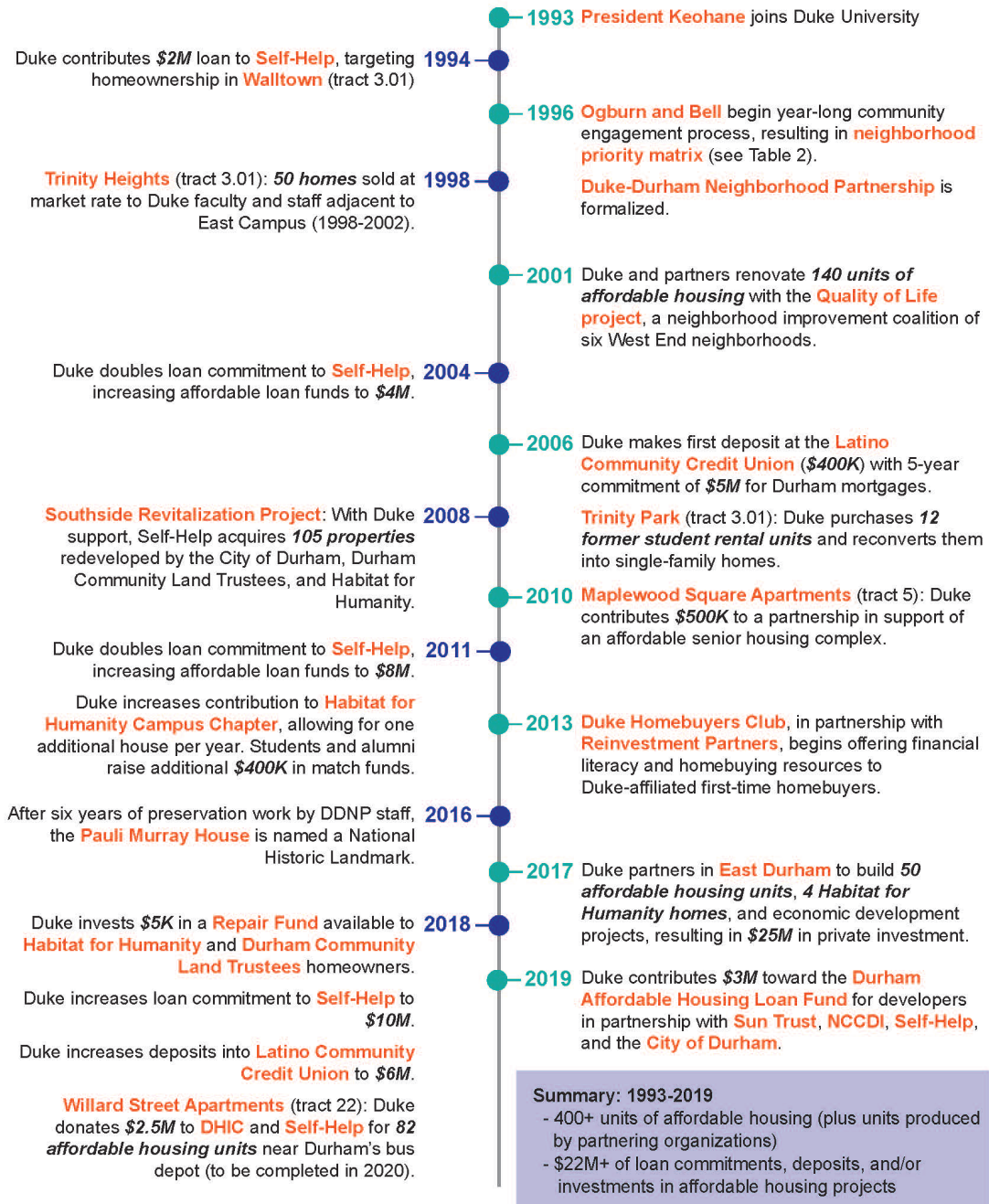


Figure 3. Highlights of Duke's Anchor Strategy: Housing Partnerships (see Figure 2, Ehlenz 2020)



## TWO APPROACHES TO HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION IN DURHAM

### APPROACH 1: TARGETING NEIGHBORHOOD PRIORITIES AND INVESTING IN PARTNERSHIPS

The core of DDNP's model has rested on community partnerships and neighborhood revitalization investments. Early on, QOL and DDNP earmarked affordable housing as a priority, recognizing it as a win-win-win: responding to community priorities, generating wealth for low-income households, and fostering homeownership to combat crime and disinvestment. Duke's housing initiatives have spanned loan funds, housing production, personal finances, and partnerships. This multi-faceted approach is unique among university anchor models. Figure 3 enumerates Duke's neighborhood revitalization investments, with an emphasis on housing, between 1993 and 2019.

Monetarily, Duke committed more than \$22 million to further affordable housing and homeownership opportunities in Durham between 1994 and 2019. The majority of Duke's outlays have taken the form of revolving loan funds or deposits with nonprofit financial intermediaries. Since the 1990s, this partnership has resulted in a multitude of investments across Durham (including the projects summarized throughout this case study). For instance, Durham's Walltown neighborhood was the first large-scale affordable housing endeavor to grow from Duke's partnership with Self-Help; Duke's financial investment helped support the development of 80 homes for first-time homebuyers. In another example, Duke's investment has also supported the Self-Help Land Bank, which holds several scatter site parcels in South West Central Durham and Southside for future development. Rather than a one-time allocation, this strategy has provided an ongoing resource to nonprofit partners, advancing an array of projects from affordable housing development to mortgages.

Self-Help, a local credit union and CDC with an empowerment-driven mission was initially engaged with the QOL Project and became a long-time DDNP partner (Office of Durham & Community Affairs 2008; Self Help 2008). As Duke's loan commitment has grown from \$2 to \$10 million, Self-Help has established a land bank, acquired property identified in South West Central Durham by the QOL Allocations Committee for affordable housing development, and funded other nonprofit developers to meet community housing needs. In this example, residents with on-the-ground knowledge, were in the development drivers' seat, ensuring that the overall strategies aligned closely with neighborhood needs and their visions for the future. QOL went so far as to develop, with the assistance of students from NC State's School of Design, a set of design guidelines so that infill affordable housing would neatly knit into the fabric of the neighborhoods. DDNP has also contributed \$500,000 to a housing repair fund managed by Habitat for Humanity of Durham and Durham Community Land Trustees.

More recently, Duke helped convene a working group around affordable housing that led to the creation of a city-wide loan fund. The fund launched in 2019 with an initial capitalization of \$10 million and a goal to reach \$15 to 20 million. The Durham Affordable Housing Loan Fund is managed by Self-Help and funded by a coalition of government agencies and allied affordable housing partners, including Duke (\$3 million commitment) ("Durham Affordable Housing Loan Fund" n.d.). The fund provides acquisition loans and lines of credit, ranging from \$200,000 to \$2.5 million, to nonprofit developers or housing authorities for the purpose of acquiring, developing, and/or preserving affordable housing (single or multi-family projects) within the City of Durham. In 2020, Duke helped convene the Affordable Housing Strategy Task Force (now the Affordable Housing Network) as another avenue for establishing broad, community-centered priorities around affordable housing within the Durham region (Duke University 2022). The Network is complemented by an emerging Affordable Housing Council that seeks to leverage affordable housing expertise and assets to increase inventories and access within the city ("Affordable Housing Council" 2022). These recent investments illustrate Duke's efforts to broaden its partnerships and formalize a collaborative conversation around affordable housing in Durham.



DDNP's initiatives and partnerships with Self-Help, the Quality of Life Project, Habitat for Humanity of Durham, Durham Community Land Trustees, and the City of Durham have helped support the creation of more than 400 affordable housing units. As part of a community-led, consensus-centered process, Duke has taken a support role that enables community partners to pursue their missions. For instance, through the QOL Project, Duke has been a supporter of ongoing community-led efforts to invest in housing, economic development, non-profit support, and preservation of community history and storytelling. The Project's work is not dictated by the institution, but rather leads the conversation and establishes the priorities for its neighborhoods.

As a housing-focused community organization said, "doing [affordable housing] is another issue... [we] had expertise the university could not obtain, so that precipitated the relationship" (Ehlenz 2020). The interviewee added, "this partnership work[s]... because of its [focus on] mission. We still include the community... listening to issues and needs... [T]hat has been the glue—other than money—that keeps [our] relationship [with Duke] bonded." To this end, Duke has often been a participant—though not the sole or lead actor—in the generation and protection of affordable housing in Durham's neighborhoods. In recent years, Duke's partnerships have expanded beyond target neighborhoods to support affordable multi-family housing projects in central locations, including the Southside neighborhood and downtown (The Herald-Sun 2012; Baumgartner Vaughn 2019; Johnson 2019).

#### **APPROACH 2: TARGETING AFFORDABLE HOUSING AS A DUKE-EMPLOYEE OPPORTUNITY**

Within its own institutional context, Duke has also identified strategies that align with neighborhood revitalization priorities. For instance, one initiative matches Duke's employee-directed giving campaign to its anchor model through the **"Doing Good in the Neighborhood" program** (Duke University 2021b). Launched in 2008, the program enables Duke employees to send their charitable contributions to local issues, including several directly aligned with DDNP and neighborhood-identified priorities (The Herald-Sun 2008). The program supports an array of community-focused initiatives, including community well-being, education, and housing and neighborhoods; during the 2021-2022 campaign, the fund collected \$439,000. For housing and neighborhoods, DDNP collaborates with its 14 neighborhood partners to identify specific priorities; in 2022, the fund invested nearly \$21,000 into these neighborhood-selected initiatives spanning community arts to social justice and equity projects.

The second initiative, the **Duke Homebuyer Club (HBC)**, responds to challenges for Duke's low-wage employees as they pursue affordable homeownership within Durham's neighborhoods (Duke University 2021a). Established in 2013, HBC was created to address the homeownership challenges facing Duke's lower-wage employees. It grew out of a failed \$10,000 forgivable loan program Duke had created as part of a Southside neighborhood revitalization project (Gronberg 2013). Despite a large pool of interested employees, Duke administrators discovered "...that about 80 percent were really credit challenged" and could not qualify for homeownership at all—subsidy or not (Ehlenz 2020). DCA created HBC as a response, offering Duke employees "more time and more guidance and more support to [achieve] a credit worthy, stable financial situation" that would qualify them for first-time homeownership in Durham. DDNP staffs HBC, alongside several partners, including lending institutions, community development organizations, and the City of Durham. Since fall 2013, the program has supported 67 homebuyers in purchasing homes, provided more than 3,000 hours of homebuyer education to participants, and awarded more than 300 homebuyer education certificates (Duke University 2021a).



## DUKE AND DURHAM'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING CHALLENGE: PROGRESS & NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, Duke, DDNP, and their many community partners recognize emergent opportunities to respond to new pressures and advocate for issues that impact Durham residents more broadly. This work is an extension of community-identified priorities that have shaped Duke's anchor model over the past 25 years.

Since Duke began participating in community-led efforts to stabilize Durham neighborhoods, the city's context has shifted substantially (Ehlenz 2020). Whereas Duke was once part of an effort to help Durham recover from economic decline, the city has since experienced significant economic, population, and job growth that has made gentrification and tight housing markets a priority (e.g., Johnson 2019; Eanes 2018; Tan-Delli Cicchi 2017; White 2016). Within that context, the community priorities for Duke's anchor work have also shifted. Within many areas of Durham, communities are no longer focused on sowing revitalization or partnering with Duke (and other anchors) to stimulate private development; instead, neighborhoods are grappling with filling affordable housing shortfalls amidst an influx of new dollars, energy, and Durhamites.

Duke has adjusted its anchor strategy with Durham partners in targeted ways. First, Duke has continued to define its anchor strategy through partnerships. Affordable housing has become a predominant concern and Duke has worked to expand its network, partnering with additional affordable housing developers and community-focused lenders. Duke's strategy has continued to be led by purposeful community partnerships, shifting the focus even more towards coalition building that can generate measurable impacts that address community priorities. Relatedly, Duke launched a new strategic community impact plan in 2021, intended to establish its guiding priorities for DCA and its commitment to purposeful partnerships including community, housing, education, employment, and health (Duke Office of Durham & Community Affairs 2021). The plan provides a platform for Duke to demonstrate its commitments, as well as measure impacts and maintain accountable partnerships into the future. Under the banner of housing, Duke's ongoing strategic efforts include: ongoing collaboration with affordable housing partners; homeownership assistance programs that enable residents to remain in their communities; homebuyer education programs to support resident homeownership goals; implementation of the Neighborhood Identified Action Plan via partnerships between DDNP and local communities; establishing partnerships to develop transitional and supportive housing opportunities; partnering with city and county agencies to improve multi-modal transportation access and technology resources within lower-wealth neighborhoods; and working with community members to create and maintain an archive of historical and cultural neighborhood resources (Duke Office of Durham & Community Affairs 2021).

Duke has also continued to approach its investments via a flexible strategy that enables priorities to evolve as needed within the community. Under this approach, Duke continues to direct a substantial share of its anchor investments towards strategic resources for its partners (e.g., affordable housing repair funds) and larger deposits in local credit unions to increase affordable lending opportunities. Recent investments in affordable housing partnerships include:

- The construction of the **Willard Street Apartments** in Downtown Durham, adding 82 units of affordable housing targeted towards households earning between 30 percent and 60 percent of area median income (AMI) (DHIC n.d.; US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2022b). The project came to fruition via a partnership between Duke, the City, DHIC, Self-Help, the AJ Fletcher Foundation, and others, bringing new affordable housing supply with access to the Durham Station Transportation Center and the downtown economic center. In addition, the project includes a nonprofit dental clinic. The project anticipates a second phase will offer more than 50 units of affordable senior housing (US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2022b).





Figure 4 Willard Street Apartments (DHIC n.d.)

- Duke's commitment of **\$5 million in community partnerships during the COVID-19 pandemic**, including housing initiatives that provided eviction assistance and provided monetary support for housing shelters (Duke University n.d.).
- In late 2022, the Durham Housing Authority received a **\$40 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant** with a focus on redeveloping two public housing properties within downtown Durham (US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2022a). Duke contributed \$1 million to this partnership effort (Duke University n.d.), in addition to providing partnership to address supportive services to local residents. As existing residents relocate to accommodate the redevelopment process, Duke will provide services focused on helping families navigate enrollment issues for K-12 students who will transition into new schools and on households who require assistance accessing their healthcare providers.

Durham's market forces have precipitated a conversation for Duke and its partners about how to deal with dwindling affordable housing supplies in an expensive market. Gentrification has made it difficult to continue producing affordable housing within downtown neighborhoods. To that end, Duke's anchor priorities have changed: there is now a citywide push for affordable housing that includes a multi-partner strategy group, several new affordable housing partnerships, and investments in a land bank and affordable housing loan fund (Baumgartner Vaughn 2019). The idea is to broaden the focus to opportunity neighborhoods at risk of rising market pressures. Expanded priorities also include more conversations around rental housing and the gap between affordable supply and downtown's expanding job center. Lastly, there is an ongoing transportation discussion, as stakeholders work to maintain ties between the downtown job center and neighborhoods—especially as some employees are moving to outlying areas in search of affordable housing.

Internally, Duke's anchor model remains a priority as new waves of leadership have come to the institution. Since the model's inception, three Duke presidents have supported DDNP's mission: Keohane (1993-2004), Richard Broadhead (2004-2017), and, most recently, Vincent Price, who arrived following his tenure at the University of Pennsylvania—another early adopter of an anchor institution model to neighborhood revitalization (Rodin 2005). As Duke, DCA, and DDNP consider the next generation of university-community partnerships, the office reports three criteria to guide their work: alignment with Duke University and, more recently, Duke University Health System's missions; connection to "quality of life in the community;" and—in line with the earliest iterations of Duke's anchor model—representative of key priorities, as identified by the Durham community (Mock 2020).

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