

Affordable Housing for Employees

The Khazar University plans to build some affordable housing for its faculty and staff in a bid to help employees avoid getting priced out of Baku's roaring housing market.

Many of the details have yet to be worked out — including a financing plan — and the units won't open for at least another four years. But the university already owns the property needed for the project.

The Khazar University plans to build some affordable housing for its faculty and staff in a bid to help employees avoid getting priced out of Baku's roaring housing market.

Many of the details have yet to be worked out — including a financing plan — and the units won't open for at least another four years. But the university already owns the property needed for the project.

Faculty Desires: Affordability, Location

Faculty, like most of us, want to live in a neighborhood by choice, and the current trend is to live close to where they work. But the cost of housing continues to rise faster than wages, and available housing, especially in urban markets, continues to shrink while the demand increases. In many areas we are seeing an ever-increasing separation between people that can afford housing, and the remaining workforce that is pushed to the outer margins of the urban zone. That workforce is inclusive of our young professors and faculty who want an affordable place to live near their teaching and research, and desire to feel part of their community.

There is a dual necessity here: universities have a recruiting problem, and young faculty have an affordable housing problem. Institutions are feeling the need to leverage their strengths and are seeking a solution through developing housing. Typical multi-family housing projects require work and knowledge to be applied on several levels, including financial models, long range planning, construction methods and operations. Developing faculty housing also presents some unique social challenges to be addressed.

The design process for staff and faculty housing must include visioning that is empathetic to their particular needs and aspirations. As this is a marketing tool for recruitment, affordability is key to helping employees begin their employment financially secure. The less they need to worry about their income covering the rent, the more they can focus on being successful in their work. However, it is also incumbent on the University to see the big picture, and develop housing where staff feel at ease and have the ability to separate their work from the rest of their life to the degree they choose.

Major Issues

One of the major issues is to decide where to build new houses:

Greenfield site - an area of land that has not been developed previously

Brownfield site - an old industrial or inner-city site that is cleared for a new building development

Green belt - land consisting of farmland, woodland and open recreational areas surrounding urban areas on which building is restricted

Building on greenfield sites is a controversial issue. Population growth in the Baku, the trend towards smaller family units and the demand from people wanting to live at the edge of the city has put pressure on the countryside surrounding major cities.

Advantages of building on greenfield sites

There is no need to clean up the site from previous land uses therefore it can work out cheaper.

Existing road networks are not in place, so planning is not restricted.

They are often on the edges of cities where land is cheaper.

Planners and architects have a blank canvas to work with.

More space is available for gardens.

The edge of city/countryside environment can appeal to buyers and businesses.

Sites on the edge of the city are often close to major motorways providing good access.

Advantages of building on brownfield sites

It is more sustainable as existing developed land is being used.

City expansion is curbed as the site is already within the city - this stops the loss of countryside and reduces journey times as the city is more compact.

Road networks already exist, as do electricity and gas networks, although these may need updating.

It is easier to gain planning permission as councils are keen to reuse the brownfield sites.

The sites are closer to the central business district for shopping and job opportunities.