



 Virginia Housing

Leadership Through Learning

Studio-to-Practice: Educating
Designers & Planners for
Affordable Housing

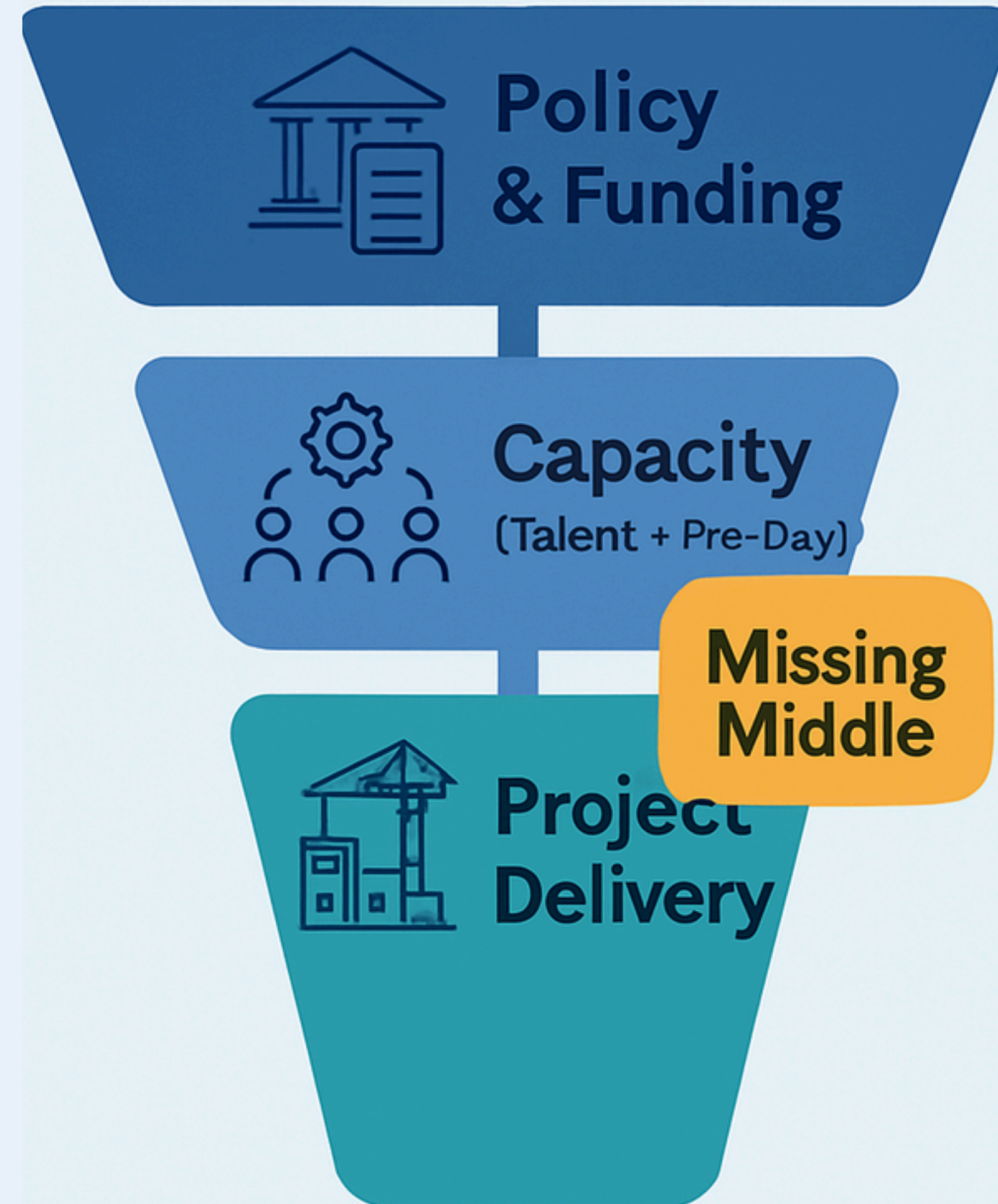
PRESENTED BY

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Foundational Concepts

This section focuses on the relationship between **policy**, **capacity**, and **projects** in affordable housing, emphasizing the importance of the "Missing Middle" housing approach in addressing community needs.

- Policy alone doesn't equal projects: We need practice-ready people
- Pre-development "missing middle" slows delivery
- Design decisions drive cost – cost drives affordability



Four Learning Objectives

STUDIO-TO-PRACTICE MODEL

This refers to a hands-on academic framework that connects students directly to real affordable housing challenges. Students help fill the “capacity gap” while organizations gain supplemental pre-development support.

VIRGINIA HOUSING RESOURCES

Virginia Housing plays a critical role in strengthening local capacity through early-phase support: Virginia Housing accelerates delivery by investing in the “first mile” of development—where most projects get stuck.

INTERSECTION OF DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

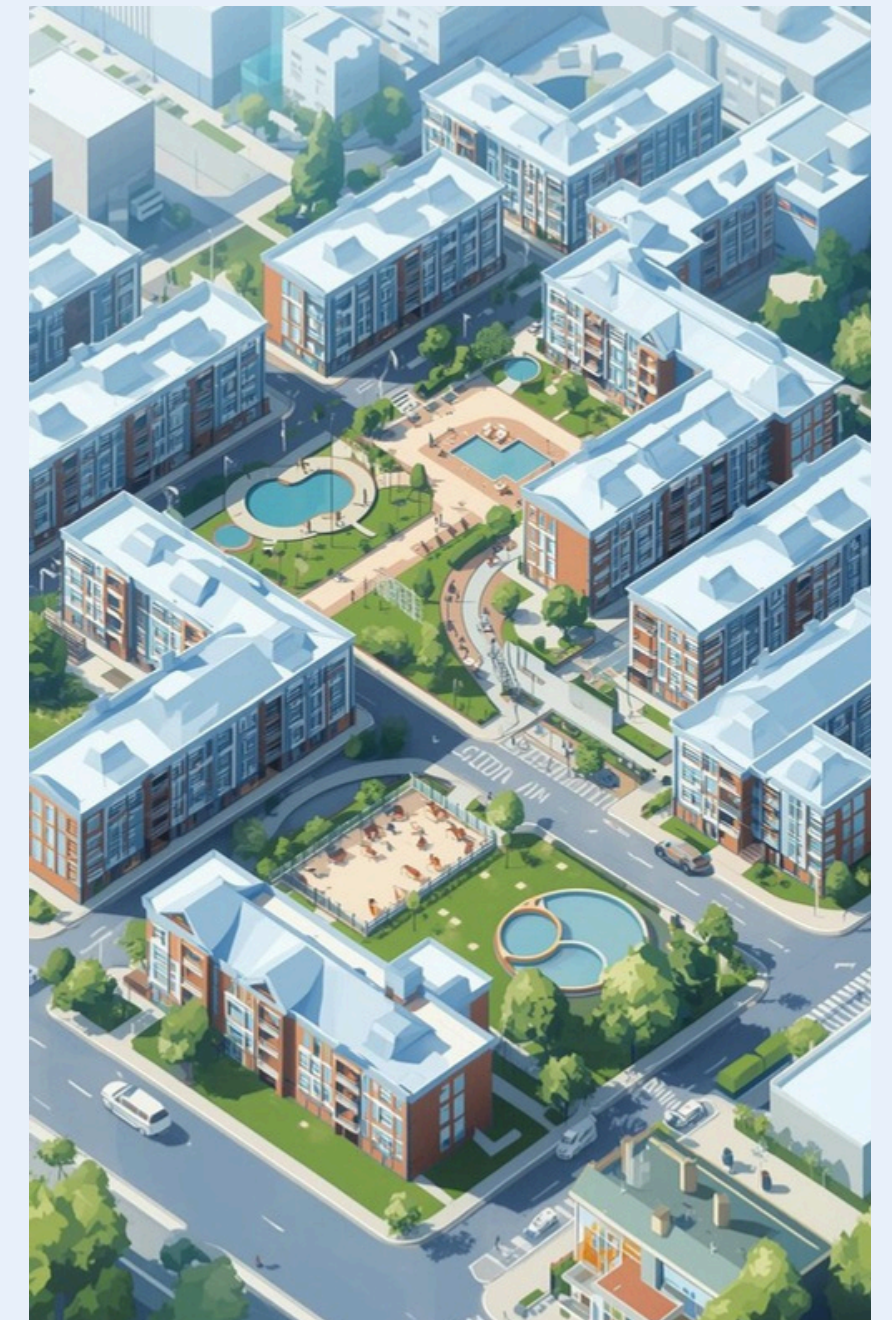
Affordable housing is not just design, not just finance—it's the intersection of both. When both sides speak each other's language, projects move faster and are more financially viable.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Effective community engagement is strategic—not performative. The community is not a stakeholder you visit—it's a partner you design with.

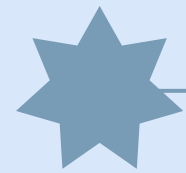
Beyond Pro Formas: Design is a Cost Driver

- Building systems & materials → capital & O&M costs
- Massing, unit mix, and efficiency ratios change budgets
- Early choices affect energy, durability, and rent limits



Studio-to-Practice Workflow

SEMESTER STUDIO



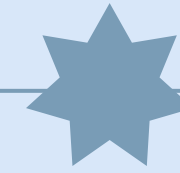
A studio course becomes a real pre-development engine, not a theoretical exercise. Students step into authentic roles and generate usable, early-stage work for partners.

OUTPUTS



The studio produces a package of early-phase deliverables that agencies and nonprofits struggle to resource internally: Students generate the “missing-middle” work that jump-starts projects.

PARTNERS



This model thrives when each partner brings a different strength: Collaboration makes the studio valuable, realistic, and actionable.

RACI Roles



ARCHITECTURE + PLANNING DEPARTMENTS (DESIGN + POLICY CONTEXT)

These departments anchor the academic side of the model. They offer:

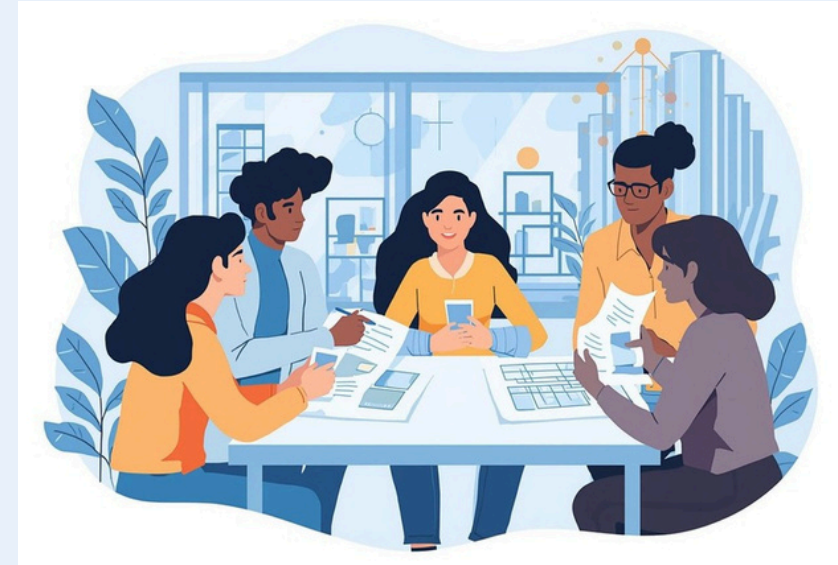
Design Expertise

- Studio instruction
- Test-fit methods
- Massing and site layout
- Building systems literacy
- Visualization + communication skills

Policy + Planning Context

- Zoning & entitlement fundamentals
- Land use constraints
- Community development frameworks
- Environmental + mobility considerations

Instructional Structure



HOUSING AUTHORITIES/LOCALITIES (SITE, CONSTRAINTS, GOALS)

Housing authorities and local governments anchor the public sector lens:

They Provide the Project Foundation

- Real land / real sites
- Real constraints (zoning, easements, utilities, topography)
- Redevelopment goals and affordability targets
- Existing community concerns and political context

They Bring the Public Mission

- Deep affordability objectives
- Long-term stewardship
- Resident-centered priorities



DEVELOPERS/NONPROFITS (FEASIBILITY REALITY CHECK)

The development side brings financial feasibility + practical implementation:

They Ground Projects in Reality

- Pro forma perspectives
- Cost drivers
- Market conditions
- Funding stack awareness
- Operating + maintenance implications

They Shape What's Actually Buildable

- Constructability
- Systems selection
- Parking decisions
- Efficiency ratios
- Phasing possibilities

What Students Learn

- Systems thinking: design ↔ cost ↔ operations ↔ equity

Students learn that affordable housing is a systems problem — not just an architecture problem, not just a finance problem.

They learn to connect:

- Design → influences structure, materials, efficiency
- Cost → determines feasibility and rent levels
- Operations → dictates long-term affordability and maintenance
- Equity → shapes who benefits and how communities are impacted

- Interdisciplinary teamwork & deadlines

Studio work mirrors real team environments:

- Real client communication & documentation standards

Students must produce professional work, not just academic work.



Value Exchange Between Students and Agencies

MUTUAL BENEFITS

Students gain practical experience through hands-on projects, while agencies receive fresh perspectives and innovative ideas from emerging professionals. This collaboration fosters a **dynamic learning environment** that benefits all parties involved.

RESOURCE SHARING

Agencies provide valuable resources and mentorship, enabling students to enhance their skills. In return, students contribute their insights and solutions to address current challenges faced by agencies in the affordable housing sector.

Designing for Affordability



UNIT EFFICIENCY (NSF/GSF TARGETS),
STACKING, MEP STRATEGY

Students must understand the foundational math of
affordable housing design:



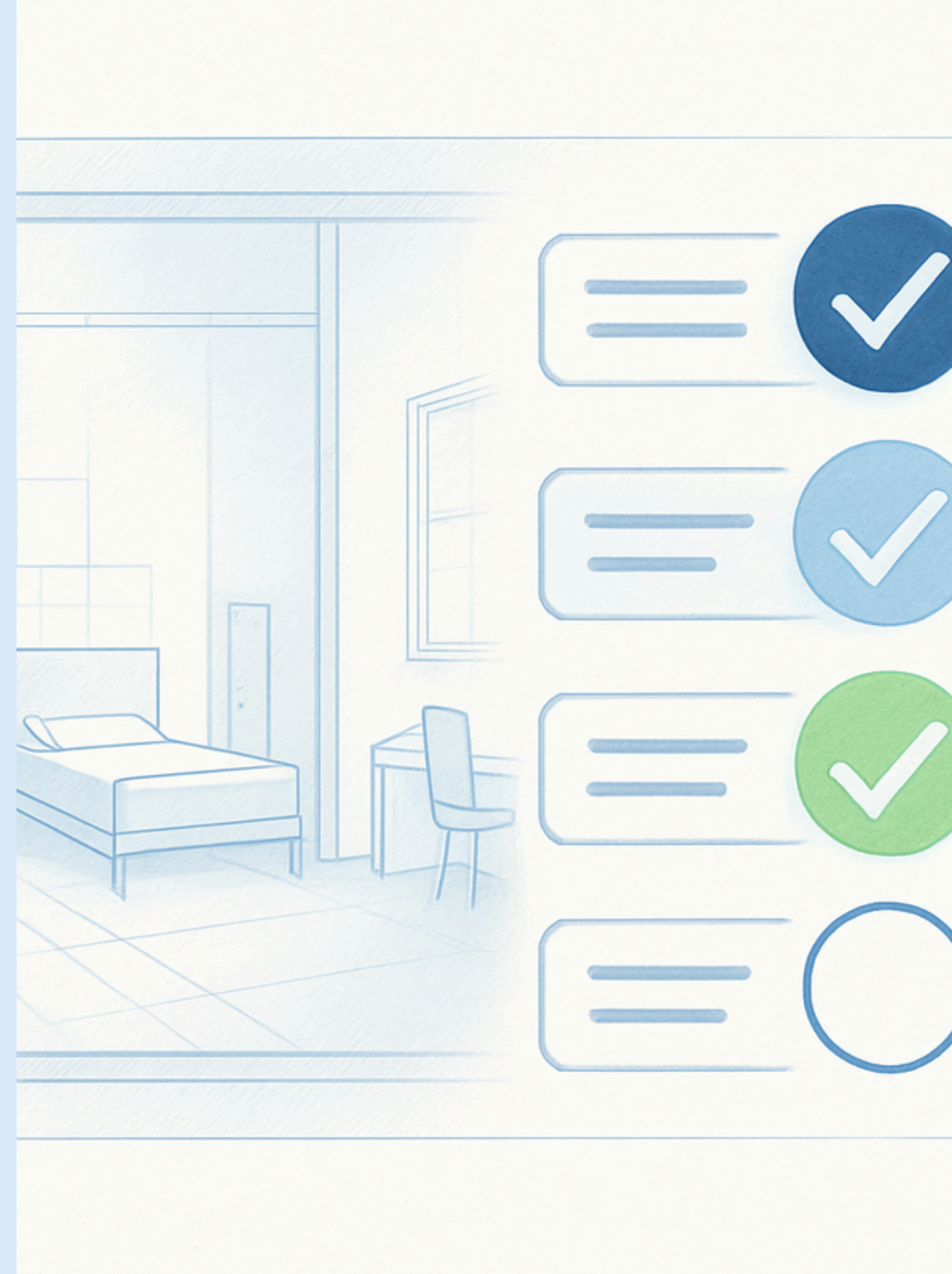
ENVELOPE & STRUCTURE TRADEOFFS;
DURABILITY & MAINTENANCE

Affordable housing requires long-term thinking:



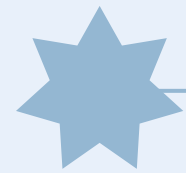
SPEC DISCIPLINE: RIGHT MATERIAL IN RIGHT
PLACE

Students often over-specify because they design like
they're working on custom projects.



Community & Resident Engagement Done Right

WHO



Effective engagement begins by understanding who needs to be part of the conversation:

residents, neighbors,
service providers,
employers

WHEN



Students must see that engagement is not a one-time event — it's a sequenced process.

scoping, concept
alternatives, pre-
entitlement, value-
engineering

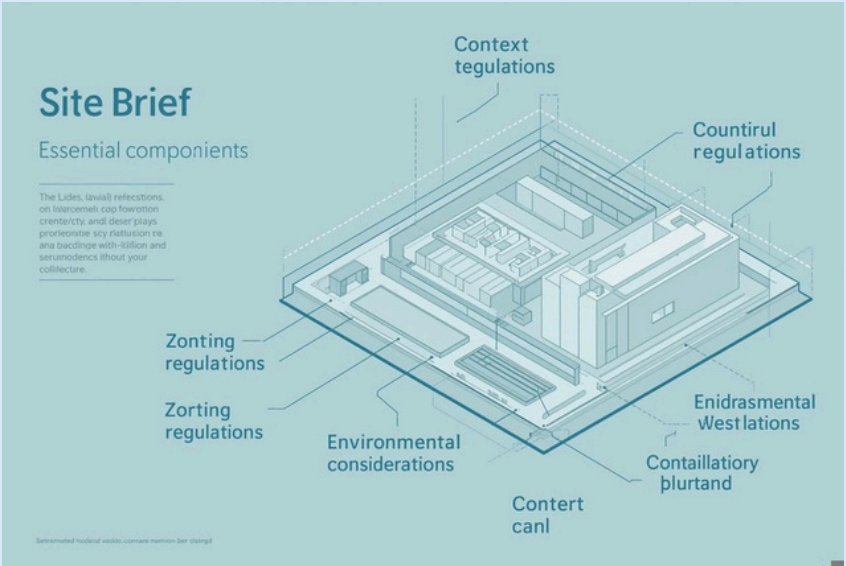
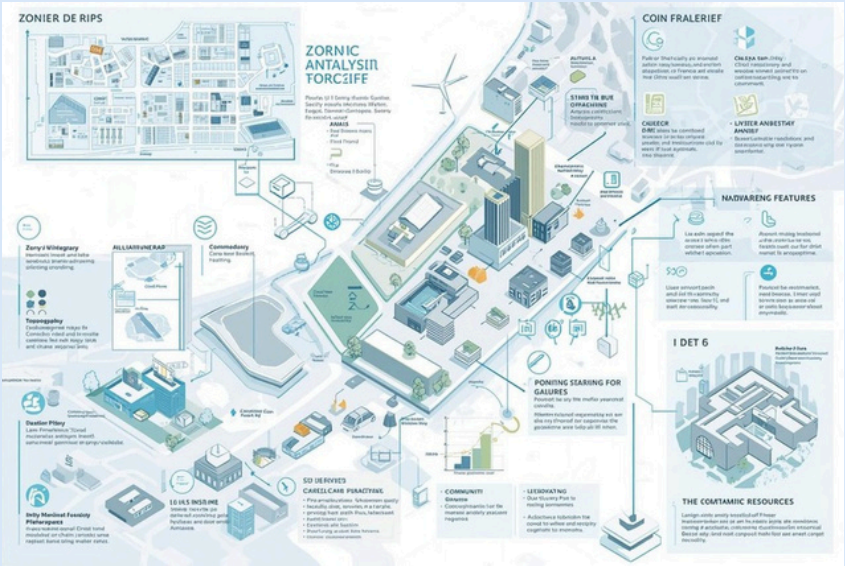
HOW



Modern engagement is light-touch, accessible, and visual.

brief workshops,
intercepts, visual
choice tools,
translation

Minimum Viable Site Brief



SITE CONTROL & INTENT

- Who owns or controls the land (PHA, locality, nonprofit)
- What the client hopes to achieve:

CONSTRAINTS & UTILITIES

- Slopes
- Easements

SITE BASICS

These give students realistic boundaries and align their work with real development pathways



CLIENT GOALS & NON-NEGOTIABLES

This is where clarity saves everyone time.

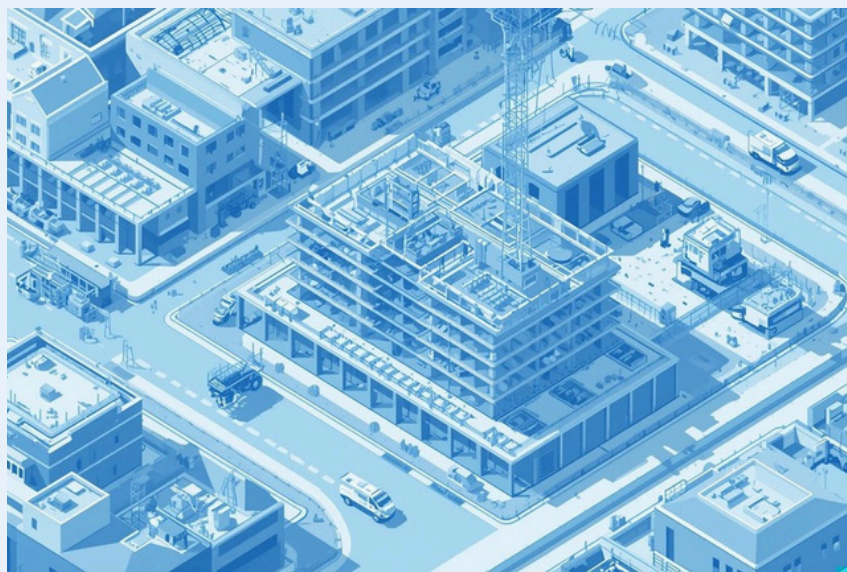
ZONING & PARKING ENVELOPE

Students cannot generate useful concepts without understanding the rules of the game.

TARGET POPULATION & FUNDING WINDOWS

- Seniors
- Workforce
- PSH

Deliverables Overview

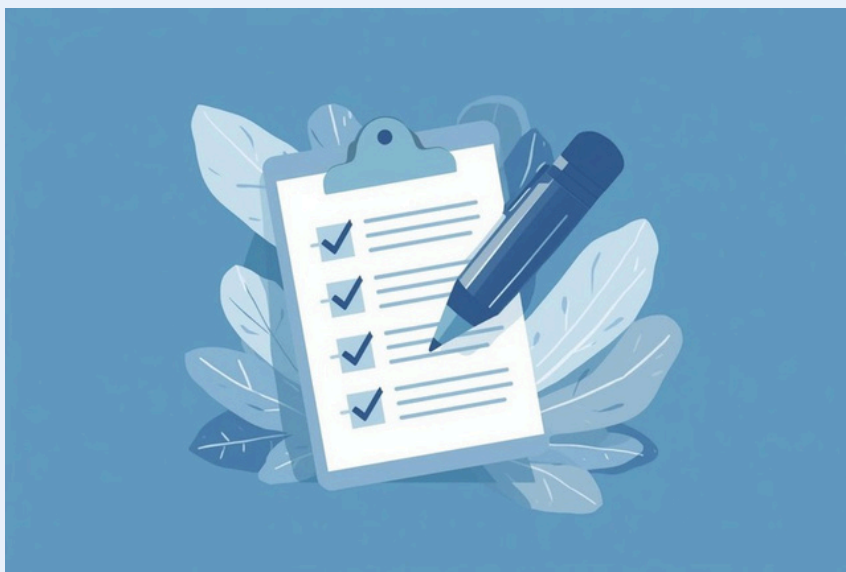


SITE TEST-FITS (2–3 OPTIONS) WITH KEY METRICS

Students produce a core set of concept alternatives so the client can compare possibilities, not just one idea.

PURPOSE:

Give the client a menu of viable options rather than a single conceptual direction.

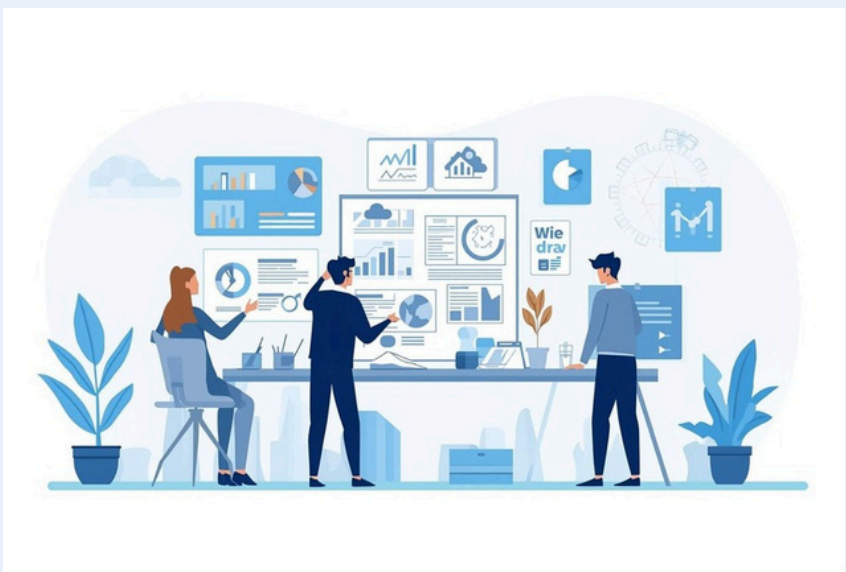


SYSTEMS & MATERIAL STRATEGY NOTES

This section teaches students to think like developers and asset managers.

PURPOSE:

Show that design choices have lifecycle consequences and teach students to articulate them clearly.



A/E SCOPE & NEXT-STEP MATRIX; COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

This section is where the student package becomes actionable for agencies.

PURPOSE:

Give PHAs and nonprofits something they can use in board briefings, community meetings, and early grant narratives.

Studio Framework

PHASE 1 — FOUNDATIONS & CONTEXT (LECTURES + CASE STUDIES)

This phase establishes the intellectual backbone of the studio

PHASE 2 — PROBLEM DEFINITION & PROJECT START (REAL CLIENT + REAL SITE)

The studio shifts into applied learning as students meet their real client (PHA, locality, nonprofit developer).

PHASE 3 — CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT & TECHNICAL EXPLORATION

Students develop multiple conceptual pathways that reflect real constraints and goals.

Activities include:

PHASE 4 — ENGAGEMENT INTEGRATION & SCENARIO REFINEMENT

Students incorporate insights from residents, neighbors, stakeholders, and service providers.

Deliverables include:

Affordable Housing Studio

What is
affordable
housing?

PHASE ONE: LECTURE SERIES

- Lectures
- Policy and case studies
- Design principles



LECTURE
REFLECTIONS

Who are we
designing for ?

PHASE TWO: PROJECT START

- Project kickoff
- Site visits
- Community input



PROJECT BRIEF

How do we
develop solutions?

PHASE THREE: DESIGN

- Concept design
- Reviews
- Final presentation



FINAL DESIGN

Risk Guardrails

CONCEPT ONLY

Not a substitute for licensed A/E; concept only
This is the most important guardrail to protect agencies and universities:

IP & PERMISSIONS

IP/credit agreements; image permissions
Academic work involves intellectual property considerations:

COMPLIANCE

Procurement light-touch (quotes), non-proselytization, nondiscrimination
Housing authorities and localities must comply with strict federal and state rules.

Partnerships: Virginia Housing Support

PRE-DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES (FEASIBILITY, A/E CONCEPT, DUE DILIGENCE) WHERE ELIGIBLE

CONVENINGS + TA SPRINTS (FAITH-BASED, UNDERSERVED DEVELOPERS, SENIOR+/SUPPORTIVE)

Virginia Housing actively builds the ecosystem through structured training and convening.

UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS (GMU; OPEN TO HAMPTON & OTHERS)



Building Virginia's Next Generation of Housing Leaders

- Education + Practice + Community = Capacity
- Partnerships turn concepts into real options
- Students gain skills; agencies gain forward momentum
- Together, we build resilient, inclusive, and just housing outcomes

“LET’S STRENGTHEN THE TALENT PIPELINE — AND
THE PROJECT PIPELINE — TOGETHER.”



Thank You

LET'S STAY CONNECTED.



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