In 1969, St. Stephen’s parishioner and vestry member George Hart stood before the congregation and said, “St. Stephen’s Church can be free only when it humbles itself before its own God and divests itself of its ideology that places property above people and goods above God.” Hart was a member of the Black United Front, which was demanding reparations for slavery from all D.C. churches.

St. Stephen’s response was crafted by the Rev. Edgar Lockwood, a member of the church’s clergy team. The church would sell its three parcels of land on Newton Street to a trust that would develop the land for the benefit of the community, with the church renting back space for worship. The congregation endorsed the plan. Over the next five years, economic and political realities caused the plan to evolve, until in 1976 ground was broken to construct today’s Urban Village Apartments. The first tenants moved in two years later.

While the community/church partnership envisioned at the beginning never became fully developed, St. Stephen’s parishioners and Urban Village residents had some success through the Urban Village Corporation (UVC), which was formed in 1970 to have some control over the development of the project. When Conrad Cafritz, the builder of Urban Village, tried to turn the complex into market-rate housing when the project’s tax credits expired in 2001, St. Stephen’s and the UVC fought to maintain Urban Village. Urban Village was purchased by Eagle Point/Somerset Development, with a guarantee that its 72 units remain as low- and moderate-income housing through 2027.