

CHAPTER 6

Building Community Acceptance

When introducing residential developments, particularly those with an affordable component, everyone involved – municipal officials, developers, residents, employers, faith-based leaders, and advocates – needs to recognize common community values.

People desire stable communities that make their everyday activities convenient and lives worry-free. Residents want good schools for their children, easy access to work, shopping and recreation, and a safe and attractive environment. When citizens and developers understand and address these values, housing can be integrated smoothly into the community.

Affordable housing is about equity of choice. Everyone deserves a decent place to live, an opportunity to succeed, and a range of feasible choices for attaining those things. Affordable housing

must complement and build upon its surrounding neighborhood. Planning a community acceptance strategy and tapping public participation early on can help address concerns, and result in better developments for the residents, neighbors, municipality, and developers.

The planning process for any new housing development involves “give and take.” In some cases, a developer’s initial plans need improvement; input from citizens and local staff can lead to revisions that will improve the final product. At times, however, opposition to affordable housing is based on unfamiliarity and negative perceptions. As a result, affordable housing can be an unnecessarily “hard sell.” This chapter provides tools for local communities to demonstrate the need for and potential benefits of affordable housing.

Photo: Josh Hawkins



WHAT TO GAIN FROM THIS CHAPTER

- 1. Learn to identify the right partners and determine the best strategy to build community acceptance of affordable housing.**
- 2. Learn about tools and resources to disseminate your message.**
- 3. Understand that addressing community values is more effective than focusing on community fears.**
- 4. Learn the truth behind negative myths about affordable housing.**

Getting Your Message Heard

In northeastern Illinois, the Metropolitan Planning Council, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, and Housing Illinois are among organizations that have developed materials to assist municipalities and affordable housing developers. These include a housing video describing how affordable housing benefits a community, *Welcome Home: Housing Our Community*; the “We Need the People who Need Affordable Housing” public education campaign; and the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus’ Housing Endorsement Criteria (see Page 4). Information on accessing these groups and resources, and many more, is available in the Appendix.

In addition to these resources, the following materials can help to present an affordable housing development to a community:

- Fact sheets summarizing the development proposal – number of homes, number of bedrooms, income levels for target tenants, plans for on-site management, traffic, and school impact figures.
 - Project brochures – including color renderings, if possible, and photographs of similar buildings constructed in comparable communities.
 - Briefing materials on the need for affordable housing in the region and community. Use specific examples, including salaries actually paid to public servants, hospital staff, sales clerks, and others who work nearby.
 - Posters and photoboards to be used as part of formal presentations and informal “question/answer” sessions. Include site plans. Show adjacent streets. Measure distance to adjacent properties. Make enough copies to place the boards outside of the municipal building or at the public library.
 - Postcards to remind supporters to attend public meetings and hearings.
 - Slide shows with pictures of existing conditions on the proposed development site, nearby streets and neighborhoods, renderings of the proposal, and photos of comparable properties.
 - Videotaped interviews with residents of affordable housing in nearby communities, and with potential residents of the proposal.
 - Web site with relevant information and e-mail communication to engage supporters.
- In contentious situations, a more active public relations campaign may be needed, involving professional expertise. Activities could include:
- Doing radio and TV interviews on recent housing price or rent escalation and the scarcity of available affordable housing.
 - Producing fact sheets on the growing number of households with affordability problems, and the need for affordable housing.
 - Conducting interviews with, or soliciting testimony from, employers who are experiencing difficulty in recruiting workers due to the high cost of housing.
 - Writing letters to the editor of local newspapers.
 - Setting up information tables at community events.
- Individual meetings with and presentations to elected officials, interested neighbors, or community groups also are helpful. Concerned citizens want to feel their voices are being heard. Developers may ask zoning officials to designate a department head or senior staff member to seek compromise on controversial issues, or to hold smaller neighborhood meetings rather than mass public hearings.

At the municipal level, there are several steps that a community can take once it has determined that it prioritizes providing a range of housing options. The municipality can adapt the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus' Housing Endorsement Criteria, which state the community values housing that is well-designed, well-maintained, accessible to transit and employment, and affordable to households at a range of income levels. Passing the Endorsement Criteria sends the message to developers that the municipality is receptive to affordability in proposals. Communities also can form a Housing Commission, which is usually composed of volunteer commissioners who are charged with promoting housing for all community residents.



Renderings and site plans are invaluable tools for communicating the potential community benefits of proposed housing developments.

Stakeholder Strategies

In building support for a new multifamily development or an affordable housing proposal, developers and communities need to identify the key decision makers who will influence the final decision, and which organizations to contact to generate support. It is important to find champions in the community who bring a new perspective to the discussion.

Debra Stein, a consultant who works to build support for developments, identifies three categories of influencers:

- A Tier 1 decision maker is the ultimate target of all communications. Members of this group include mayors, council members, city managers, and zoning commissioners.
- Tier 2 is comprised of respected community leaders who shape the opinions of elected officials and other local organizations. They can include the president of a large civic group, homeowners association, or Chamber of Commerce; well-respected clergy; owners or managers of major employers with facilities in the area.
- Tier 3 influencers are more focused on personal rather than community interests. They are the rank and file members of neighborhood groups, as well as individual citizens and property owners.



Local leadership and community outreach have been instrumental to achieving housing goals in communities such as Riverdale, Rolling Meadows, and Park Forest.

The message developed for each audience can use different methods and media, but the issues that must be addressed are the same:

- Affordable housing is needed not only regionally but in this community.
- It will serve people who already live or work in town.
- The community can benefit from a more diverse housing stock.
- The proposed development is well planned and attractively designed.
- It will be professionally managed and well connected to local community organizations. If a resident manager will be living on-site, be sure to mention that.

The Metropolitan Planning Council is working with regional and local nonprofits, employers, and faith-based leaders to build and deploy “community acceptance strategies,” which support policy makers and developers advancing the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus Housing Endorsement Criteria (see Introduction). The key to a successful strategy is to begin this process as early as possible – anticipating concerns rather than reacting to them, and proactively communicating the benefits of the particular policy or development. Contact the Metropolitan Planning Council for more information.

Commonly Voiced Concerns about Affordable Housing

Developing a community acceptance strategy before proposing housing developments, policies, or plans, can reduce misconceptions about affordable housing and smooth progress toward community goals.

Indeed, an inclusive and comprehensive planning process is often the first and most important step in developing community acceptance. The planning process should reveal what a community wants and values – for instance, good schools, retail and restaurant options, access to a diversity of job opportunities, and a distinct community character. Building community acceptance of affordable housing, or even of denser developments of market-rate housing, is often a matter of illustrating that housing does not conflict with community goals, but instead complements them and, in some cases, actually make them possible.

Affordable housing is simply that – not cheap and not free.

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There are many groups in northeastern Illinois that can help a community develop an acceptance strategy, but every community leader and housing advocate should understand common concerns about affordable housing and density, where those concerns come from, and what the actual facts are. Understanding the exact nature of opposition to a particular housing development, for instance, will help identify the strategy necessary to overcome it.

AFFORDABLE HOMES CAN STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

In a 2004 study that analyzed LIHTC buildings built in the 1990s and their surrounding neighborhoods, the Brookings Institution found these neighborhoods improved on socioeconomic and housing measures absolutely, and relative to other neighborhoods. This finding was consistent with other studies that showed project-based affordable housing did not necessarily “bring down” the surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, neighborhoods with tax credit projects generally have newer housing stock, indicating this type of development can work in areas where other residential development is occurring.

Concern #1

Residents of affordable housing are extremely poor, unemployed, and lack ties to the community.

Community residents may not be aware of the recent escalation in housing prices or rents, especially if they have owned their homes for decades. They may be surprised to learn even older homes and apartments are beyond the means of many employed heads of households, especially in families where only one person is working full time. Opponents of affordable housing may be surprised to learn housing in their neighborhoods is often too expensive for public servants – starting teachers, firefighters, police, librarians – who work in their communities, and certainly not affordable to people who work as sales clerks, secretaries, waiters, child care providers, or practical nurses. Testimony from these workers and their employers at public hearings often strikes a chord because their stories are real. Communities need these people, and these people need homes they can afford.

Affordable or workforce housing is not just designated for very low-income or unemployed residents. In fact, many current subsidy programs require a consistent stream of income. While LIHTCs can bring rents below current market levels, neither federal nor state subsidies are as deep today as they once were. Residents of tax credit-assisted buildings pay a fixed rent. A small family needing a two-bedroom apartment could pay as much as \$1,018 a month for an apartment and still meet the definition of “affordable.” Like many would-be residents of market-rate homes, residents in these affordable buildings must sign a lease and are subject to credit and criminal background checks. To pay the fixed rents in tax credit buildings – or to buy “affordable” for-sale housing – one or more household members must be working or have another steady source of income such as Social Security.

Many communities throughout the region have asked for local community preference in the tenant selection criteria. This is possible in private market transactions. However, given many of the funding sources required for development, this is not always possible; federal and state funding can prohibit this type of criteria. Also, if a community’s current residential makeup is not diverse, identifying a local preference or requirement could essentially exclude a protected class from qualifying, which puts the community in violation of the Fair Housing Act.



Photo: Wondertane.com, Linda Lane

People are often surprised by who needs, and who lives in, affordable housing. Teachers, municipal staff, fire fighters, and police officers often struggle to afford homes in the Chicago region, but it is these people who make our communities stronger, better places to live and raise families.

Concern #2

Affordable housing = high density development.

In suburban communities, where the housing stock consists primarily of single-family, detached homes, an affordable development will likely have more homes per acre than residents are used to seeing. Higher density lowers per-unit development costs (especially for land), allowing the developers or sponsors to pass on the savings when calculating rents or sales prices.

Of course, not all high density housing is affordable, and not all affordable housing is high density. High density housing can be very expensive indeed – witness the prices of high-rise condominiums and rentals in downtown Chicago. More often than not, increasing density – even doubling or tripling the density of a typical new suburban single-family subdivision – will not automatically bring rents or prices down to a level affordable to low-income families. Density can be a tool and leverage point to request that developers incorporate some affordable housing, or to help affordable developers meet their goals. Additional sources of funding, such as LIHTCs and other subsidies, will also be needed.

Today's affordable housing developments may be denser than surrounding single-family neighborhoods, but they are far different than the high-rise public housing towers of the past. Styles for multifamily include wood frame, garden apartments, stacked flats, or townhouses that are virtually indistinguishable from nearby market-rate developments. LIHTC projects for families rarely have more than three stories – installing elevators is costly, and therefore unnecessary if building heights are kept low.

Photo: Alex MacLean for Lincoln Land Institute for Land Use

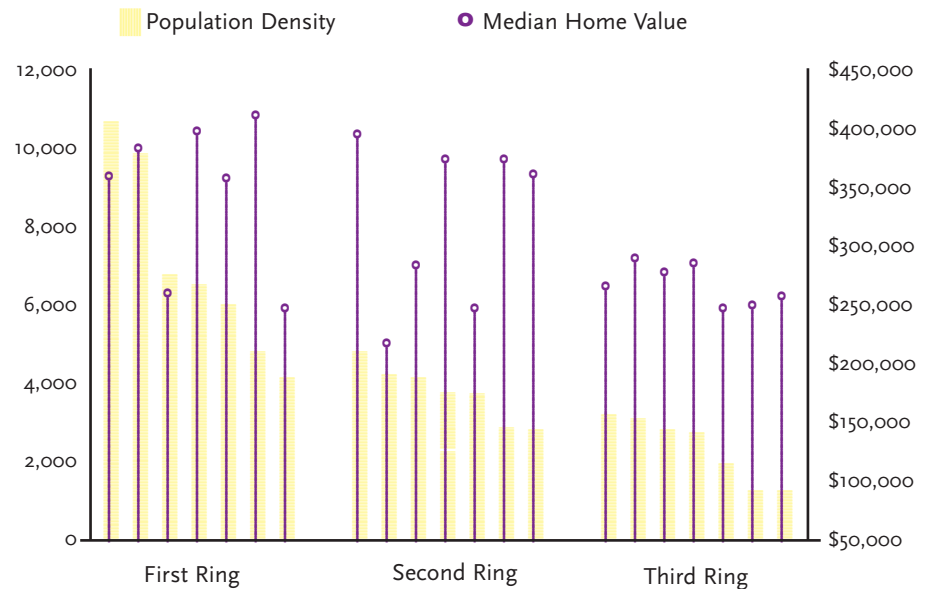


Because it has a mix of housing types, sizes and designs, the community in the top picture is as dense as the community below, but does not look like it. Perception matters. Monotony of design can often be more of an issue than density.

Affordable seniors-only housing is typically a one-story garden style complex or a mid-rise elevator building with three to five floors. Affordable townhomes often have 1,200 square feet of space or more, with at least two bathrooms. Single-family, for-sale properties usually have three or more bedrooms. They may be smaller than new market-rate, detached homes because they lack “bonus” features that drive up costs (for example, having both a living room and family room, separate office, or screened porch room).

The graph shows the relative population density of various first, second and third ring Chicago suburbs and their median home values. First ring suburbs are oldest and closest to Chicago. Second ring suburbs were primarily developed in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Third ring suburbs are the newest and farthest from the city, with most residential development occurring in the 1990s and later. Property values are higher in many of the higher density, first and second ring suburbs than in the less dense, second and third ring communities.

Population Density Per Square Mile and Median Home Value for Selected Chicago Suburbs, 2007



Source: Valerie S. Kretchmer Associates, Inc. based on data from Demographics Now and Chicago Tribune.

Concern #3

Affordable housing = Unattractive, cheap construction.

There is a common misperception that affordable housing is ugly and cheaply constructed. This is far from the current reality. Affordable housing today, if done right – with municipal and community input – is attractive and compatible with the surrounding housing stock. A demonstration of visually appealing new developments in communities with similar socio-economic characteristics can have a powerful effect on current residents.

Most developers understand good design is essential to the success of any development, affordable or not. New incentives for environmen-

tally responsible design have recently become available, and developers have responded by incorporating more green principles where possible.

Showing slides, color renderings, and providing background information at public meetings can help to demonstrate good design and affordable prices can be accomplished simultaneously. Finally, it also can be helpful to take community leaders on a bus tour of successful developments.

HOMES INCREASINGLY OUT OF REACH

Each year, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) publishes *Out of Reach*, a detailed analysis of the household incomes required to afford a typical two-bedroom rental apartment in every metropolitan area in the U.S. In the Chicago-Naperville-Joliet area, in 2006, a household needed to earn \$37,400 per year to afford such an apartment at the HUD fair market rent – \$935, including utilities – assuming it spent no more than 30 percent of income for shelter.

NLIHC notes a full-time worker earning the minimum wage (\$6.50 per hour) could afford to pay only \$338 per month. An hourly wage of \$17.98 was needed to afford the fair market rent – an equivalent of nearly three full-time wage earners per household. Non-working households that rely on Social Security (SSI) as their sole sources of income face an even bigger gap – an affordable monthly rent based on their SSI payments would be only \$181. In some communities, where rents are much higher than the HUD fair market rent, the affordability crisis for renting families is even more acute.

Photo: Josh Hawkins



It is lack of imagination, not affordability requirements, that produces unattractive homes. Affordable homes are often attractive and fit in with the neighborhood.

Concern #4

Affordable buildings are property tax exempt and, therefore, don't contribute to the community.

In most cases, affordable buildings pay local property taxes to all taxing jurisdictions. Some municipalities may decide to place conditions relative to the payment of taxes when the project is approved (e.g., it cannot be sold to a tax exempt entity). If the building is developed by a nonprofit organization, the municipality can negotiate a payment in lieu of taxes or have ownership of the property in the hands of a for-profit affiliate. If the property is located in a TIF district, all real estate taxes go to the district rather than other taxing bodies, until the TIF expires.

Concern #5

If I have to move, it will be harder to sell my home. My property values will go down.

Homes are usually a household's single most important investment. Families will want to protect their property values, and will feel threatened if they think values will decline because of multifamily construction or small, single family-homes targeted to low and moderate-income households. According to the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, developers need a multi-faceted response to concerns about property values. They need to provide information from the most relevant research – for neighborhoods in the same general area. If such reports are not available, the developer may need to commission a new property value study. Appraisers and realtors should be asked to testify about value trends. Developers should provide residents with information on the planned budget for property maintenance and management to help allay concerns.

“...a substantial body of research, dating back to the early 1970s, has established that affordable housing has no detrimental effect on property values or on the time that homes spend on the market. Well over 100 studies, conducted by prestigious universities, state and federal government agencies, accounting firms and planning organizations, have concluded that neither conventional public housing, nor affordable private units, nor group homes for people with disabilities has a negative effect on surrounding properties.”

Source: *The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, Addressing Community Opposition to Affordable Housing Development: A Fair Housing Toolkit, 2004.*

Photo: Josh Hawkins



Evidence suggests proximity to affordable homes has little to no effect on property values. This is true within mixed-income developments such as Rolling Meadows' Riverwalk, and in the surrounding community as well.

Concern #6

Multifamily housing – affordable or market-rate – will create traffic problems and generate too many school-age children. Households needing social supports will strain the capacity of public services. Taxes will go up as a result.

Residents of affordable housing complexes have, on average, fewer private vehicles per household. They tend to rely more on public transportation to get to work, and shop close to home. How much vehicular traffic will be generated depends on how far residents have to go for everyday needs and where they are employed. Locating affordable residential developments near existing transit and service will cut down on traffic demand considerably. In senior buildings, it is very common for management to work out an arrangement with the village, township, senior agencies, or nonprofit social service providers (such as Catholic Charities) for a scheduled shopping bus. Trips are provided at little or no cost, but must often be reserved in advance. In some locations, dial-a-ride will take residents of senior apartments to medical appointments.

Studies also have shown affordable and multifamily housing does not necessarily generate a disproportionate number of school-age children. In fact, creating a wider range of housing choices can help to attract singles, retirees, and couples with no children.

When affordable housing is built on infill sites, local governments collect service charges and real estate taxes, but often do not have to build and pay for new infrastructure. New residents patronize community businesses. For Illinois municipalities, there is the potential for additional sales tax collections with the increased purchasing power brought by new households.

Photo: Valerie Kretschmer



This multifamily building was once a Marshall Field's store. Its downtown Evanston location is more likely to attract seniors, singles, or couples without children. The belief that affordable or multifamily developments automatically generate more children is unfounded.

MULTIFAMILY DEVELOPMENTS GENERATE FEWER SCHOOL CHILDREN

Opposition to multifamily housing – and especially to affordable apartments – may reflect concern the new homes will overload the school system. This is especially true in communities that are attracting new home developments that are being marketed to families with young children. These families are eager to avoid overcrowded classrooms. Older residents fear an increase in real estate taxes to fund new school construction.

For more than 25 years, researchers at Rutgers University have studied Census and school district data to calculate multipliers – estimates of the number of people, and specifically school children – generated by housing type (single family, townhouse, garden apartment) and number of bedrooms. As American household sizes have trended smaller, Rutgers researchers have found a corresponding decline in multipliers. A report published in November 2006 provides updated information.

Although the results are based on New Jersey data, Illinois would likely show similar trends. As noted in Chapter 3, the densely developed HomeTown Aurora community actually generates a \$1.2 million surplus for the local school districts. The national studies show multifamily housing generates far fewer children per unit than do single-family, detached homes with the same number of bedrooms. Additional guidance is provided in the full report, available on the Internet at www.policy.rutgers.edu.

“It is commonly assumed at the present time that each new housing unit contains about one public school child. The latest census data indicates that is the case only for large homes (four-or-more bedroom, single-family, detached homes); attached homes generate about 0.1 to 0.7 public school children per unit (e.g., 100 attached units contain about

10 to 70 publicly educated pupils). Further, residential construction of growing popularity in New Jersey, such as transit-oriented development (TOD,) generates yet fewer public school children. Exploratory New Jersey data suggests that each TOD unit contains only about 0.02 public school children. In other words, 100 units in a TOD contain, on average, only 2 public school children.”

“Similarly, this study informs the demographic impact of affordable housing, a subject of much misinformation, by providing exploratory data on the household size and number of school-age and public school children in housing occupied by low and moderate-income households. To illustrate, about 19 public school children are generated by a 100-unit inclusionary condominium housing development in New Jersey (88 market-priced homes and 12 affordable homes.) Approximately three of the 19 public school children come from the affordable homes.”

GOOD HOUSING, GOOD SCHOOLS

Passed by the Illinois state legislature in 2007, this bill created a school funding bonus for school districts in communities that approve multifamily housing developments to advance Live Near Work and Preservation goals of Illinois' Comprehensive Housing Plan. The annual amount of the school funding bonus for eligible developments would be \$1,120 for each two-bedroom unit, with \$560 awarded for each additional bedroom. Based on this formula, the state's annual estimated cost for the bonus is less than \$5 million per year.

Many young families in Illinois are struggling to achieve the most basic of dreams: finding an attractive neighborhood with both housing they can afford and schools they can trust. Good Housing, Good Schools will help ensure more communities in Illinois fit this bill and advance the goals of the state's Comprehensive Housing and Planning Act.

Concern #7

If affordable housing is built, crime will increase.

Residents of modern affordable housing developments are carefully screened. To afford the fixed rents associated with LIHTC developments, adults have to be employed or on permanent disability. Potential residents with a history of problems in their previous places of residence are denied leases. If problems with noise, vandalism, or other issues occur after a tenant has moved in, a good management company will work to resolve them. If they cannot be resolved, the problem tenants will be asked to move. With so many households on waiting lists for new affordable housing, there is no reason for management to put up with problem tenants. Municipalities can support and encourage responsive management through trainings, dialogue, and dependable delivery of municipal services.

Good managers also develop partnerships with local service providers to offer after-school programs that keep children supervised and busy; many buildings have community rooms or clubhouses with computer centers or tutoring. Managers work closely with local police and neighborhood groups to prevent and resolve problems.

Today's housing designs incorporate better security provisions than are typically found in older apartment buildings. Windows have working locks, and more windows face the street or common spaces to keep more "eyes" on potential trouble spots. Entry doors require access codes or electronic key cards. Parking areas may be gated with lighting. These environmental strategies, which municipalities can set with building codes, are very effective at mitigating crime.

"There is no evidence of an increase in crime resulting from the introduction of affordable housing into a neighborhood. In fact, much of the affordable housing now being developed in inner cities and older neighborhoods replaces broken-down and crime-ridden buildings and can serve to reduce the neighborhood crime rate."

Source: The Urban Institute, The Impacts of Supportive Housing on Neighborhoods and Neighbors, April 2000.

Photo: David Jenkins



Design features at Chicago's Northtown Village, which include gated entries and street-facing windows, can help reduce crime and are increasingly common in affordable and market-rate developments alike.

What's Next?

One of the great ironies of quality affordable or multifamily housing communities – when well designed and well managed – is they blend in so well with the surrounding neighborhood that they are often invisible. Many people's imagery of affordable housing is the buildings that have achieved notoriety due to their mismanagement, poor design, or both.

Even so, no matter how great the demand for quality affordable or multifamily housing, and no matter how skilled and experienced the development team, a certain amount of opposition is inevitable.

When addressing affordable housing, it is important to treat those opposed to the policy or housing proposal with respect, and be responsive to their concerns. Ask people why they are concerned, and acknowledge the legitimacy of their questions. Be willing to do the extra research needed to answer a question if you do not have all the facts. Affordable housing developers and their supporters do make mistakes. Not every development is perfect. Honesty is important. It is okay to acknowledge problems in design, construction, or management, as long as you show how the developer, manager, or community can resolve the problems.

This chapter detailed ways in which municipal officials and staff can work with developers, residents, neighbors, employers, and other stakeholders to ensure new projects address the needs of the community at large and become neighborhood assets. The workbook's concrete examples of how successful affordable and mixed-income sites are planned, designed, financed, built, and managed can be replicated in or tailored to almost any community in the Chicago region.