

**HIMLE HORNER**

**PUBLIC RELATIONS • CRISIS MANAGEMENT • PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

**RESEARCH AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Report on Affordable Housing Research  
Sponsored by The McKnight Foundation**

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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

A shortage of affordable housing is pushing more Minnesotans to the edge of homelessness, according to a report released in June 2009 by the Minnesota Housing Partnership. The standard benchmark for determining affordability – 30 percent of a person’s income – is being exceeded by nearly half of renters and a third of homeowners in Minnesota, the study found.

The challenges facing those with incomes below \$20,000 annually are even more staggering, with 83 percent of Minnesota renters in this income group living in housing that is unaffordable. The trend of low-income Minnesotans living in housing that is unaffordable by traditional measures is accelerating, according to the MHP report. In fact, over the previous nine years, Minnesota had the fastest increase of extremely low-income households living in unaffordable housing.<sup>1</sup>

Many Minnesotans recognize these challenges and are supportive of the concept of affordable housing, particularly for specific, empathetic beneficiaries. For example, 86 percent of Minnesota homeowners agree that their communities “would be better if we had more homes that working class people and young families can buy.”<sup>2</sup>

The general support, though, is tempered by the self-interest of many Minnesotans, including the passion they feel for their communities. More than 9 out of 10 say their communities are ideal or close to their ideal of a place to live. Included in these favorable attitudes is the perception that communities currently provide a broad range of housing choices. In fact, 75 percent of Minnesotans in a statewide survey said their communities offered the “right mix of affordable housing” versus only 19 percent who believe their communities need to offer more choices.<sup>3</sup>

It is against this backdrop that The McKnight Foundation commissioned research to better understand the values and perceptions that shape public attitudes toward affordable housing and to identify the strategies and messages that could promote broader public support for affordable housing. In particular, the challenge is to move beyond the broadly held stereotypes that make public discussions of affordable housing contentious.

### *Desired Outcomes*

The research sponsored by McKnight forms the basis for strategic recommendations that are intended to do more than just win political approval of affordable housing proposals. Affordable housing initiatives should be built around three outcomes:

- They should produce more housing choices in Minnesota communities. Ultimately, the goal is to create a marketplace in which all Minnesotans can find quality housing appropriate to their circumstances and incomes.
- They should result in residents of affordable housing being viewed as equal partners in the future of a community. An initiative that succeeds in gaining new affordable housing units, but results in public hostility to the residents of those units isn’t a complete success. Initiatives should be rooted in a process that produces more affordable housing and creates an environment in which residents of the affordable housing residents are treated with respect and dignity.

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<sup>1</sup> The Minnesota Housing Partnership study and profiles of housing affordability by county is at [www.mhponline.org/research/county-profiles](http://www.mhponline.org/research/county-profiles).

<sup>2</sup> Survey of Minnesota homeowners conducted by Decision Resources Ltd., January 2009. Other data cited in this section also are from this survey.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. To test the impact of language, and particularly the term “affordable housing,” the survey asked the question twice, substituting “right mix of housing choices” for “affordable housing.” The results of the question were statistically identical regardless of the language.

- They should be driven by processes that are trusted and respected by current homeowners, and are perceived by these residents to add value to their communities.

### ***Methodology***

There were four primary components to the research conducted to understand and evaluate public attitudes on affordable housing and to create the strategies and messages:

- A statewide, random-sample telephone survey of Minnesota homeowners. The survey was exclusive to homeowners in order to gain in-depth information on the attitudes and values of those Minnesota residents most likely to be involved in community-based public policy issues, especially on housing. The survey was administered to 700 randomly selected adult homeowners throughout Minnesota. Professional interviewers conducted the survey by telephone between Jan. 22 and Feb. 3, 2009. The typical respondent took 27 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The results of the study are projectable to all adult homeowners in the state within plus or minus 3.8 percent in 95 out of 100 cases.
- A total of 90 Minnesota homeowners participated in 10 focus groups throughout the state (Minneapolis, St. Paul, Twin Cities suburbs, Hibbing and Rochester) in February 2009. Participants were evenly divided by gender and included a mix of incomes, political beliefs and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Two of the focus groups were comprised exclusively of “opinion influencers” – people who are well-informed on public issues and are high consumers of news media, active in their communities, political participants and have at least some college education. These engaged and informed people tend to exert disproportionate influence on the opinions of others. None of the 10 focus groups included more than 10 people and all were segregated by gender (five groups of women, five groups of men). Each focus group was 90 minutes and all participants were paid a stipend.
- Minnesota print news coverage of affordable housing was evaluated. News articles, letters to the editor, editorials and other print coverage between Jan. 1 and Oct. 31, 2008, were included in the review. The evaluation focused on how elected officials, advocates and residents framed their opinions of affordable housing issues and projects in public discussions.
- In-depth interviews with those involved in housing policies and politics, including elected officials, industry representatives and advocates of affordable housing.

Other research (state and national) also was evaluated, including work being done to promote broader and more productive engagement of citizens in public policy issues. A particularly compelling source of information was the MAP 150 project of the Citizens League. This research is being used by Citizens League to design new processes for citizen engagement. Among the key challenges to resolve is that citizens and public officials often talk past each other. Although the following findings are based on very small samples, the disparity in attitudes between public officials and citizens is great enough to warrant attention:

- Thirty-eight percent of citizens say people only get involved if they have a personal interest in the outcome; 79 percent of public officials believe that public involvement is motivated mainly by personal interest.
- Twenty-nine percent of citizens say that elected officials always or often use information they receive from the public; 71 percent of public officials say they often/always incorporate public input into their proposals and decisions.
- Citizens believe that public policy fails because of the process (engagement is all talk, no action; solutions already are determined before public asked to comment; citizens aren’t given useful information). Public officials believe that public policy fails because of citizens (only opponents, those with narrow, special interests show up). Experts believe policy fails because citizens and public officials don’t listen to experts.

### ***Partners in the Project***

This project was designed and completed under the direction of The McKnight Foundation. Program Officer Eric Muschler was the lead staff person for McKnight. Partners in the project are the following:

- Himle Horner Inc., a Minnesota public affairs and public relations firm, was the day-to-day manager of all activities, participating in the design of the overall project and in the design and implementation of each phase of research. Himle Horner also developed the analysis of the research, proposed specific conclusions and recommendations and drafted the final report. Tom Horner was the project lead.
- ActionMedia Ltd. designed, conducted and interpreted the focus groups. Action Media is a Minnesota firm helping advocacy organizations create and implement more effective communications to achieve their goals. Dick Brooks and Michael Goldberg were the principals on the affordable housing project.
- Decision Resources Ltd. is a Minnesota research firm with extensive experience in research on public policy and community-based issues. Decision Resources designed, conducted and interpreted the survey. William Morris, Ph.D., was the lead consultant.

### ***The Report Author***

This report was drafted by Tom Horner of Himle Horner. While incorporating analyses of the research created by ActionMedia (focus groups) and Decision Resources Ltd. (survey), the findings, strategic insights and recommendations were developed by Himle Horner.

## THE RESEARCH ELEPHANT

Perhaps the greatest value of this project is the breadth and scope of the research. Relying on the findings of a single slice of the data is likely to create a distorted picture. In fact, the individual components of the research are much like the allegory of the five blind men each describing an elephant by the part of the animal he is holding. Each description is wildly misleading.

The reality is that most Minnesotans have very nuanced and sometimes conflicting views of affordable housing. While there are strong advocates (about 10 percent of the population, many of them motivated by social justice) and strong opponents (16 percent, driven by a range of issues from anti-government to racism and anti-immigration sentiments), nearly three-quarters of Minnesotans are much more equivocal in their view of affordable housing. Many Minnesotans in this middle ground (ranging from soft supporters to soft opponents) can be swayed, especially when affordable housing moves from concept to a specific project or from sympathetic beneficiaries (for example, the elderly or lower-income professionals like teachers) to less popular beneficiaries (for example, low-income single parents or new Minnesotans).

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on a comprehensive analysis of the entire body of research conducted for this project. While the summaries of the individual research components provide context and, in some cases, depth, it is the themes that are consistent throughout the research that create the road map recommended in this report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The McKnight Foundation commissioned comprehensive research (a statewide survey of homeowners; focus groups; in-depth interviews with elected officials and policy makers; and, a review of news coverage of affordable housing in Minnesota print media) to better understand the values and perceptions that shape public attitudes toward affordable housing. The research was conducted between November 2008 and April 2009.

The goal of the project was to identify the strategies and messages that could promote broader public support for affordable housing. In particular, the identified challenge was to create recommendations that would move affordable housing discussions beyond the broadly held stereotypes that make public discussions of affordable housing contentious.

### *Desired Outcomes*

The research sponsored by McKnight forms the basis for strategic recommendations that are intended to do more than just win political approval of affordable housing proposals. Affordable housing initiatives should be built around three outcomes:

- They should produce more housing choices in Minnesota communities. Ultimately, the goal is to create a marketplace in which all Minnesotans can find quality housing appropriate to their circumstances and incomes.
- They should result in residents of affordable housing being viewed as equal partners in the future of a community. An initiative that succeeds in gaining new affordable housing units, but results in public hostility to the residents of those units isn't a complete success. Initiatives should be rooted in a process that produces more affordable housing and creates an environment in which residents of the affordable housing residents are treated with respect and dignity.
- They should be driven by processes that are trusted and respected by current homeowners, and are perceived by these resident to add value to their communities.

The research produced several findings that are important to understanding public attitudes toward affordable housing and to shape communications and engagement strategies that can be effective in gaining approval of more affordable housing projects and in building broader public acceptance of affordable housing, the residents of these homes and the public process that resulted in affordable housing as an outcome.

### *Summary of Findings*

There are important public attitudes toward affordable housing that are consistent through the entire body of research. If a strategic plan to change public will is to succeed, it has to address the Minnesota values and beliefs inherent in these findings:

1. Affordable housing is, at best, a third-tier political issue. It has enough volatility to be politically dangerous but not enough popular support for solutions to be politically urgent. For political leaders, homeowners, most employers and others, the easiest course is to do nothing – or to respond to the loudest voices, which, in the case of affordable housing, most often are the opponents.
2. The one constant throughout the research is the strong motivation of current homeowners to protect their own interests, including the value of their homes.
  - Having affordable housing nearby is perceived to reduce the values of existing homes for several reasons. Affordable housing is perceived to bring additional social problems to a community, especially crime; it changes the character of the community, increasing density and adding to congestion; and, it erodes the quality of local schools.
  - Many homeowners rationalize the desire to protect their home values at the expense of affordable housing on the basis of personal responsibility – the idea that current homeowners achieved their housing through hard work, diligence and savings, and others, including low-income and other disadvantaged people, should do the same.

- A related self-interest theme – also very intense – is the passion many Minnesotans have for their communities. An overwhelming number of Minnesotans believe their communities are close to ideal and they would recommend them to family members as good places to live. They feel strongly about preserving the character of their communities and see affordable housing (and its residents) as threats.
  - Citizens will accept changes to their communities, but only if they are viewed as being consistent with the essential character of where they live. One good example from the focus groups – a resident of a St. Paul neighborhood wanted more small, local retail while a resident of a suburban community sees the same retail options as troublesome places for teenagers to hang out.
  - Minnesotans support a government role in affordable housing solutions. However, the strongest motivator for government support is self-interest. Minnesotans want government to rehabilitate and return foreclosed homes to the market and stop new foreclosures out of concern that foreclosures are eroding property values for existing homeowners. Minnesotans support the general concept of government acting to keep housing affordable, but when asked their opinions on specific actions government might take, few proposals gain even majority support and most receive a very divided response.
3. When self-interest bumps up against the reality of today’s housing and economic markets, the result often is deeply conflicting and contradictory positions. Minnesotans understand that housing costs have made it impossible for many Minnesotans to afford quality, safe housing. Yet, support for affordable housing wanes when it moves from the general (“too many people are priced out of housing”) to the specific (proposals to build affordable housing in “my community”).
- On one hand, Minnesotans support greater diversity in their communities and majorities believe that a mix of housing choices strengthens communities (for example, 63 percent agree that “the economic health of communities would be stronger if the housing market had a broader range of housing options, including some low-cost housing”). Most Minnesotans recognize the growing need for more affordable housing, especially for young and working-class families and empty-nesters.
  - When faced with specific affordable housing proposals, though, current homeowners find comfort in the status quo. For example, 68 percent believe that “Any housing choices added to my community should fit the character of the community as it exists today.”
4. Affordable housing discussions often are defined by the perceptions current homeowners have of the people who will live in the affordable housing.
- Generic descriptions of housing for young, professional families or empty-nesters looking to sell a too-large house while remaining in their life-long community have broad appeal. But the positives are easily and quickly undermined by anecdotes that affordable housing brings with it more crime, congestion, residents who aren’t invested in the community, students who will create problems in local schools and other negative stereotypes. The emotional value of empathetic beneficiaries is vastly overwhelmed by the negative portrayals.
  - Renters – especially apartment renters (versus renters of attached or single-family homes) – are an especially unwanted population.
5. Consequently, many Minnesotans do not see affordable housing through the same lens as advocates.
- Advocates see a supply issue; there isn’t enough affordable housing. Most Minnesotans, however, believe their communities currently offer a good mix of housing, including a range of choices for people at different stages of their lives. While many Minnesotans accept that housing costs impose a barrier to affordable housing for some people, they believe there are enough options to meet most needs.
  - Advocates often define affordable housing as a social justice imperative. Most Minnesotans see it as a personal responsibility issue in which hard work and diligent savings are rewarded. To some extent, these attitudes are shaped by race and class biases.
  - Advocates typically focus first on affordable housing solutions – proposing a project, then determining how to gain approval. Current homeowners strongly believe that discussions of affordable housing should begin with consideration of their core issues, particularly their strong desire to protect their



personal and economic security. Until the issues that matter to homeowners are resolved, policy makers are unlikely to provide leadership on affordable housing.

### ***Strategic Directions***

The research suggests a strategic road map to building public will for affordable housing and ultimately to winning public approval for more projects.

1. To be successful – with success defined not just in getting projects approved, but in improving the opportunity for residents of affordable housing to be accepted into the community – the focus has to shift from clients to community. Current homeowners need to first understand how affordable housing improves their communities and enhances their own economic and personal security.
2. Minnesotans have very clear criteria for affordable housing projects in their communities. Failure to acknowledge the validity of these criteria and to begin community conversations with these issues at the core opens the door to opponents who define affordable housing proposals negatively:
  - Protect existing home values. This includes not just the resale value of existing homes but property taxes.
  - Maintain the current character of the community. Recognize that the character is the unique persona of each community.
  - New residents must have the same sense of commitment to the community that current homeowners have.
3. The strategic challenge isn't in getting opponents to affordable housing to "stand down." Opposition is intense and strident, often based on issues of class and race rather than policy. What is clear from the research, though, is that there is the potential to coalesce enough public support to counter opponents, even if support is soft and easily eroded.
4. Affordable housing is most likely to succeed through citizen engagement that builds a tipping point of support by acknowledging and responding to the values of current residents of a community. Support has to come from assurances that that affordable housing won't undermine what current homeowners consider important.
  - While strong opponents may be driven by racism or intense anti-government sentiment, the positions of soft supporters and opponents are defined by personal interests. These interests may get framed around specific projects, their presumed impact or the perceived residents of the housing. However, much of the underlying concern really is about personal economic and physical security and fear that the character of the community will be changed. A successful initiative has to address these values in meaningful and substantive ways.
  - Focusing campaigns to win support for affordable housing on people has two huge challenges: First, it opens the door to the much stronger emotional appeal (and more widely held stereotype) that residents of affordable housing aren't like me; they are people who detract from a community. Second, it ignores the much stronger point of opposition – affordable housing undermines the interests of current homeowners by eroding housing values, creating social problems and changing the character of the community.
  - Supporters won't be engaged and activated on the basis of messaging alone. It's important to note that the phrase "affordable housing" is not inherently negative. In fact, the term seems to be neutral and most often is defined very literally. What people object to isn't "affordable housing," but "government-subsidized" housing, "low-income" housing, "housing projects" – in other words, their objections are to too much government, concentrating poverty, or housing projects that are perceived to be tomorrow's slums.
5. There is fear that the economic and foreclosure crises will lead to the deterioration of communities. This may be a value that can counter people's strong desire to protect the character of their communities. At the same time, many Minnesotans are wary of public policy that goes too far. They will support policy that recognizes the current economic climate, but not policy that assumes the housing market and the economy won't recover.

6. The research suggests that many Minnesotans are at least open to learning more about broader community assets, including transportation, energy efficient homes and economic development.
  - Integrating affordable housing into these broader discussions has some value (for example, strengthening the economic base of a community by creating affordable housing convenient to transit options as a way to attract young families, workers in lower-paid positions and retirees who are downsizing).
  - However, there are limits Minnesotans put around each of these issues – where the positives end and the negatives begin. For example, affordable homes for workers is very different positioning than good jobs that allow workers to afford homes. The convenience and lifestyle appeal of a low-cost neighborhood restaurant does not always translate into support for housing that is affordable to the low-income workers in such a restaurant.
  - Ultimately, Minnesotans return to the impact of new developments on their own interests, particularly their personal and economic security.

### ***Recommendations***

1. **Engagement vs. Advocacy.** Create strategies that are built on engaging citizens in a community around common challenges. The strategies should shift from advocating for a specific proposal to a broader focus on strengthening the community.
2. **Messaging.** Messaging should reflect that the driving concern for most Minnesotans is the impact of community investments on MY home – its value, the security of the neighborhood, and the quality of life supported by the community. The subject of the messaging should shift from today’s focus on social justice and affordable housing supply to the health and vitality of communities.
3. **Audiences.** Focus on the 64 percent of Minnesotans who are soft supporters or soft opponents. Don’t develop campaigns aimed mainly at getting opponents to “stand down.”
4. **Engaging Leadership.** Engaging community leadership in initiatives – especially elected officials and employers – is a key tool to success. However, both elected leaders and employers are far more likely to be active participants in promoting a process (engagement) than they are in a solution (specific proposal to build affordable housing).
5. **Influencers/Spokespeople.** Community influencers who understand the value of affordable housing from their own perspective and are invested in a process to win support from others will make the most effective leaders and spokespeople.
6. **Communications Vehicles.** Communications with the target audiences will be most effective when they are integrated into vehicles that are part of these audiences’ routine, are trusted and connect to them on a personal level. Appropriate vehicles include community media, forums in faith and employment venues, and social media.
7. **Change the Broader Environment.** While the core recommendations largely are intended to focus efforts on individual communities, some attention should be paid to the broader communications environment. Affordable housing will be difficult to advance if the perception in the broader media and blogosphere is intensely negative.

## KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

### **1. Affordable housing has broader support than many policy issues. However, Minnesotans are very conflicted in their opinions of affordable housing and support is very vulnerable to opponents' attacks.**

The public and decision makers see the need for affordable housing, particularly in today's economy and with Minnesota's changing demographics. While support is soft and often eroded by the details and terms of specific proposals, affordable housing has a solid foundation on which to build public support. Minnesota homeowners can be divided into five general categories of support and opposition on affordable housing:

- Advocates (10 percent of Minnesotans)
- Quiet supporters (43 percent)
- Uncertain, less informed (21 percent)
- Quiet opponents (10 percent)
- Vocal opponents (16 percent)

A majority of Minnesota homeowners – 53 percent – are at least potential advocates or quiet supporters of affordable housing and an additional 21 percent are uncertain about affordable housing, but could be won over for specific projects under some circumstances. However, with the exception of the 10 percent of the population who are strong and unequivocal advocates, support is soft and vulnerable to being undermined by opponents of affordable housing.

The breadth of the soft support and opposition reflects how conflicted many Minnesotans are about affordable housing. On one hand, many homeowners and policy makers see the need for new approaches to housing.

“I think for a city to thrive and grow, change is necessary. The old motto, ‘If it’s not broke don’t fix it,’ ...really isn’t what we should be working on any more. Most cities should become the outside-the-box thinkers. (H)ow do we want to progress, how do we want to grow, and what do we want to do? And if you don’t continually strive for that, we won’t bring new people and new businesses, anything, into our community.” – Suburban Minneapolis homeowner

“I just think that housing makes such a difference in everyone’s lives. With a stable home and roof over their heads, kids do better in school, there is less violence, etc. I can’t imagine how challenging it would be for kids without a home. And the horrible feeling parents have when they can’t take care of the kids. Housing is a critical component for communities in the future.” – Elected Minnesota municipal official

At the same time – and in some cases, from the same people who support the concept of affordable housing – opposition to affordable housing can be intense, very personal and highly emotional.

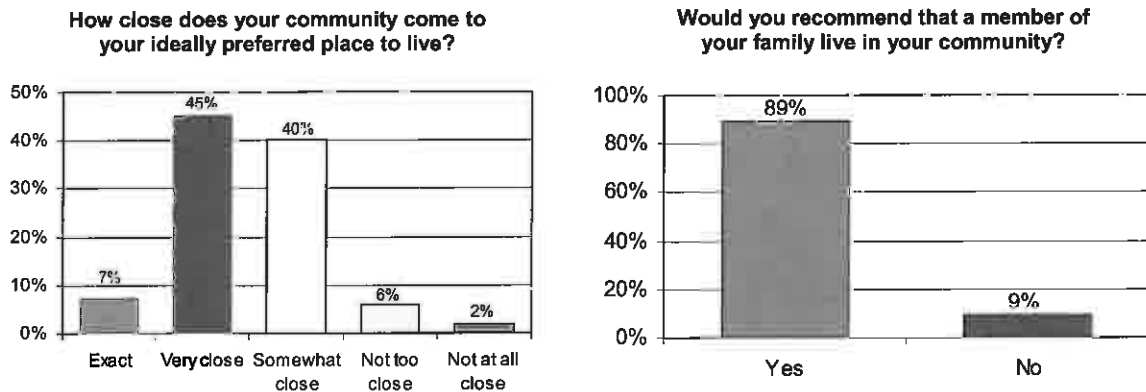
“There’s a need for low income housing. But I guess I think of...the crime...My concern is do (residents of affordable housing) have to always be low income to be there? Are these people bettering themselves but can’t quite afford to go to the next level...Yeah. I’m all for helping people, if they’re helping themselves too and we can all build a community. But not people that are constantly living off (the community) and dragging it down.” – Suburban Minneapolis homeowner

“It seems when you put a lot of poorer people together in one spot, it just is an automatic. Kind of like the Cedar Riverside, when it was designed and built it was state of the art and beautiful. And now...” – Suburban Minneapolis homeowner

These conflicts aren't easily resolved. Throughout the research, many Minnesotans easily move from accepting the need for affordable housing (and even registering some support) to articulating their concerns (and opening the door to opposition) over the impact of affordable housing on their community and their personal well-being. One of the most striking examples occurred in a focus group comprised of suburban men. One homeowner spoke passionately about the need to create more affordable housing in his community, particularly for young families at the beginning of their careers. He cited the challenges of his own children to get established in jobs and homes in his discussion. Yet, later in the focus group, when reaction was sought to a hypothetical affordable housing project in his community, he strongly opposed any project that would be built near his home, fearing an adverse impact on the value of his property.

**2. Affordable housing taps very personal and strong values. Where most societal issues are judged on the basis of ideology or public policy, affordable housing is evaluated by many Minnesotans on a very personal level – particularly the impact on their own homes. Many Minnesotans evaluate affordable housing from their own self-interest, relegating the interests of people in need of affordable housing to secondary (at best) status.**

Most Minnesotans perceive their communities to be ideal or close to ideal places to live. This is a powerful value that defines the context in which most Minnesotans make their decisions about specific affordable housing proposals.



What Minnesotans like most about their communities are exactly the characteristics that are undermined by affordable housing and the residents of this housing, in the views of many Minnesotans. The gap between the perceived values of Minnesotans' communities and the negatives of affordable housing is huge:

<b>What Minnesotans like most about their communities</b> Based on the survey question, “If you were to try to convince someone to move into your neighborhood, what is the ONE characteristic that you think would be most persuasive (open-ended question)?” Similar responses are combined in the following chart.		<b>What Minnesotans perceive to be the strongest negative characteristics of affordable housing.</b> Based on the focus groups, qualitative interviews and scan of media coverage of public discussions of affordable housing.
Nice people/ good sense of community	23%	Residents of affordable housing aren’t involved in the community; they aren’t “people like me.”
Safe/quiet and peaceful	17%	Affordable housing brings crime and other social problems to a community.
Open space/parks/trails/natural assets	16%	Affordable housing means higher density, more congestion.
Good schools	12%	Residents of affordable housing are disruptive in schools. Many can’t speak English, diverting scarce resources from other students and slowing down learning for all.
Well-maintained/nice homes	10%	Residents of affordable housing – especially of multi-unit rental housing – aren’t committed to the community and don’t take care of their property.

And underlying all these sentiments is what might be the strongest concern about affordable housing: the housing itself and the people residing in affordable housing erodes the value of MY house:

- Many Minnesotans strongly believe that the affordable housing of today are the slums of tomorrow. The homes are poorly built and not well-maintained.
- Affordable housing doesn’t fit the character of the neighborhoods in which it is built.
- Residents are disruptive and bring with them crime and other social problems.

In several of the focus groups, Minnesotans were asked their opinions of specific (albeit hypothetical) affordable housing proposals for their communities. The proposed developments were described in very positive terms – well-built, energy-efficient, affordable townhomes with access to transit and marketed to a range of people, from low-income to professionals. While many focus group participants liked the concept, especially if the homes had convenient transit and could accommodate older residents, the concerns of the “influential” focus groups are indicative of the underlying challenges. This group – better educated and better informed than typical Minnesotans – quickly moved from the positives of the project to questions about the impact on the community and on their homes:

“I guess I’d kind of like to know where (it was going to be built, concerned that if it was too near her, it would be a problem).”

“My question would be wherever you’re building this, is the mass transit sufficient enough for it to handle what you’re trying to do. Are you going to look for, are you going to build all these homes and then we’re going to have all these commuters saying, ‘I don’t have enough buses, the bus doesn’t take me where I work, this isn’t working.’ And then put more pressure back on the community for funds to support more mass transit.”

“And if you’re going to have lower housing and younger families can afford it, can the schools support it?”

“I don’t know how they’re attracting or what they think is attracting these young couples or families, so I guess I’d want to know that, what they think... what are they doing to now attract these people vs. why weren’t they attracting them before.”

“I would just want to know what the impact would be for the community itself.”

“And what would make them affordable to this other couple, if someone else couldn’t afford them. Are they going to tear them down and build something smaller?”

“I think the community would want to know the ratio (of owned homes to rentals)... You want to know how many renters are coming in.”

Comments in public forums (as reported by local media) and those made in the one-on-one interviews and in the focus groups underscore the gap between what Minnesotans value about their communities and the personal threat that they see in affordable housing:

“Considering that a home is a person’s largest investment. to what gain to its citizens does the Willmar City Council approve this housing project? None! Those near that area most definitely would lose substantial value in their home. Just because you have a grant doesn’t mean it is fiscally responsible to use it.” – Willmar resident speaking in a public forum and quoted in the local newspaper

“(F)or somebody like myself who... was taught by my father to take pride in anything we have or own, I would not enjoy having somebody alongside of me who had that mindset (of not being responsible for maintaining the property)... to just put (affordable housing) up so that somebody can afford it and not do something to help that person understand what home ownership really means, and what it can do for them in their own personal life, in their own pride of things, I don’t think it’s going to succeed. I just don’t.” – Minneapolis resident speaking at a focus group

“I want to protect my value of home... I wouldn’t want a government subsidized condo going next to my home because I know my property value would decrease and so. I’m not saying it would be bad neighbors but then my, what’s my future if I want to sell my home.” – Rochester resident speaking at a focus group

“The development would violate one of six conditional permit standards that says a use ‘conform or is complementary to neighborhood characteristics of the district in which it is located’... He said the neighbors did not want to deny affordable housing to anyone. He said the issue was that the proposed use is not compatible with what is already there.” – newspaper report on a public hearing over affordable housing

“If we purchase property, take care of it, then sell it for a profit, isn’t that good? I don’t think it is the role of government to enter a market and erode property values simply because someone has made the decision that having lower-priced housing in a particular area is a good thing.” –local government official speaking in an interview

“I agree with everybody. One other thing that some people have brought up when they’ve tried to establish this lower income housing is what’s it going do to my home then if I’m in the general vicinity.”

MODERATOR: Would that be a known thing?

“Oh yeah, it’s known.”

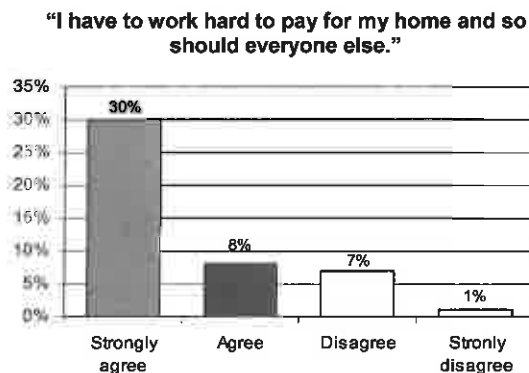
“You get an appraisal on your home and they run it within so many miles. It affects your price of your home.” – exchange among the moderator and two suburban homeowners in a focus group

“(M)y kids are in an elementary that’s just a block and a half from our house. They are minorities in some of their classes. Where I struggle with that is when I go to help or volunteer, and a third of the class cannot speak English, the teacher is repeating. Sometimes they’re going back and reworking lessons where my child who got it the first time is sometimes sitting and waiting or bored.” – suburban resident speaking in a focus group

“There’s no way communities will be more open to rental housing and high density development. There are too many issues like too much traffic, overuse of land, even in low-income areas. I’d be very surprised if there would be more willing and open to that kind of development. I’ve literally seen neighbors here argue that they live in a \$500,000 house and the proposed \$400,000 a house development next to them would have serious adverse effects on their neighborhoods.” – local government official speaking in an interview

One of the most common ways in which many Minnesotans rationalize their opposition to subsidized housing is through a perception that their homes were achieved through diligence, hard-work and a personal commitment to savings. This “pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps” sentiment is consistent throughout the research.

As a focus group participant said (echoing comments made in other focus groups), “I guess we got (into home ownership) in the old fashioned way. We saved up the 20-30 percent or 40 percent down payment for a house. So we had equity built into it. I mean, not a lot of people can do that. The only reason I was able to do it is ‘cause I was in the military for 20 years and you don’t buy a house, because you lose too much. But you put money aside. Now people want to get into the house with nothing down.”



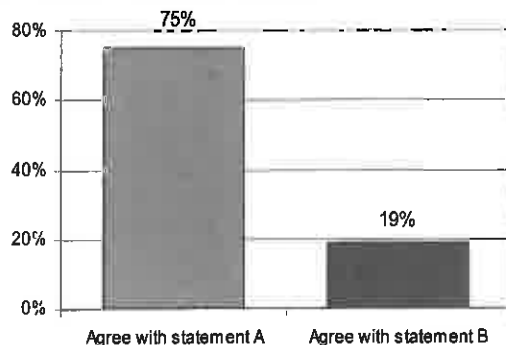
Another challenge in winning support for affordable housing is the strong perception that communities already have a good mix of housing options. The survey asked Minnesotans to choose one of two statements that better reflected their views of housing in their communities. It’s important to note that this question was asked twice in the survey. At the beginning of the survey – before survey respondents were introduced to the topic of housing – respondents were asked if their community had the right mix of “housing choices.” Later in the survey, the same question was asked, with “affordable housing” being substituted for “housing choices.” The wording change did not affect the responses to the question in a statistically significant way.

**Which of the following statements comes closest to your opinion:**

**A: My community has the right mix of affordable housing.**

**OR**

**B: My community needs more affordable housing to attract new residents, including people with a range of incomes, lifestyles and cultures.**



**3. Thinking that their communities are close to ideal doesn't preclude Minnesotans from recognizing that economic and demographic forces make change inevitable.**

Minnesotans' satisfaction with their communities includes a belief that while the right mix of housing choices exists for today's market, economic and demographic changes will require new approaches to address changing demographic and economic circumstances.

However, the changes have to engage homeowners and be consistent with their core values. Nearly two-thirds of Minnesotans – 64 percent – believe that the kind of housing choices that are available in a neighborhood should be decided by the people already living in that neighborhood.

Housing solutions also must be designed in concert with the key values and criteria current residents deem important. Minnesotans believe three key issues should not be compromised even as their communities change:

- Protect existing home values. This includes not just the resale value of existing homes but property taxes.
- Maintain the current character of the community. Recognize that the character is the unique persona of each community.
- Be a part of the community. New residents must have the same sense of commitment to the community that current homeowners have.

A theme that was consistent throughout the research is that rental property stands in direct contrast to all these values. While some participants in the research blamed landlords, much of the criticism was directed at renters themselves:

“I'd be concerned about the commitment of rental people, that would be more transient and possibly that leads to a weaker community because there's less dedication to the community as a whole.” – focus group participant

The anti-renter sentiment is as prevalent among research participants from urban communities as it is among suburban participants:

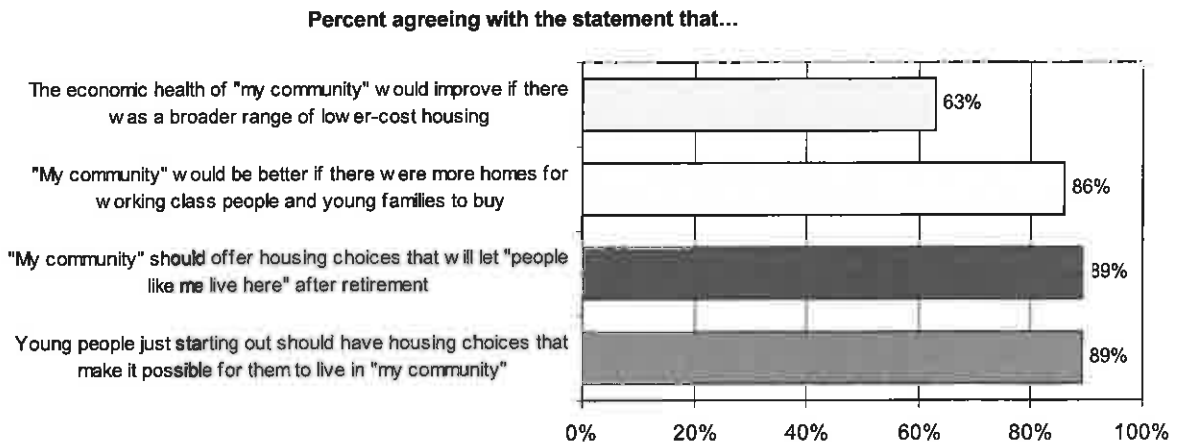
“There's houses and then there's rental houses and then there's duplexes and then there's apartments. I'm probably like most people...they don't want to be around (apartments) because it brings in undesirable type people...(When there are) apartment buildings,



usually have people that move in and out and they cause trouble. They have people that come over, wild parties, fights. That kind of stuff.” – focus group participant from the Camden neighborhood of Minneapolis

Still, many Minnesotans throughout the focus groups and in the one-on-one interviews expressed the opinion that communities have to be open to new kinds of housing, especially for the elderly seeking smaller homes or assisted living and for young families who weren’t able to afford housing in the communities where they were raised or where they now worked.

Housing for these groups is broadly supported by Minnesotans:



Policy experts and local officials believe that housing changes are on the horizon, even if some communities are slow to come to the realization:

“In the past 10 years, communities have thought differently about housing. The next burst [of housing trends] will be very different – more condos, townhomes, greater density, etc. There will be a big sea change in the next 10 years. Yes, it’s inevitable [that citizens will have to be more open to different kinds of housing]. Policymakers and the public haven’t caught up yet, but most developers and planners get it.” – Developer

The economy is a major driving force in terms of price ranges. On the political side, we’re seeing more and more recognition of the need to look at the environment and to build housing that is sustainable. ...I think you’ll see more drive toward that. Everyone wants to become energy self sufficient and not rely on foreign sources of power. Communities are becoming more accepting of smaller housing and are not having zoning requirements that require larger lots. As you see a lot of developments that have failed in the suburbs and outskirts of the Twin Cities, people are seeing [large lots and homes] are not a good idea. Political and community perceptions of housing are starting to shift.” – housing policy analyst

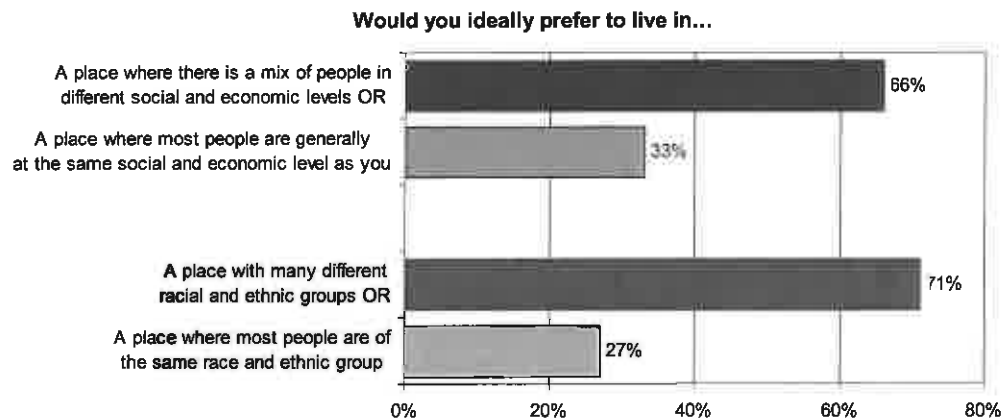
“The bottom line is we’re going to see a shift in housing overall as it reacts to the economy. The housing market has to look at developing opportunities for people to have housing whether it’s single family homes, rental, higher densities, etc.” – Elected Minnesota municipal official

**4. Arguments for and against affordable housing are most effective when they are personalized. However, the supporting arguments don't carry the same emotional clout as opposing arguments.**

The most successful arguments in creating public support for expanded housing choices focus on the people who will benefit from great diversity in housing choices. However, the most effective arguments against affordable housing also focus on people – on the stereotypes of the residents of affordable housing. In the end, building a public case on the aspirations of people in need of housing they can afford doesn't hold up to the stereotypes that are widely held.

While there is general agreement on many of the economic and social arguments tested, the strongest public support comes from the proposition of helping people. Ninety-seven percent agree that working families deserve to live in a safe neighborhood they can call home; 95 percent agree people who can't work because of mental or physical disabilities deserve a clean and safe neighborhood they can call home; 89 percent agree that communities should offer more choices for young people and retirees.

Minnesotans claim to favor neighborhoods that bring together people from different racial, ethnic, political and economic backgrounds. The survey asked Minnesota homeowners to make choices about the kind of neighborhoods they preferred to live in. A majority of respondents supported diversity and social interaction on each of the seven questions that were asked. For example, large majorities of Minnesotans claim to prefer communities that have a mix of social and economic classes and racial and ethnic groups.



However, there is still a significant percentage of respondents who prefer people like them to share their neighborhoods. For example, 44 percent stated they wanted to live in a neighborhood with homes generally in the same price range, 39 percent with mostly two-parent traditional families and 33 percent with people of the same social and economic level. It is these minority opinions that are exploited by opponents of affordable housing.

The focus groups underscored the challenge. Participants were asked to cite some positives and negatives about a proposal to use available state and federal funds to build new townhomes that would be affordable to low-income people. The results from one focus group are telling. Virtually all the responses – positives and negatives – spoke to the people who would be living in the new homes. However, the positives were very general and not emotionally compelling (“more diversity,” “bring more families to the community,” etc.).

The negatives reflected the perceived personal impact low-income people would have on current residents. The responses were strongly felt:

“A negative is always the question of are you bringing in more crime with lower income, with poverty.”

“But then the negative is...the tendency for crime with the low income.”

“The negative is where is the new housing for the non low income people that we want to also draw into our community, where’s housing for them. So if I’m middle income person, how come I don’t have a nice new townhome to buy or purchase to move into?”

“I picture people that move into low housing as being more transient. And there’s people coming in and out and in and out and they don’t care about their community.”

“The other negative could possibly be that – I don’t want to be -- what about the language barrier that generally low income housing can possibly bring in, like my son is dealing with in his class right now.”

“But I guess I think of the same things...the crime, that more regulation with background checks. My concern is do they have to always be low income to be there?”

“One other thing that some people have brought up when they’ve tried to establish this lower income places is what’s it gonna do to my home then if I’m in the general vicinity?”

“But I do agree...that some of the low income housing that has been built in Anoka a few miles from my home, they’re brand new and they look even nicer than my townhouse that was in 2000 that I own and that I bought. So I might kind of look at that and say why can’t I buy that house!”

The sentiments reflected in these comments increasingly are defining communities. Nationally and in Minnesota, people are moving to communities to be with people like themselves:

“...during the past two decades, many whites have moved to one group of cities and many blacks to another. Meanwhile, young people have deserted rural and older manufacturing areas for cities like Austin and Portland. Places with higher densities of college graduates attract even more, so that the gap between such communities and less-educated areas widens further. Zones of high education, in turn, produce more innovation and enjoy higher incomes, generating communities dominated by upper-middle-class tastes. Lower-educated regions, by contrast, tend to be more family-oriented and more faithful to traditional authority.” (“Vote Like Thy Neighbor,” by William A. Galston and Peitro S. Nivola, *New York Times Magazine*, May 11, 2008)

The arguments against affordable housing sometimes play to stereotypes and often rely on false or misleading information. But they also exploit the fears many Minnesota homeowners have that affordable housing will create unfavorable changes in their communities – residents who aren’t committed to the community, new people bringing with them crime and other social problems and an adverse impact on housing values.

Ultimately, the challenge of creating human interest stories that support affordable housing is reflected in the comments of a suburban focus group participant. If affordable housing is for a “decent” person, he’s for it. But in his mind, the residents of affordable housing aren’t decent people, they are threats to him, to his values and to his property:

“I’m not talking about a young person out of college just starting out. I’m talking about somebody who is 45 years old, has no job, selling dope on the street. That’s what I’m talking about. They’re what’s called low income housing. That’s who’s living in those. Not starter homes. Low income housing. There’s totally different things. You’re talking about a criminal element versus a respectable person trying to start their career, their life. They’re just not the same thing. And what we need now are people that are starting their career or life to have a place they can manage, they can build or whatever. But if the times proceed like they have in the past, it’s an ebb and flow. And they start making more money, those houses are going to be low income housing. It’s going to be the criminal element moving back into those. So I wouldn’t want it next to my house. Because that’s what’s going to end up happening. If I plan on staying there, I wouldn’t want it next to my house. If it’s going to be in another town somewhere else or out if in the country, go ahead and build a couple blocks. But I don’t want it next to my house. Because my property value is going to go down to nothing when that happens.”

**5. Government has a role in affordable housing, but it is narrow and well-defined in the minds of existing homeowners.**

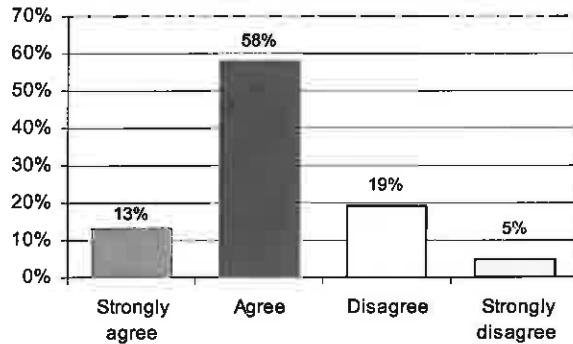
People see a role for government in affordable housing, with the economic and foreclosures crises driving an openness by Minnesotans for a more activist public sector. However, the strongest support for government action is consistent with the other findings. Minnesotans aren’t eager to see expansive government programs investing in new housing. Instead, many Minnesotans are driven by fear of what foreclosures may do to their communities and to their own housing values. If government is to intervene in housing, it should be in putting homes already in foreclosure back on the market and stopping more from happening.

The comment from a suburban focus group participant is typical:

“I think that personally I think we need to just stop building and I think we need to take a look at everything. So take a look at everyone’s house and figure out, to your point before, we’ve got so far this way that we need to kind of come back and not just start building Section 8 or all these affordable houses. Because there’s some out there. We need to come back and say okay, let’s take a look at this community and figure out what the balance is. Because we have people who are in these homes that now can’t afford them. So instead of having them go into foreclosure, let’s figure out how we can keep them in there. And then let’s stop it from happening any more. And then figure out what we can do with what we have. Because I think right now we have a ton of things that are open, so let’s get people in there before we start building more.”

The survey findings also reveal support for a limited and focused government role in housing. Seventy-one percent believe elected officials need to find ways to make housing more affordable in a recession, with 59 percent agreeing that government should do more to protect housing choices during the foreclosure crisis. Fifty-four percent also support the government purchasing and refurbishing older homes to increase the availability of homes that young and low-income families could buy.

The role of government is another area in which support at a general level is much stronger than support for specific applications. That is, in general, Minnesotans do not oppose government involvement to keep housing affordable, especially during the economic crisis. **to make housing more affordable for everyone.”**



However, the support for government involvement in general erodes when specific proposals are tested.

Action	Support	Oppose
Provide incentives to builders and landowners to include more variety in size and pricing of houses in their developments.	44%	36%
Use new zoning regulations to create greater variety in the supply of houses in different areas of the community.	42%	37%
Provide direct assistance to families for rent or monthly mortgage payments.	40%	41%
Invest directly in the development of more housing choices	37%	42%

These sentiments were reflected in the other research and underscore two important findings about government’s role in affordable housing:

First, there is no great incentive for elected leaders to elevate affordable housing. As an election issue, affordable housing is a neutral. A mayor who promotes an affordable housing plan could be expected to find that the initiative would make about one-fourth of the community more likely to support the mayor’s re-election; one-fifth would be less likely; and the decision of about half of the voters wouldn’t be affected by the issue.

Local elected officials typically reflect the communities they serve. They most often are homeowners, long-time residents and people who are established in their careers. In short, they align closely with those in the survey and “influentials” focus groups who may support affordable housing in principle, but are wary of specific proposals for their communities.

In addition, the incentives for local leaders are to respond to needs and challenges where there is consensus or political urgency for action. As the survey suggests, most Minnesotans believe their communities have a good mix of housing choices.

Add to this the reality that affordable housing initiatives typically feature two groups of people – opponents and advocates from outside the community. In this environment, there are no immediate political rewards or incentives for elected leaders to tackle affordable housing at the local level.

The second challenge is a widespread concern that government involvement in housing is likely to go too far. Minnesotans are divided on taxes, with the intensity much greater among those who oppose tax increases. Minnesotans continue to identify themselves as moderate (36 percent) or conservative/leaning conservative (39 percent); only 22 percent identify themselves as liberal/leaning liberal.

Throughout the focus groups and in the other qualitative research, Minnesotans consistently warned against government over-reaching in housing programs. The sentiment is supported by two sentiments:

- Minnesotans generally are optimistic. While nearly three-quarters see the current economic challenges lasting two years or more (in a survey conducted in January 2009), the focus groups revealed Minnesotans' confidence that the market will recover and Minnesotans will adjust to the new realities of housing.
- And, there remains in Minnesota a strong belief that government is too large, too bureaucratic and too inflexible to deal with an issue as complex as affordable housing. Typical of those holding this opinion is the following comment:

“I think we have to make sure that we aren't doing the kinds of things that sound good to some, but are harmful to others. A home is a huge investment for people. Government shouldn't do things that undermine the value of a home, that erode market values, because some people want to achieve some questionable goals. The problem is that government starts with a sense of largesse, then builds from there. Getting involved in the government is like dancing with a herd of buffalo. Government isn't flexible. It doesn't respond well to market changes. Churches, non-profits have a closer relationship to the people being served. They can adapt to the changing needs of the clientele.” –  
Conservative policy influencer

## STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Summary of Recommendations*

1. **Civic engagement.** Affordable housing initiatives should shift from campaigns built on advocacy of a specific solution to a focus on engagement. Civic engagement is a process that builds step-by-step from focusing participants on common challenges to ultimately advocating for shared solutions.
2. **Messaging.** Ultimately, the driving concern for most Minnesotans is the impact of community investments on MY home – its value, the security of the neighborhood, and the quality of life supported by the community. Decisions made by most Minnesotans will be defined by those values. Messaging – the language and the tone – need to reflect this reality. Specific messaging should build on language that reflects the interests of current residents while driving toward broader solutions:
  - The health and vitality of a community rests on new solutions and smart investments, including new thinking about preserving the housing that already is here and creating new housing that is right for the market.
  - Minnesota is changing. Protecting the investments we have in our homes will require new solutions for our community, including housing, transportation and economic development.
  - Our opportunity is to renew older houses and neighborhoods so they remain valuable assets in today’s housing market; provide the housing and transportation that attracts new and experienced workers; and, create housing that allows our lifelong residents to remain in their homes while new buyers gain the economic means to buy these larger homes.
3. **Audiences.** Focus on the 64 percent of Minnesotans who are soft supporters or soft opponents. Don’t develop campaigns aimed mainly at getting opponents to “stand down.” These audiences are well-defined and can be very specifically targeted. Neutralizing opponents does more than just divert resources. The kind of messaging needed to get opponents to stand down elevate issues that undermine support and that often are unwinnable for advocates of affordable housing. The target audiences are time-starved. They also are most sensitive to home values (they often are young and relatively new homeowners) and the character of their communities (they often have young children). Messages need to be delivered through convenient vehicles, in positive terms and with an eye on “what’s in it for me?”
4. **Engaging Leadership.** Engaging community leadership in initiatives – especially elected officials and employers – is a key tool to success. However, both elected leaders and employers are far more likely to be active participants in promoting a process (engagement) than they are in a solution (specific proposal to build affordable housing). In addition, a specific effort to inform elected leaders statewide on the findings and insights from this research can help reinforce the political need and acceptability of affordable housing.
5. **Influencers/Spokespeople.** Community influencers who understand the value of affordable housing from their own perspective and are invested in a process to win support from others will make the most effective leaders and spokespeople.
6. **Communications Vehicles.** Communications with these audiences will be most effective when they are integrated into vehicles that are part of these audiences’ routine, are trusted and connect to them on a personal level. Appropriate vehicles include community media, forums in faith and employment venues, and social media.
7. **Change the Broader Environment.** The recommendations presented here largely are intended to focus efforts on individual communities. However, some focus on the broader environment is needed. So much of policy information now is coming from social media, especially blogs. The most popular Minnesota blogs tend to be harshly critical of government and advocates of affordable housing. Without countering these messages, engagement campaigns at a local level will have a difficult time gaining traction.

### *Details: Strategies and Recommendations*

1. **STRATEGY: To meet the growing demand for more affordable housing, campaign and communications strategy should change from a top-down political approach that relies on winning enough votes in the city council to a model in which current homeowners of the community are engaged in designing the solutions. This is a shift from advocating for a specific solution to an engagement campaign that involves people in identifying and promoting a common solution. The goal remains the same – build support for community-specific affordable housing solutions. The recommendation here is to change the means by which the goal is achieved.**

The community's future health and vitality is more compelling for homeowners than the need for affordable housing. However, engaging homeowners in designing solutions that protect and enhance their own interests while building the community is far more likely to overcome the barriers to affordable housing than a process of trying to impose solutions on the community through the political system. Issues like transit and economic development may be a gateway to broader discussions that include affordable housing solutions. Ultimately, though, economic and personal security – what is the impact on my home value and on the quality of life for me and my family – is the lens through which most residents view proposals for their community.

### *Recommendations*

- Civic engagement is a process that builds step-by-step from focusing participants on common challenges to ultimately advocating for shared solutions:
  - Connect first with influencers (including citizens who influence through the respect their peers have more than their positions of authority) to understand the community, frame the challenges and develop a credible process of broader engagement.
  - Create transparent opportunities for all people to participate equally in identifying challenges and crafting solutions.
  - Brings people together to find their common interest in meeting a specific challenge.
  - Advocate for solutions that respect the needs and values of current residents while meeting the challenges of the future, including affordable housing.
- The goal is to create a mandate for affordable housing, not by focusing on changing public will (which has an implicit focus on opponents), but by creating a tipping point of support (that is, building support among those with soft opinions sufficient to create a political safe harbor for solutions to be achieved in a political environment). Affordable housing is most likely to succeed through engaging local residents in shared solutions that create an economically and socially strong community prepared for the future.
- Create an engagement strategy in which the community recognizes and accepts its self-interest in affordable housing.
- Engage residents in defining a community's future before seeking support for specific solutions. Residents can be engaged around assets in addition to housing – including transit, economic development, etc. – but they need to see that their interests aren't going to be harmed.
- Ultimately, an engagement process has to assure residents on three key points:
  - The value of their homes will be protected.
  - The character of their community will be preserved.
  - The new assets will attract residents who have a commitment to the community.

A tool kit outlining an engagement campaign is included as an addendum to this report.

2. **MESSAGING AND VOICE: Changing the messaging and voice of advocates is essential.**

The most common messages in affordable housing initiatives today are based either in social justice or the inadequate supply of affordable housing. Neither is effective in moving soft supporters or soft opponents because either they don't address the core issue ("how does affordable housing affect MY economic and personal security?") or they are deemed irrelevant (most Minnesotans believe their communities already offer a good mix of affordable housing).



Ultimately, the driving concern for most Minnesotans is the impact of community investments on MY home – its value, the security of the neighborhood, and the quality of life supported by the community. Decisions made by most Minnesotans will be defined by those values and messaging has to frame these values in a context that supports investments in affordable housing and other community assets.

### ***Recommendations***

- Shift the tone and language from a “Voice of Authority” (“we experts know the problem and we have the solution”) to a “Voice of Understanding” (“the housing market is in transition, and that creates both opportunities and challenges for existing homeowners and future residents; let’s work together to find solutions that work for everyone”).
- Don’t spend time and effort in trying to change the most common descriptor of the issue, “affordable housing.” “Affordable housing” isn’t a barrier to success for the most important audiences – advocates and soft supporters/opponents. While it is a negative for stronger opponents, it remains the language used by the news media, policy makers and others who define the debate. Putting effort into changing the language is comparable to the concerns environmentalists had a few years ago. They perceived “environmentalist” to be a negative, loaded descriptor. In fact, it was only opponents of environmentalism for whom the word was problematic. Today, as the public has become more aware of and engaged in environmentalism, the word isn’t a major barrier to public policy or the credibility of those who advocate for environmental policy.
- Rather than investing in what likely would be a very expensive and ill-fated campaign to change the language, advocates need to change the community’s understanding of what is at stake. When “affordable housing” becomes defined by opponents as “subsidized housing,” it’s a negative. When it is defined as part of building a community ready for the future, it has value.
- Proposed new messages:
  - The health and vitality of a community rests on new solutions and smart investments, including new thinking about preserving the housing that already is here and creating new housing that is right for the market.
  - Minnesota is changing. Protecting the investments we have in our homes will require new solutions for our community, including housing, transportation and economic development.
  - Our opportunity is to renew older houses and neighborhoods so they remain valuable assets in today’s housing market; provide the housing and transportation that attracts new and experienced workers; and, create housing that allows our lifelong residents to remain in their homes while new buyers gain the economic means to buy these larger homes.

### **3. AUDIENCES: Focusing on solidifying supporters and winning soft opponents is likely to be far more effective than trying to get hard opponents to “stand down.”**

Efforts that focus on winning the 26 percent of Minnesotans who oppose affordable housing aren’t a good use of resources. Yet, that is exactly what most advocacy campaigns do even if it often is done unintentionally. Opponents often are motivated by issues of class and race. Getting them to “stand down” is a difficult, expensive and dangerous strategy. By focusing on opponents, soft proponents are put in jeopardy. Addressing the opponents’ concerns put issues into play that won’t be won.

### ***Recommendations***

- The winning proposition is to focus on the 64 percent of Minnesotans who are vocal or soft supporters. These audiences can be well-defined, targeted and the focus of very specific and targeted messaging. These audiences begin by accepting the social validity of affordable housing. They need to be engaged in defining the personal benefits.
- Two groups should be targeted: Quiet supporters and the Uncertain/Less Informed.
- More detail on these audiences is provided in the “tool kit” which is included as an addendum to this report. However, some general characteristics shared by these audiences include the following:

- These audiences are among those most likely to be squeezed by time and money.
  - Many have young families, they often are in economically vulnerable income brackets and many are likely to be relatively new homeowners who have suffered the greatest equity losses in recent years.
  - They tend to be moderate to moderate-conservative.
  - They also are likely to be among those most susceptible to the “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” messages. Many in these audiences likely have struggled to get into their homes; having made it themselves, they are likely to believe others can achieve the same goal through diligence and hard work.
- While these audiences present the best opportunity to create a tipping point of support for affordable housing, they also exemplify the challenges of Minnesotans who support the issue in general while opposing specific proposals.
    - Communications needs to begin with the value affordable housing (and other community investments) provides for them – an economically healthy community that protects and enhances their own home values; thoughtful solutions to affordable housing that bring contributing residents to the community; initiatives to protect the community from the economic harm caused by foreclosures; etc.

**4. LEADERSHIP: Engaging elected leaders and employers in affordable housing initiatives is extremely valuable. They are trusted by the target audiences and they are able to convene audiences in an engagement initiative. However, both elected leaders and employers are far more likely to be active participants in promoting a process (engagement) than they are in a solution (specific proposal to build affordable housing).**

Solutions imposed on a community inherently are contentious. Engagement processes are conciliatory. Employers have little incentive in engaging in controversy on issues that don’t have an immediate and demonstrable impact on their bottom lines. Similarly, elected officials typically are risk-averse. With little political incentive to lead a campaign to impose an affordable housing solution, they are comfortable relegating the issue to second- or third-tier status.

Examples from Worthington and Willmar are instructive. Both cities dealt with initiatives to create affordable housing choices mainly for workers at food processing companies. Worthington succeeded with the active participation of the leading employer; Willmar failed while a leading employer sat largely on the sidelines. However, in interviews with key participants and a media scan of the two communities, the key point is NOT that the Worthington employer was eager to promote a specific solution. Rather, it was willing to be part of a process that produced a solution. Conversely, the Willmar employer stayed neutral on a specific solution; there was no process to engage the employer.

The important takeaway is this: Employers tend to support solutions when they have a direct interest (e.g., tax and trade policy). They are much more likely to support a process on issues they see as only tangentially related to their bottom line. Elected leaders are much more likely to engage residents in evaluating and designing the future of the community than they are in imposing solutions that are divisive.

In addition, it’s also an important opportunity to reach out directly to elected officials statewide, providing them with the data and insights from this research that can help them frame the issue in their own communities.

***Recommendations***

- Employers and elected leaders are important audiences for advocates entering a community. One-on-one conversations with these audiences about the community, its needs, potential processes that engage residents, etc., are effective in creating an engagement initiative.
- Engage employers to participate in a process. Swift in Worthington was effective in working with public agencies to survey residents on housing needs, engaging residents in discussions about what was important to their community and working with the public and city leaders to create different possible solutions.

- Engage elected officials in helping to design the process and convene residents. They succeeded because they engaged citizens in moving affordable housing from a worthwhile social policy to a personal benefit.
- A communications campaign to local elected officials is important. Recommendations are presented in a separate document in the appendix to this report.

**5. INFLUENCERS/SPOKESPEOPLE: Engagement builds from the inside out. The most effective processes start with small circles of trusted influencers, identifying them, informing them on the issues and involving them in helping to define choices and to create strategies.**

Community influencers who understand the value of affordable housing from their own perspective and are invested in a process to win support from others will make the most effective leaders and spokespeople.

**Recommendations**

- The strategy of identifying and engaging effective spokespeople shouldn't be shortchanged. Spokespeople likely will be drawn from the leaders identified during an engagement campaign (see tool kit).
- The role and effectiveness of each spokesperson should be well understood. Spokespeople need to serve three functions:
  - Convening the process. Credible people need to give the process stature and urgency. People have to view the process as meaningful. That sentiment gets framed when people are invited to participate.
  - Endorsers: Community influencers need to be recruited to be early adopters (participating in the forums, lending their voice and stature to the activities, promoting the activity through word-of-mouth, etc).
  - Visionaries: These are the spokespeople (leaders) who can be the catalysts for creating the shared goal.
  - Outside advocates can be spokespeople, serving as issue experts, complementing the community spokespeople (e.g., sharing the platform in a presentation) and in helping sort through proposals. What they can't do is impose their solutions on the community.

**6. COMMUNICATIONS VEHICLES: Communications with these audiences will be most effective when they are integrated into vehicles that are part of these audiences' routine, are trusted and connect to them on a personal level.**

The target audiences are much more influenced by peer-to-peer communications than messages delivered through more impersonal vehicles. However, this doesn't mean that messages have to be delivered only by word-of-mouth. A variety of vehicles can be effective. In addition, messengers can gain credibility and stature when they are "endorsed" by a respected peer.

**Recommendations**

- Use community media – local newspapers and radio. It directly reaches the target audiences (especially those with school aged kids) and is trusted.
  - Spokespeople follow the vehicles. These audiences trust local leadership (mayors, school officials, etc.). Peer-to-peer communications is essential.
- Leverage forums where people already are spending time. This is a time-squeezed audience. Create forums in places of worship, employment and civic and social organizations. However, the messages remain focused on the community's future, on building value for current homeowners by assuring the infrastructure is in place to create an economically healthy future. For example, even though many in the target audiences tend to be regular attendees at worship services, the messages that resonate on this issue remain focused on the interests of the community and current residents, not social justice values, even when the venue for communications is a faith setting.
- Social media –especially peer-to-peer – is very effective with the target audiences. They are more likely to be influenced by "people like me" than those they don't know; they are heavy users of social media; and, it communicates on their terms and on their time.

**7. CHANGE THE BROADER ENVIRONMENT: Community engagement should be complemented by a broader public information campaign that counters the internet and social media attacks on affordable housing.**

Community engagement is the core recommendation of this report. In today's marketplace, however, communications on policy and politics increasingly is ideological, not community-based. Online news sites and social media are influential in creating the frame through which local issues are evaluated. To cite but one example, *Powerline*, the conservative Minnesota blog by John Hinderaker and Scott Johnson, routinely tops the Google Readers list of blogs with the most subscribers. In the view of *Powerline*, affordable housing is unnecessary (citing stories of homeless people who die and leave large amounts of money to a cause or person); a tool for ACORN and similar organizations to achieve their liberal political agenda; or, a boondoggle supported by Rep. Barney Frank and other congressional Democrats.

***Recommendations***

- Public understanding of affordable housing has to be elevated beyond these stereotypes if community engagement is to be successful. Previous information campaigns to increase public support for affordable housing typically have relied on the personal stories of beneficiaries to drive messages of social justice and supply. It may be that these campaigns have been effective in creating the large pool of potential affordable housing supporters that now exists in Minnesota. These campaigns, though, don't create political urgency in the same way *Powerline* and other conservative blogs do.
- Expanding the number of supporters and moving them from soft advocates (at best) to engaged activists now bumps up against conflicting values, especially self-interest. These values are deeply ingrained and they are entirely rationale if the prevailing perceptions of affordable housing and its residents are defined by the rhetoric of extreme conservative bloggers.
- The model for this campaign may be the original Embrace Open Space initiative in which McKnight is the catalyst for the campaign, but the faces in the news media and communications forums belong to advocates, "unusual suspects" (credible influencers who the target audiences wouldn't typically associate with support for affordable housing) and case histories.
- The focus of the communications should be the importance of affordable housing (and investments in other assets) in maintaining the economic health and vitality of communities for the benefit of current residents. The message can be delivered in several ways:
  - Opinion articles. Articles bylined by noteworthy "unusual suspects" not only have an immediate impact, but can be packaged and sent to influencers in key target audiences.
  - Radio. Minnesota has strong community radio stations, many of them with very credible and popular longer-format interview programs. This is a great format for spokespeople to talk about affordable housing from the community's perspective.
  - Case histories. Feature stories in publications and other communications vehicles targeted to the right audiences can underscore the value of investing in the future from the perspective of communities and current residents.
  - Online news sites, blogs and social media. An outreach campaign through social media can help counter the anti-affordable housing focus of the blogosphere.

## **Addendum 1: Outreach to local government**

## OUTREACH TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### *Introduction*

Engaging local government is an important tactic in successful affordable housing initiatives. This plan provides tools for advocates to use:

- A strategic road map to engagement local government.
- Background on the politics of affordable housing. This information should be used to inform planning and with local government officials to help them better understand how community attitudes affect decision-making.
- Messaging to educate local officials.
- A longer-format presentation for use by advocates in forums likely to engage and educate local officials.
- Venues in which to communicate to local government officials.

### *Overview*

Research sponsored by The McKnight Foundation on public attitudes toward affordable housing reflects the challenge of engaging local government leadership on the issue.

- There is no urgency to resolve the issue, especially from most current homeowners who believe their communities already have a good mix of affordable housing.
- While there is potential public support for affordable housing, it is soft. The opposition, by contrast, is intense and strident. Opposition often is based on issues (racism and classism) that are very divisive, especially at a community level.
- A key community influencer – business – is more likely to be involved in issues that have a direct, bottom-line impact. Affordable housing may be important, but it is a least a “one-off” issues for most employers.

At the same time, the research underscores the important role local elected leaders can and must play on affordable housing and other community investment issues. The research also provides a road map to begin providing local elected officials with a more favorable context for these contentious issues.

### *Strategies*

Four strategies are proposed:

#### **1. Host online forums for local officials.**

The McKnight Foundation or key partners and grantees can present these forums with Dr. Bill Morris (Decision Resources Ltd) providing the expert content and presentation. Morris is well-known and highly regarded by many local government officials through the hundreds of community research projects DRL has done in recent years. Two tactics can be effective:

- Host live, interactive webinars for local officials. These webinars allow busy officials to participate in online forums in which they can receive the information from the convenience of their desk and computer. Webinars provide audience members with the

data in a format that can be downloaded and saved and all for participants to engage in a discussion of the information.

- Provide information through a webcast that can be accessed at the user's convenience. These forums provide audience members with an annotated PowerPoint presentation and audio narration (making them more engaging and more effective in highlighting critical information). However, they are not live, allowing for participants to view them at their convenience.

**2. Present the research findings and insights through the forums (conferences, publications and online channels) of local government organizations.**

Many of these organizations already have a relationship with McKnight and could be readily accessed. McKnight Foundation or key partners and grantees again can present with Dr. Morris providing the expert content.

- A list of possible organizations and venues is included at the end of this section.

**3. Translate the research into case histories and seek placement in appropriate venues.**

While there continues to be a need for affordable housing, there are success stories – many of which underscore the findings and insights of the research. While data inform local government officials, case histories can motivate them to act. Translating the positive stories of employer involvement, engagement processes and other successes can be very effective. Advocates, McKnight and others can facilitate the development and placement of these case histories, but the focus is on those involved in the featured event.

- While placement of these stories should be sought in the direct venues reaching local government (attached list) they also should be pursued in publications that influence elected and appointed officials. For example:
  - Place a business case history in a business publication, then send the story via advocates, personal acquaintances, etc., to targeted local officials with a “thought you would be interested in this article” note.
  - Use the local connections of someone involved in a case history to place a story in the community newspaper of a targeted community (that is, if a key business person involved in a successful initiative in one community is a resident of a target community, highlight the residence to gain publication in the target community).

**4. Present the findings, insight and case histories to business, civic and service organizations in target communities.**

McKnight Foundation or key partners, grantees and advocates can facilitate this effort; Dr. Morris, advocates or those involved in the case histories can be the presenters.

- Using the “investing in the future economic health and vitality of communities” as a theme, presentations can be made to local chambers of commerce, Rotary Clubs and other organizations.
- Local officials typically attend these events, but should receive a special invitation.
- Follow-up can include local media coverage and a personal note with the presentation sent to local officials.

### ***Politics of Affordable Housing***

**1. Most Minnesota homeowners support affordable housing:**

- Advocates (10 percent of Minnesota homeowners)
- Quiet supporters (43 percent)
- Uncertain, less informed (21 percent)
- Quiet opponents (10 percent)
- Vocal opponents (16 percent)

2. **Minnesotans understand that demographics and the economy are bringing changes to our communities, including the need for new solutions for housing, transportation and economic development.**
  - Minnesota homeowners are most vulnerable to the demagoguery of affordable housing opponents when the priorities and voices of current homeowners aren't respected.
  - Current homeowners want to be involved in the process of creating solutions, not just in confirming or rejecting the result of someone else's decision-making;
    - Sixty-four percent believe that the kind of housing choices available in a neighborhood should be decided by those already living in the neighborhood.
  - Discussion of solutions should reflect three criteria that are important to current homeowners:
    - Protect existing home values. This includes not just the resale value of existing homes but property taxes.
    - Maintain the current character of the community. Recognize that the character is the unique persona of each community.
    - New residents must have the same sense of commitment to the community that current homeowners have.
3. **The politics of affordable housing permit good decisions if the process is managed.**
  - Processes too often attract only the 16 percent of homeowners who are the strongest and most vocal opponents. These opponents often are motivated by anti-government ideologies or racism and classism.
    - The core of the 64 percent who are quiet supporters or uncertain are exactly the kind of people communities want to attract and get involved in local decision-making – young families, middle-income, politically moderate.
  - Most Minnesota homeowners are passionate about their communities. Their goal isn't to exclude new people, but to maintain the quality of their neighborhood.
    - As an electoral issue, affordable housing is neutral to positive if the process engages community residents beyond the vocal opponents.
    - Three-quarters of Minnesota homeowners would either be more likely to support a mayor who proposes an affordable housing plan for his/her community (27 percent) or aren't influenced at the voting booth by this issue (48 percent).

### ***Key Messages to Engage Local Officials***

1. **Most local elected officials have the same values and frames as other community residents. Consequently, the first set of messages are the same for elected officials as they are for other residents:**
  - The health and vitality of a community rest on new solutions and smart investments, including new thinking about preserving the housing that already is here and creating new housing that is right for the market.
  - Minnesota is changing. Protecting the investments we have in our homes will require new solutions for our community, including housing, transportation and economic development.
  - Our opportunity is to renew older houses and neighborhoods so they remain valuable assets in today's housing market; provide the housing and transportation that attracts new and experienced workers; and, create housing that allows our lifelong residents to remain in their homes while new buyers gain the economic means to buy these larger homes.



**2. Some messages are more focused for local government officials.**

- Minnesotans understand their communities are changing because of demographics and the economy. They see a limited but very important role for government in protecting the quality of the community (in particular, not letting foreclosures erode the value of other homes) and in supporting housing for young, working families and for older residents who are seeking to downsize but stay in the community.
- Government has a narrow but important role:
  - In these challenging economic times, government should be proactive in making sure that our older homes – and especially foreclosed homes – become part of the solution.
  - We can look to creative solutions to make these homes available to young families and professionals beginning their careers, while enhancing the value of all homes in our community.
- We also need to make sure our community is able to attract new businesses – and the new and established workers who are part of our future economic vitality – while creating opportunities for our older residents to sell their larger homes and find right-sized homes that allow them to stay in the community.
  - One of the things we can do as a community is work with builders and landowners to find new solutions and incentives that allow greater variety in the size and cost of homes.

***Longer Presentation to Local Government Officials or Civic/Business Settings***

**Minnesota’s need for affordable housing is broadly supported.**

Minnesota homeowners can be divided into five general categories of support and opposition on affordable housing:

- Advocates (10 percent of Minnesota homeowners)
- Quiet supporters (43 percent)
- Uncertain, less informed (21 percent)
- Quiet opponents (10 percent)
- Vocal opponents (16 percent)

**Minnesota homeowners recognize the changes facing their communities. There is overwhelming support for affordable housing for empathetic beneficiaries.**

- 97 percent agree that working families deserve to live in a safe neighborhood they can call home
- 95 percent agree people who can’t work because of mental or physical disabilities deserve a clean and safe neighborhood they can call home
- 89 percent agree that communities should offer more choices for young people and retirees.

**At the same time, Minnesota homeowners are passionate about their communities and believe there already exists a good mix of affordable housing.**

- 85 percent of Minnesota homeowners believe their communities are very close or somewhat close to the ideal place to live.
- 89 percent would recommend that a member of their family live in the community.
- 74 percent believe that their communities have the right mix of housing choices.

**What Minnesotans value most about their communities is in stark contrast to the strongest perceptions of affordable housing and its residents.**

What we like...		What affordable housing brings...
Nice people/ good sense of community	23%	Residents of affordable housing aren't involved in the community; they aren't "people like me."
Safe/quiet and peaceful	17%	Affordable housing brings crime and other social problems to a community.
Open space/parks/trails/natural assets	16%	Affordable housing means higher density, more congestion.
Good schools	12%	Residents of affordable housing are disruptive in schools. Many can't speak English, diverting scarce resources from other students and slowing down learning for all.
Well-maintained/nice homes	10%	Residents of affordable housing – especially of multi-unit rental housing – aren't committed to the community and don't take care of their property.

**The key to understanding public sentiments on affordable housing is this: Ultimately, the driving concern for most Minnesota homeowners is the impact of community decisions and investments on MY home – its value, the security of the neighborhood, and the quality of life supported by the community.**

- Having affordable housing nearby is perceived to reduce the values of existing homes for several reasons. Affordable housing is perceived to bring additional social problems to a community, especially crime; it changes the character of the community, increasing density and adding to congestion; and, it erodes the quality of local schools.

**Many homeowners rationalize the desire to protect their home values at the expense of affordable housing on the basis of personal responsibility.**

- Current homeowners hold close to the idea that they achieved their housing through hard work, diligence and savings, and others, including low-income and other disadvantaged people, should do the same.
- 88 percent agree: "I have to work hard to pay for my home and so should everyone else."

**The affordable housing challenge: Close the gaps.**

- GAP: Between support for the concept and opposition to specific projects.
- GAP: Between the challenges of the future and the resistance to change.
- GAP: Between what is valued by homeowners and the perception of what affordable housing brings.

**Solutions: Refocus and recast the discussion**

- Win supporters; don't try to get opponents to "stand down."
- Begin with the criteria current homeowners feel are important; don't begin with the solutions homeowners feel are built solely around the needs of affordable housing beneficiaries.
- Emphasize the need to protect the economic health and vitality of the community.

**Current homeowners have clear criteria they feel are ignored in affordable housing discussions.**

- Protect existing home values. This includes not just the resale value of existing homes but property taxes.
- Maintain the current character of the community. Recognize that the character is the unique persona of each community.
- New residents must have the same sense of commitment to the community that current homeowners have.

**Minnesotans will support solutions if they are perceived to be fair, build for the future and protect current homeowners' economic and physical security.**

- Make older homes – and especially foreclosed homes – part of the solution. Identify creative solutions that make these homes available to young families and professionals beginning their careers, while enhancing the value of all homes in our community.
- Work with builders and landowners to find new solutions and incentives that allow greater variety in the size and cost of homes.
- Hold renters and landlords to the same standards of accountability as all residents.

**Investing in the future has value.**

- We also need to make sure our community is able to attract new businesses – and the new and established workers who are part of our future economic vitality – while creating opportunities for our older residents to sell their larger homes and find right-sized homes that allow them to stay in the community.

**The politics of affordable housing permit good decisions if the process is managed.**

- Processes too often attract only the 16 percent of homeowners who are the strongest and most vocal opponents. These opponents often are motivated by anti-government ideologies or racism and classism.
- The core of the 64 percent who are quiet supporters or uncertain are exactly the kind of people communities want to attract and get involved in local decision-making – young families, middle-income, politically moderate.
- Most Minnesota homeowners are passionate about their communities. Their goal isn't to exclude new people, but to maintain the quality of their neighborhood.

**As an electoral issue, affordable housing is neutral to positive if the process engages community residents beyond the vocal opponents.**

- Three-quarters of Minnesota homeowners would either be more likely to support a mayor who proposes an affordable housing plan for his/her community (27 percent) or aren't influenced at the voting booth by this issue (48 percent).

## COMMUNICATIONS VENUES TO REACH LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS

### **Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT)**

- The Minnesota Association of Townships is a voluntary membership organization representing 1,785 of Minnesota's 1,786 organized townships. MAT is guided by a 13-member board of directors, representing 13 state districts, and is located in St. Michael, Minnesota.

#### Organization Events

- The 2009 Annual Conference is at the Mayo Civic Center in Rochester November 19 – 21.

#### Online Publications

- *Minnesota Township News* is a bi-monthly newspaper published for townships in Minnesota. Each issue contains legislative updates; legal assistance; insurance and risk management news; clerk and treasurer information; current events; information regarding training sessions; questions; answers and many more items aimed to increase awareness for town board members.

### **North Metro Mayors Association**

- The North Metro Mayors Association involves a large number of north metro cities in its membership, including most municipalities along Bottineau Boulevard.
- The North Metro Mayors Association has over the years encouraged member communities to initiate subregional organizations around significant transportation corridors, including the 610 Coalition, 100 Council, and the North Metro I-35W Corridor Coalition.

### **Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA) – Previously the Metropolitan Inter-County Association**

- The Minnesota Inter-County Association is a nonprofit organization of growing or urban counties in Minnesota. The association is a vehicle for planning and implementing projects and programs of similar interest to member counties.
- MICA's member counties encompass a major portion of the state's population and an enormous share of its industrial and high-tech resources in five out of the six metro areas of the state. The MICA Board of Directors is the policy setting body. All member counties are represented on the Board by two county commissioners chosen by their respective county boards. In addition, the county administrators meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues, problems and projects of interest to one or more of the counties.

#### Organization Events

- Upcoming Board meetings:
  - August 12 at 2 p.m. in Ramsey
  - September 9 at 2 p.m. in St. Paul
  - October 14 at 2 p.m. in St. Paul
  - November 11 at 2 p.m. in St. Paul
  - December 9 at 2 p.m. in St. Paul

### **Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC)**

- The Association of Minnesota Counties is a voluntary statewide organization that assists the state's 87 counties in providing effective county governance to the people of Minnesota.

#### Organization Events

- AMC Leadership Development Summit, August 12 – 14, Ruttger's Sugar Lake Lodge, Grand Rapids (although the agenda is set for this meeting)

### Online Publications

- *Minnesota Counties* newspaper
  - Published 10 times per year (skipping June and December).
  - This publication contains notices of upcoming AMC events; summaries of recent activities; individual county news; regular columns by the AMC president, executive director and staff; a calendar of events; job posting notices; and board meeting minutes.
  - Contact: Becky Pizinger; pizinger@mncounties.org
- *AMC UPDATE*
  - Published throughout the year.
  - This publication alerts counties to pertinent happenings at the State Legislature or federal government. Its policy analysts summarize complex legislation, pulling out its significance - positive and negative - for county government.
- *AMC EXTRA!*
  - Published every other Wednesday, this publication contains news and event announcements for counties.
- *"FYI" Resources*
  - To help county officials, employees and citizens better understand what county government does, AMC produces a number of "For Your Information" bulletins. These short documents provide an overview of county revenue and expenditures, county government structure, duties of a county commissioner, transportation, the Minnesota Open Meeting Law, why property taxes vary and other topics.

### **Economic Development Association of Minnesota (EDAM)**

- EDAM is a nonprofit professional association of individuals and organizations throughout the state of Minnesota dedicated to the advancement of the economic development profession.

### Organization Events

- Summer Conference (the 2009 event was in June)

### Online Publications

- *EDAM Developer* (Newsletter)
  - Contact: Eric Ewald; erice@ewald.com
  - Contact: Jim Grom; (763) 323-2785; jimgrom@connexusenergy.com

### **League of Minnesota Cities (LMC)**

- League of Minnesota Cities is a membership organization dedicated to promoting excellence in local government. The League serves its more than 800 member cities through advocacy, education and training, policy development, risk management, and other services.

### Organization Events

- LMC's annual conference (2009 event already occurred)
- Clerks' Orientation Conference: August 10 – 12, St. Paul
  - This conference provides basic training for city employees charged with municipal clerk's duties.

### Online Publications

- *Minnesota Cities* magazine covers a wide range of topics that are important on a local level. *Minnesota Cities* magazine includes in-depth feature articles and regular columns that cover notable court decisions; municipal governance and leadership information; labor relations and human resource news; technology developments; city news and good

ideas; the latest happenings at the League and Insurance Trust; and training and professional development opportunities.

- *Cities Bulletin* newsletter is a source for:
  - Summaries and analysis of legislation affecting cities.
  - Reviews of state and federal decisions.
  - Action alerts requesting input.
  - Conferences and training opportunities.
  - Detailed coverage of LMC and League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust news.
  - Published weekly during the legislative session and bi-weekly during the interim.
  - Contact: Claudia Hoffacker, Web Content & Publications Manager; (651) 215-4032 or (800) 925-1122; choffacker@lmc.org

#### **Minnesota Association of Small Cities (MAOSC)**

- The Minnesota Association of Small Cities is an organization whose purpose is to stimulate the communication among small cities and to facilitate an interchange of ideas among member communities.
- The MAOSC is dedicated to and supported by Minnesota cities of 5,000 people or less. The MAOSC consists of a network of member cities that communicates and advocates for enhancing the quality of life that will keep our small cities thriving.

#### Organization Events

- The MAOSC has regular meetings.

#### Online Publications

- Annual Newsletter
  - Contact: Dave Engstrom; (651) 214-5263; daveengstrom@pacemn.com

#### **Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities (CGMC)**

- CGMC's mission is to develop viable, progressive communities for businesses and families through strong economic growth and good local government.

#### Organization Events

- Annual CGMC summer conference – Wednesday, July 29, to Friday, July 31

#### Online Publications

- CGMC blog – <http://www.thanklga.org/>

#### **Regional Council of Mayors (RCM)/Urban Land Institute (ULI)**

- Regional Council of Mayors is supported by the Urban Land Institute.
- Regional Council of Mayors represents Minneapolis, Saint Paul and 36 municipalities in the developed and developing suburbs. The RCM provides a non-partisan platform that strategically engages mayors and land use professionals to support a more connected, more sustainable and more competitive region.

#### Organization Events

- **Real Estate and the Financial Crisis--Tony Downs**  
July 30, 7:30 a.m., Minneapolis Marriott Southwest
- **City Building: Expanding Common Ground--Ken Greenberg**  
September 14, 4 p.m., Dorsey & Whitney Minnesota Room
- **The Politics of Density--Debra Stein**  
October 20, 4 p.m., Dorsey & Whitney Minnesota Room
- **4th Annual ULI MN Emerging Trends program--Brian Beaulieu**  
November 19, 7:30 – 10 a.m., Dorsey & Whitney Minnesota Room
- **Leadership Studio – Young Leaders Group (YLG) 2009 mentoring program**
  - All events are held at the McKnight Foundation
  - August 20 – Mayor Gene Winstead; 3:45 – 5 p.m.

- October 22 – Nate Garvis, Vice President of Government Affairs, Target Corporation; 3:45 – 5 p.m.
- December 10 – Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives, TBD

Online Publications

- Quarterly Newsletter
- Contact: Caren Dewar, executive director; [caren.dewar@uli.org](mailto:caren.dewar@uli.org)

## Addendum 2: Tools for Engagement



## THE TOOLS OF AN ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN

### *Overview*

Research sponsored by The McKnight Foundation on public attitudes toward affordable housing underscored the value of shifting affordable housing initiatives from a focus mainly on advocacy – identifying a specific solution and seeking to build public support around the narrow issue – to broader engagement strategies.

This document provides a tool kit to assist advocates in planning and implementing an engagement campaign. It includes the following components:

A discussion of engagement campaigns and their core attributes.

- Target audiences – who they are and what defines them.
- Messaging.
- Tone of the campaign.
- A step-by-step tactical guide.

### *What is Engagement?*

An engagement campaign is not the same as an advocacy campaign. An advocacy campaign rallies support around a specific solution. An engagement creates a process for citizens to identify, develop and promote a shared goal.

Creating more affordable housing opportunities through advocacy has had some success. However, research conducted in 2008-09 on behalf of The McKnight Foundation suggests that even when affordable housing campaigns succeed in winning approval of a project, success often comes at the expense of a public that is more cynical of the process and less trusting of government. It often leaves homeowners angry at the perception that their values (personal security, the character of their community and the value of their homes) were sacrificed for the benefit of other people, the residents of affordable housing. This anger often is focused on the targets that remain in the community – government and the affordable housing residents.

Engagement isn't just hosting a town hall meeting. In fact, traditional forums (e.g., town hall meetings) are more likely to attract opponents than to engage those who are undecided about new community investments or who might be passive/quiet supporters. Most people – and especially those who aren't passionate supporters or opponents of an issue – are discouraged from participating not by limits on time (although that is a factor), but because of the belief that public meetings produce too much talk and not enough concrete actions (46 percent) and that politicians don't really care about the outcomes of civic meetings (38 percent), according to a 2006 survey on civic engagement conducted by the Citizens League.

Engagement campaigns aren't passive; they aren't built around static meetings and events fixed by time and place. They create opportunities for residents to explore new solutions, to learn from one another and to find solutions that work for everyone.

### ***Four Qualities***

Successful citizen engagement is based on four qualities:

- **Common goal**: A common goal doesn't preclude advocates from working toward a specific outcome. Rather, it should focus advocates on determining how the desired outcome can be achieved in ways that deliver benefits to current residents and are consistent with community priorities and values.
- **Transparency**: The purpose of the process is stated from the outset and is shared by all participants. The process is open to all and participants have the opportunity to be informed (that is, a part of the engagement process is learning what citizens need to be fully involved in sorting through competing issues and reaching a good decision based on all the facts).
- **Feedback**: Content of the process is made available to all and there are the means available for all affected people (not just those who participate in forums) to add their opinions.
- **Credible Convener**: Meetings are convened by those who have standing with affected parties. Conveners don't have to be members of the community, but they must be trusted by the community to create a process that achieves an outcome with shared benefits.

## ***Who are We Talking to, What do We Say, and How do We Say it?***

### ***Audiences***

- Two audiences representing 64 percent of Minnesota homeowners are essential to a campaign:
  - Quiet supporters (43 percent of Minnesota homeowners):
    - This group believes government must play a role in affordable housing. They aren't advocates in large part because they are concerned about the personal impacts – likely because they are particularly vulnerable to eroding home values and higher government costs.
    - They often accept the community-wide justification for affordable housing investments, but also may be concerned about government over-reaching in efforts to encourage more affordable housing.
    - The quiet supporters are disproportionately Democratic, but more likely to self-identify as political moderates. They typically are 35-54 years old and lower income, most often have an annual household income between \$25,000 and \$50,000.
    - They are likely to have children at home and are religious, attending worship services several times a month.
  - Uncertain, less informed (21 percent of Minnesota homeowners):
    - Members of this audience are less likely to have personal experience with affordable housing issues, they don't follow the issue closely, and still are forming opinions about the best role for government.
    - They are more likely to accept the value a range of housing choices adds to the value of the community, but retain concerns about the impact of affordable housing on their own interests (e.g., the value of their home). They tend to be either younger – under age 24 – or older – 55 and older.
    - Younger members of this audience often have pre-school children.
    - They generally fall into one of two income categories, either earning less than \$35,000 annually or over \$75,000.
    - As a group, they tend to self-identify as moderates and moderate/conservatives.
    - This group has a gender gap, tending to more often be women.
- These two audiences are among those most likely to be squeezed by time and money. Many have young families, they often are in economically vulnerable income brackets and many are likely to be relatively new homeowners who have suffered the greatest equity losses in recent years. They also are likely to be among those most susceptible to the “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” messages. Many in these audiences likely have struggled to get into their homes; having made it themselves, they are likely to believe others can achieve the same goal through diligence and hard work.

### ***Messaging***

Minnesota homeowners in the target audiences are open to affordable housing. The research suggests that other issues (for example, the need for transit options) may be gateways to the broader discussion of building for the future. But in the end, the defining issue for most members of the target audiences is not the benefits of these investments for others, but the impact on their self-interests. Messaging has to reflect and value the three key criteria by which most target audience members will evaluate affordable housing and other community investments:

- Will the value of my home be protected (and enhanced)?
- Will the character of my community be preserved?
- Will the new assets attract residents to the community who share my commitment to maintaining the quality and character of where we live?

Messaging that reflects these criteria include the following:

- The health and vitality of a community rests on new solutions and smart investments, including new thinking about preserving the housing that already is here and creating new housing that is right for the market.
- Minnesota is changing. Protecting the investments we have in our homes will require new solutions for our community, including housing, transportation and economic development.
- Our opportunity is to renew older houses and neighborhoods so they remain valuable assets in today's housing market; provide the housing and transportation that attracts new and experienced workers; and, create housing that allows our lifelong residents to remain in their homes while new buyers gain the economic means to buy these larger homes.

### ***Tone***

As important as the specific language is the context in which messages are presented. Advocates of affordable housing typically speak in a “voice of authority” – “we know the problem and we have a solution.” They need to use a “voice of understanding” – “our community has opportunities; to take advantage of these opportunities new solutions are needed; creating those new solutions is a task that has to involve everyone.”

Social design expert Bruce Nussbaum writes about this transition from “authority” to “understanding”: “We are moving through a vast cultural change that involves shifting from The Voice of Authority to The Voice of Understanding. Listening and understand[ing]—connecting and communicating—are the key skills of business culture today and the essence of leadership. If you don't get this—and many CEOs being fired these days clearly don't—you don't get the 21st century of social networking, disaggregated power and co-creation.”

- “Understanding” begins with listening to the values, concerns and possible solutions of the core audience – current homeowners who need to accept and embrace changes to their communities.
- “Understanding” acknowledges the validity of their issues, then works collaboratively to seek new and creative ways to meaningfully address them.
- “Understanding” is transparent. When issues can't be resolved, they aren't dismissed or covered up. The inability to resolve them is acknowledged.

Translating these principles to affordable housing results in actions large and small, as the following examples reflect:

***Challenge:*** Current homeowners are worried about the impact of foreclosures on their community. Much of current government policy, though, favors incentives for new construction over reclaiming foreclosed homes as affordable housing.

***Solution:*** Take advantage of existing policies, while committing to collaboration on foreclosed homes, including changing policies, seeking private resources to reclaim foreclosed homes and grassroots action to protect the homes from damage while they are vacant.

***Challenge:*** Current homeowners believe that residents of affordable housing – especially multi-unit rental housing – have no stake in the maintaining the community. They are disruptive and bring with them crime and other social problems.

***Solution:*** Homeowners love Habitat for Humanity because of its sweat equity requirements. Translate this concept into a “first-step” solution – invite residents of affordable housing that exists in the community to join current homeowners in a park clean-up and pot-luck picnic. Join current homeowners in lobbying for tighter requirements on landlords to maintain property.

## Engaging – Step-by-Step

To begin engaging a community around the idea of affordable housing, consider the following strategies:

Strategy	Implementation
<p><b>Entering the community.</b> Begin work by sitting down one-on-one with some key community leaders to create a dialogue. The process is sometimes referred to as “entering the community.”</p> <p>The purpose is two-fold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To gain insight into the community, its culture, the needs and challenges, the leadership.</li> <li>▪ To evaluate the willingness of the community leadership to tackle housing and (perhaps) broader community infrastructure issues.</li> </ul>	<p>The need is to gain credible information from respected sources. Although likely candidates will come from the faith, business, city government, education, nonprofit communities and other key community sectors, don’t assume on the basis of title alone. Identify leaders who are respected and have a good sense of the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use the local media (community newspaper, online sites).</li> <li>▪ “Snowball” call. Begin with one call to a contact (or to a logical source, e.g., the chamber of commerce), ask for recommendations and build the list from there.</li> </ul> <p>Host one-on-one conversations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Catalog key points in each conversation and share them with the participant, assuring that they are the right points and giving the participant a chance to add.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Develop a network of community leaders.</b> Community leadership is the next ring after entering the community. If the preliminary conversations suggest that community engagement would be productive, take the conversations to the next circle of leadership – civic and service clubs, city leaders, local elected officials, local media, housing advocates, faith communities and business/chamber of commerce leaders. These conversations should start to frame the larger community engagement discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How well prepared is the community to maintain its vitality and economic health in the years ahead?</li> <li>▪ How well prepared is the community to provide the infrastructure – housing, jobs, and transportation, in particular – that will help us build an economically secure future for all residents?</li> <li>▪ How do we engage all citizens in these discussions?</li> </ul> <p>It is important to keep in mind a key tenet of engagement: You are inviting leaders to join a civic engagement process. You are not asking them to lobby for a specific solution. However, the goal is to define solutions that all can embrace.</p>	<p>Identify the leaders (who also will serve as spokespeople, driving the initiative forward). Three roles are needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Conveners:</b> The McKnight research underscores that local government (and neighborhood organizations in larger communities) and core community organizations – the chamber of commerce, faith communities, the League of Women Voters, etc. – are effective and trusted conveners of an engagement process. They can are able to tee up community issues, residents expect and trust information from them, and (in most cases) they are viewed as acting in the best interests of the community.</li> <li>▪ <b>Endorsers:</b> These are the people that Gladwell, Roper and others identify as the 10 percent who influence the opinions of the other 90 percent. They are identified by looking at the leadership of local civic and service organizations, by scanning the local media (including letters to the editor) for the names that consistently appear as the decision-makers, etc.</li> <li>▪ <b>Visionaries:</b> These spokespeople can be the catalysts for the community developing a vision that includes housing, transportation, economic development and other assets. These people are those trusted and respected for their leadership – a well-regarded local policy maker, a business leader, the superintendent of schools, etc.</li> </ul>

Strategy	Implementation
<p><b>Create a central volunteer-leadership group.</b> Recruit a group of 15-25 people willing to actively participate in furthering the conversation about affordable housing in your community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The group would meet regularly (likely monthly) to identify and coordinate planning new outreach opportunities, and should represent a broad cross-section of organizations interested in the issue (faith, business, social service, and others).</li> <li>▪ The goal of this group is to provide local leadership and capacity to your efforts, and to serve as extra “ears to the ground” keeping the group apprised of community conversations around affordable housing and community development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Create forums for discussion; be transparent.</b> Engagement is not exclusive, it is inclusive. Forums need to be proactive, reaching out to citizens. These forums are hosted by the Visionaries who have been developed; they are supported by content experts (including the advocacy groups); and, they are focused on an agenda. However, they are owned by the citizens – they need to drive the outcomes.</p>	<p>Create forums where people already congregate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use adult forums in places of worship.</li> <li>▪ Ask community organizations (e.g., the chamber of commerce) to host discussion forums.</li> <li>▪ Host brown bag lunches at places of employment (or, in larger communities – e.g., Bloomington – host a brown bag lunch for residents of that community in the general purpose conference rooms of the large office parks).</li> </ul> <p>Be creative. For example, host TeleTown hall meetings: TeleTownHall Meetings allow people to participate in a town hall meeting from their homes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People participate in the meeting via phone.</li> <li>• Format is similar to a radio program -- one hour of short information segments, participant questions, interviews, etc.</li> <li>• Participation in the events is promoted through a variety of activities, including publicity (community visits and other tactics); engaging appropriate organizations to promote the event through their channels; using social media; etc.</li> </ul> <p>Use the growing network of civic engagement media, including the Citizens League’s interactive civic web “utility”, <i>CitiZing!</i>, to engage Minnesotans electronically.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A community-specific web site would be built to accommodate the discussion. The site would be structured in a topic-specific format, so as to easily engage members of the public on the issues most relevant to them. CitiZing!-powered functionality includes forums, wikis, prioritizer” to rate or prioritize ideas, surveys, networking and other tools.</li> <li>▪ The Citizens League can be engaged to moderate the site, providing a respected, nonpartisan organization to help guide the community discussion</li> </ul>

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
<p><b>Use existing media, including community newspapers and radio.</b> Local media are highly trusted on these issues. They connect with residents on an emotional basis. And, they reach the target audiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage the local media to do on-going coverage of the discussion, backgrounders on the core issues and thought pieces on the challenges and opportunities facing the community.</li> <li>▪ Assist the (staff-squeezed) local media by providing resources, guest columns, freelance articles, etc.</li> <li>▪ Post materials on the Internet in community forums.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Extend the reach through proactive outreach.</b> Engage more people to participate through an aggressive outreach initiative.</p>	<p>Create a grassroots network of support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use community events, direct mail to shared lists, tabling at community events and similar tactics to build a broad base of community residents – both renters and home owners – who are interested in participating in the dialogue around affordable housing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Create events that leverage and build upon these existing bases of support.</b> Conducting regular events – whether large public events, press conferences, or building a list of supporters among business leaders (or similar constituencies) – can keep the conversation about the need for affordable housing alive and moving forward without having to directly propose a specific affordable housing project.</p>	<p>Conduct regular community presentations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Turn to your identified network of supportive leaders to ask that they arrange speaking opportunities to internal groups at major employers, civic organizations (e.g. Rotary Clubs), faith organizations, book clubs or other networks. Provide a presentation about the value of affordable housing and the effort to think about the future of the community.</li> <li>▪ Use the Visionaries as spokespeople, with advocates as content providers and experts.</li> <li>▪ Collect names and contact information from attending supporters to maintain contact about affordable housing and the local activities/conversation.</li> </ul> <p>Businesses for A Better Community (and similar affiliation groups)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build a list of businesses in the community supportive of the need for investing in the future of the community, keeping it economically health and vital through housing, transportation and economic development</li> <li>▪ Invest time meeting with business leaders and asking them to sign on in support. Then leverage the list by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Releasing it to the media</li> <li>- Empowering a local business owner to talk about their participation on local radio programs</li> <li>- Send direct mail about the list to your larger list of grassroots supporters and community leaders</li> <li>- Submitting follow up letters to the editor applauding businesses for their interest in affordable housing and the future of the community</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Event strategy (continued)

My Community, My Future event.

- Work with local neighborhood organizations (this could also work with parishes or faith communities) to hold an evening (or several evenings) of community pot-luck picnics. Ask homeowners to connect with each other around the value of their neighborhoods and ask them to envision what they'd like their community to look like in 5 years, 10 years or more.
- Leverage this event by:
  - Use the event as an opportunity to make phone calls to neighborhood residents and identify potential supporters
  - Engage local media by submitting event photos and/or inviting reporters to join
  - Invite local elected officials to attend and participate in the conversation (provided you are confident that you will have adequate attendance and reasonable support ahead of time)
  - Collect contact information from attendees for future direct communications

Create a Tell Your Story campaign.

- Ask area residents to share their vision for the future of the community and what it will mean for them -- a place where children can stay, a growing community, a thriving business environment, or other dreams.
  - Post stories to your website and encourage additional online submissions
  - Consider direct mail to supporters (or to a select additional base of supporters – parishioners from a supportive church, regular voters from the voter file or other list) requesting their vision/dreams for the future of the community
  - Update the media on your campaign – announce the progress and responses received for regular press releases
  - Partner with local businesses to have story cards available for submission at check-out counters (and a glass bowl on the counter where they can be submitted)
  - Submit follow-up letters to the editor from people who have shared their stories to continue the community conversation about the dreams for the future. Engage a diverse group from the community to reflect all potential interests (neighbors, tenants) of an affordable housing project.



Strategy	Implementation
<p><b>Drive toward a proposal and a vote.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Define solutions.</li> <li>▪ Vet them with current homeowners and those involved in the civic engagement process.</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with elected leaders, gaining from them an understanding of what they will need to approve the solutions.</li> <li>▪ Encourage those involved in the engagement process to be part of passage (attending hearings, calling council members to educate them on the issues and the community support, etc.).</li> <li>▪ Stay involved. After solutions passed, engage the participants in tracking implementation.</li> </ul>