

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING ADVOCACY

## HOW TO:

## SPEAK IN PUBLIC ABOUT AFFORDABLE HOUSING

### GOALS

- Build credibility and trust as the representative of the affordable housing development
- Build support and enthusiasm
- Neutralize opposition

### KEY TECHNIQUES

- Do not read from prepared statement, but speak conversationally
- Address known problems, do not minimize or sidestep expressed concerns
- Do not “oversell” or inflate claimed benefits

## Effective Preparation is a Strategic Advantage

An effective strategy is to speak to particular audience’s interests. Do your homework and learn as much as you can about the group prior to your presentation. Try to present your project in ways that demonstrate “common ground,” that is, areas of shared interest. This can be done a number of ways:

- **Demonstrate how affordable housing can be a local community asset** by eliminating blight, providing local jobs, bringing federal and state funds, providing community amenities and so forth.
- **Explain how professional property management** (including tenant screening and leases) **prevents crime** and protects neighboring property values.
- **Show the broad range of types of qualifying residents;** express need by typical jobs residents may hold. Provide examples of successful results for residents of affordable housing developments such as educational and employment achievements
- **Be prepared to talk about known controversies** and present available facts on contested issues. Also come with examples of existing developments which demonstrate the common experience that feared impacts did not actually occur.
- **Demonstrate that nearby communities are “doing their share”** (if true).

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## Bring Along Helpful Materials and Additional Support

It is helpful to be well-equipped with materials and support during presentations. Presenters should be able to provide factual information on issues such as design, density, crime, traffic, and parking. Also photos, models and videos can be particularly effective in conveying the benefits of affordable housing. If it is possible, provide:

- Successful examples of affordable housing in the local area;
- Before and after shots of affordable housing developments;
- Older buildings that are well-maintained and people living in buildings as their home.

Testimonials are another effective strategy. Testimonials should come from trusted or non-interested parties on local impacts such as neighbors, police, business, former opponents, good press, and other “authorities.”

## Follow Up

After a presentation, it is important to follow up. This can be done by organizing a housing tour; getting back to unanswered questions; providing local/regional resources.

- Attached is a helpful chart summarizing the “Do’s” and “Don’ts” for effective public speaking.

## DONT'S

- Don't try to convince each person of the total truth and righteousness of the cause
- Don't answer each question with your stock response. Listen to the actual question, its nuances and pay attention to the questioner (body language, tone, demeanor)
- Don't give "facts" that you are not sure about.
- Don't contradict the questioner's own experience of local opposition of a particular development
- Don't present yourself as an expert on every issue related to affordable housing
- Don't claim that every affordable housing development is well-designed, professionally managed, contributes to the neighborhood, and works perfectly
- Don't refer vaguely to all developers or all developments
- Don't stop the education with this presentation

## DO'S

- Remember our goals: to provide information, to present a human face, to begin a dialogue and relationship
- Listen to the actual question, its nuances and pay attention to the questioner (body language, tone, demeanor)
- Take time to think about your response if necessary
- Probe the questioner if you suspect there's a question behind the question. e.g. "Does your concern/question come out of a particular experience you've had?"
- Acknowledge the query as a factual question about which you'll need to find more information
- Promise to get back to the person and be sure to follow up
- Put the experience in context
- Acknowledge that you aren't familiar with all of the facts of that situation
- Acknowledge that developers (like everyone else) do make mistakes sometimes
- Explicitly acknowledge the complexity and long history of the field
- Give yourself permission to say, "That's a good question. I don't know the answer now."
- Acknowledge that the affordable housing movement has learned many lessons over the past decade, including on the importance of good design and quality management
- Acknowledge that not all developers have the same level of experience, expertise and funding to do everything they and the community might want them to do
- Explain that groups such as EBHO are trying to continually improve the work of housing developers
- Speak from your own experience and about particular developments that you know
- At every opportunity encourage them to go on a housing tour as the best way to understand affordable housing