

ACTION SUGGESTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO SUPPORT CONTEMPORARY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

I. CREATING A BETTER ENVIRONMENT FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

a. Education and establishing the facts

- Educate yourself and your staff about the need for affordable housing, the existing stock of affordable housing in your community, and its benefits;
- Encourage and assist your colleagues to educate themselves (elected and appointed officials, planning staff, legal counsel, police, etc.);
- Initiate and support education of the public and other key players (e.g. civic organizations and media representatives) about contemporary affordable housing;
- Prepare to succinctly and persuasively state the community benefits of affordable housing to stakeholders, voters, and the media.

b. Putting your own house in order

- Conduct a “following up” study to document the actual impacts and benefits of affordable housing in your community; publicize the findings broadly;
- Take necessary steps to address any actual problems with the existing stock.

c. Networking/building support

- Initiate and support inter-governmental (e.g. city and county) and inter-departmental (e.g. planning department and housing/community development department) collaboration on affordable housing, especially in procuring funding (e.g. support continued and additional state and federal funding as well as initiate a local funding source);
- Initiate and support community partnerships/alliances among stakeholders (e.g. chambers of commerce, environmentalists, faith congregations, etc.)

d. Policy work

- Based on the education and facts, establish affordable housing policy priorities (e.g. which populations and types of housing are most critical and what funding sources are needed);
- Initiate and support reform of zoning ordinances, planning codes, and housing policy to comply with federal and state fair housing laws and to promote affordable housing (e.g. streamline funding and land use approval process, identify and rezone sites for multi-family, adopt density bonus and inclusionary zoning programs, etc.)
- Establish and enforce professional management policies and standards through regulatory agreements and management plans;
- Make activities related to dealing with local opposition (e.g. community education, community organizing, redesign fees, additional staff time) eligible for pre-development funds.

II. ASSISTING APPROVAL OF MERITORIOUS AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

e. While a development is being planned

- Assist affordable housing developers and advocates in developing a meritorious proposal which fulfills community needs;
- Assist affordable housing developers and advocates in anticipating potential opposition and in organizing potential support;
- Initiate and encourage community partnerships/alliances among stakeholders to support the proposal; recommend best approaches and contacts; link less experienced developers and advocates with more experienced local agencies.

f. During period of controversy before public hearings

- Support the affordable housing developer and advocates in constructively engaging opponents and working through legitimate concerns;
- Encourage opponents to visit existing affordable housing developments in their community and “get the facts” before they take a position;
- Make resources available for neutral mediation where useful;
- Stand up to opponents who are acting in bad faith or discriminating;
- Succinctly and persuasively state the community benefits of affordable housing to reassure stakeholders, voters, and the media.

g. At public hearings

- If appropriate, request that the jurisdiction’s legal counsel brief the decision-making body on legal issues involved, especially anti-discrimination law;
- Set (and enforce) ground rules for a civil, reasoned discussion focused on legitimate, substantiated concerns and solutions to community problems;
- Explain the community benefits of the proposal as well as the alternatives and their costs if the proposal is not approved;
- Clarify for public and your colleagues that concerns about broader, previously existing problems that require the jurisdiction’s attention (e.g. overcrowded schools, insufficient public services to a neighborhood) should not warrant denying the proposal;
- Ensure that discriminatory information is not taken into account in decision-making and that discriminatory conditions are not applied in order to mollify opponents;
- Vote in favor of meritorious affordable housing developments.