



# A Community Forum on Affordable Housing

Keeping The Economic Engine Running  
*Solutions for Tomorrow*



## Affordable Housing + *The Community*

### **Issue:**

The introduction of affordable housing into a neighborhood more often than not generates fears and concerns on the part of current residents. Will the affordable housing lower property values, increase crime and contribute to general decline of a neighborhood? On the other hand, introducing housing into a revitalization neighborhood may be the first signs of gentrification, which may force lower income residents out of the neighborhood.

Being fearful of the impact of proposed affordable housing projects on their neighborhoods, residents may host community forums and pack City Council meetings to share their objections regarding the proposed housing development. With the proposal of new affordable housing, residents are often pitted against professional housing developers and professional staff. Both sides talk over each other and not to each other. So, what are the myths and realities concerning the impact of affordable housing on neighborhoods?

### **Charlotte's Response:**

Charlotte has not engaged in a consistent community-wide effort to address community fears and perceptions regarding affordable housing. Locally, the merits of affordable housing development are almost always debated one project at a time.

The City of Charlotte provides some community data to decision makers relative to specific affordable housing development. For new rental housing developments, a Housing Locational Policy provides information that tracks the number of affordable housing units, percentage of multi-family development and areas of low income by neighborhood statistical areas.

The City also provides crime information within 1,000 feet of a proposed development and the impact (numbers) on the school system. Ad-hoc information on surrounding property values has been collected in the past, but no empirical studies have been done locally on the impact of affordable housing on property values. Many of these studies from other communities have indicated that well-planned and managed affordable housing projects have no measurable negative impact on the quality of life in neighborhoods.

In the summer of 2006, the Mayor sponsored an Affordable Housing Roundtable. The group consisted of local affordable housing builders, funders and supporters. The group found that many residents are not aware this community has an affordable housing problem and what could be done about it. The group identified the need to have more local advocacy around the issue and developed a message (*Affordable Housing Touches Everybody Everyday*), identified the message audience as the entire community and decided to form an

advocacy group called *Housing Charlotte's Work*. Members of the group worked on the 2006 Affordable Housing Bond campaign and are involved in the Housing Charlotte 2007 forum.

Notwithstanding the above, the debate surrounding affordable housing in this community revolves around the advocates and developers presenting more affordable housing projects and the residents' fears about the impact of affordable housing projects on their neighborhoods. Both sides can point to previous affordable housing developments that were an asset to a neighborhood or the poster projects for bad results from poorly executed affordable housing in the community. The elected officials, who are the final decision makers, are often tasked with the chore of choosing between the two sides – affordable housing versus resident concerns.

#### **Other Communities' Response:**

Many cities, counties, states and organizations have taken a more proactive approach to addressing the myths of affordable housing. Some of the ideas used by other communities are:

- Market the idea of affordable housing:
  - Demonstrate to a community the economic as well as social benefits of providing affordable housing;
  - Educate the public on the need for workforce housing;
  - Spread the word about affordable housing success stories through local media coverage and opinion pieces; and

- Build a local constituency to serve as an advocate for affordable housing.<sup>1</sup>
- Advocate for affordable housing:
  - 1,000 Friends of Florida, a non-profit organization, has advocated for inclusionary housing policies in the State of Florida. The group has prepared research information, provides technical assistance to housing providers and works to change local housing policies and laws that prevent development of affordable housing.<sup>2</sup>
  - Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California advocates state-wide for more inclusive housing policies. The group conducts research, provides technical assistance and lobbies on behalf of affordable housing. The group has advocated for statewide ballot initiatives. It was instrumental in helping pass the Housing and Emergency Housing Trust Fund initiative.<sup>3</sup>
  - Housing Development Consortium is a nonprofit trade association dedicated to promoting and facilitating the visibility, quality, sustainability and effectiveness of affordable housing by its nonprofit members, primarily throughout Seattle and King County. Created in 1988, its members have preserved over 16,000 units of affordable housing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Myerson, Deborah, [Best Practices in Production of Affordable Housing](#), Urban Land Institute, Number 3, March 2005.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.1000friendsofflorida.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nonprofithousing.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.housingconsortium.org>