Housing Hurdles: Strategies for Combating Public Opposition to Affordable Housing in Carver County

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Housing Hurdles

Strategies for Combating Public Opposition to Affordable Housing in Carver County
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Introduction

Affordable housing is often the most controversial component of any housing program or plan. For many cities and states, the mere mention of affordable housing projects or efforts can result in vibrant opposition from stakeholders of all political hues. The reasons for this opposition are varied, from environmental concerns to economic concerns to social concerns.

Crucial to the success of any affordable housing policy or development is the acknowledgement that public opinion counts. Understanding the roots of public opposition towards such policies and developments, when it occurs, is crucial to addressing such opposition. Successful city efforts across the country have come from success on two fronts:

1) An honest and true judgment of where and why public opposition to an affordable housing development exists, and
2) Acknowledgement and effective addressing of public opposition points that either offer room for compromise or change opposition minds regarding a given project.

In the Carver CDA’s case, public opposition to affordable housing was crystallized by such websites as www.mycarver.org, a website built specifically in opposition to the Carver Crossroads development. Citing potential rises in crime and depreciation in property values of “$10,000-$25,000,” the website is demonstrative of common opposition points. In the context of such opposition, effective engagement can be a daunting challenge. However, strategies applied across the country provide relevant and applicable lessons for Carver.

This addendum seeks to provide a brief summary of strategies for public opposition points relevant to the Carver CDA. Opposition points to be addressed include the colloquially-known NIMBYism (“not in my backyard”) -type opposition and more formal economic opposition points. Strategies and approaches highlighted in this addendum can be modified to fit local needs and are meant to provide the basis for future public engagement efforts revolving around Carver County’s future affordable housing needs, as highlighted in the June 2014 Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment for Carver County, Minnesota, published by Maxfield Research, Inc.
NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) Opposition

NIMBYism is a reaction many cities are familiar with, especially when it comes to facets of community as fundamental as housing. In particular, as a type of opposition, NIMBYism requires outreach and engagement efforts by city and county officials that go beyond debating facts. The North Carolina Housing Coalition (NCHC) highlights the reflexive nature of NIMBYism that may relate to the ongoing tensions in Carver County,

“NIMBYism involves more than just an attitude, however. It is a collective protest in response to perceived threats about the social character or the potential impact on property values of a proposed affordable housing development.” (NCHC, 2008).

However, examples abound nationally of city-specific successes and of strategies that have proven useful for cities in addressing public NIMBY-related concerns. In particular, advocacy organizations and other third parties have proven to be useful allies in efforts to build more affordable housing. Particularly with regards to NIMBYism, advocacy organizations have played an integral part in supporting city and county efforts and articulating useful strategies.

Safety and Crime

Considerations of safety and crime are one of the most frequent NIMBY-related topics that city planners must address when advocating for affordable housing. Successful strategies and approaches regarding this topic, particularly considering the visceral reactions related to it, emphasize cooperation and engagement with special consideration for the language used in discussing affordable housing.

The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania (HAP), with assistance from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), created a toolkit that collected successful strategies and approaches used to garner greater support for affordable housing efforts.
Grounded in the fact that opposition to affordable housing is often based, “on stereotype and anxiety about the new residents or the units in which they will live,” (HAP, 2004), HAP’s toolkit represents a collection of strategies grounded in successful experiences.

When it comes to NIMBYism, particularly concerns regarding crime and safety, HAP cited multi-pronged strategies that focused on mitigating the impact of misconceptions, asserting the importance of facts, and acknowledging and addressing the very visceral reaction homeowners can have to radical housing changes in their communities (see Figure 1).

Figure 2

A report by the California Planning Roundtable, sponsored by the California Department of Housing and Community Development, echoes a sentiment presented by HAP, attention to the details of a project is a key way of understanding and accommodating the concerns of NIMBY-related opposition (see Figure 2).

In particular, CPR operationalized this idea by mentioning examples of affordable housing initiatives like the 1991 Renaissance housing development effort in Silicon Valley. In this instance, planners were receptive to local concerns about increased traffic and modified local street plans. Elsewhere, where there were concerns of safety and crime related to high density affordable housing development, planners sought out mixed-use and mixed-income alternatives to alleviate such concerns.

A key lesson from these efforts is understanding that even though much academic research has been published dismissing concerns about safety and crime with regards to high-density affordable housing developments, listening to public sentiments with a “tin ear” is a sure way to complicate housing efforts. Particularly with regards to safety and crime, public engagement efforts can be difficult, if only for the highly emotional nature of the topic, but public opinion counts.
Going beyond process-level interactions between proponents and opponents of affordable housing, language plays an outsized role in city planning processes as political as those related to housing. While attention to planning detail is key as CPR emphasizes and empathetic listening of opponent concerns is essential as HAP mentions, leveraging the lexicon of housing politics is a key area where city and county officials can exert influence and frame affordable housing efforts.

In an article written for the Housing Assistance Council’s magazine, *Rural Voices*, Peter Beard of the Fannie Mae Foundation writes of Fannie Mae’s efforts at garnering support for affordable housing by paying particular attention to the language it uses. As research suggests, the language of housing is intimately intertwined with the politics of housing. Beard writes that, “people want to know that the affordable housing community pursues a positive agenda (targeting *challenges*, not *problems*) for a deserving constituency (working families, not welfare families),” (Beard, *Rural Voices*, 2005). Especially when it comes to topics as emotive as safety and crime, racially-coded language or other language that may compel audience bias can be easy to miss by County officials, but can be a rallying cry for opponent groups.

**Character of Neighborhood Concerns**

Current residents of neighborhoods and communities likely to be impacted by city forays into affordable housing development are also likely to cite the character of their surroundings as a key point of apprehension and opposition. Rooted in conceptions of public housing as it was realized in the 70s and 80s in the form of dilapidated buildings that were considered the “cheap, no frills approach” (HAP, 2004), this concern is the product of stubborn, and increasingly inaccurate, stereotypes of affordable housing. Like NIMBY-related concerns regarding safety and crime, concerns regarding the character of impacted neighborhoods is also rooted in more visceral responses not rooted in fact. But concerns regarding *design* of affordable housing and its impact on surrounding communities affords can be addressed and accommodated more easily than concerns relating to safety and crime.

When it comes to design, city planners are uniquely positioned to understand and accommodate the concerns of current residents for an obvious reason, they’re the intermediary between the community and the developer and play an integral role in listening and giving voice to community concerns. In a case study presented by the *Housing Advocacy Catalog*, ARCH (A Regional Coalition for Housing), a nonprofit housing advocacy organization based out of King County, Washington, crystallizes the
importance of listening to residents and the importance of the city planner in making sure they’re heard in the affordable housing development process. (see Figure 3)

Figure 3

In a similar vein, CPR cites that developers and city planners are uniquely well-positioned to address “character of neighborhood”-NIMBYism. Using successful affordable city developments in California as examples, CPR cites “sensitive work by experienced architects” as integral to accommodating design concerns. However, the California Planning Roundtable cites another kind of “character of neighborhood”-NIMBYism beyond affordable housing design; concerns regarding the occupants, themselves. While this has been discussed in limited fashion in the previous section, stereotyping of residents of affordable housing units goes beyond mere safety and crime concerns. Similar to how political conversations have framed welfare recipients in a negative light, residents of affordable housing are similarly stereotyped negatively due to their housing assistance. However, CPR recommends a strategy that has been widely used across cities seeking to pierce the stubborn impressions of opposition groups, “people motivated by these concerns may just need to ‘meet’ the residents of high-density and affordable housing,” (CPR, 1993) (see Figure 4). Operative to dismissing the impression that residents of affordable housing will impact the character of neighborhoods in which they will be placed is acknowledging their stories and engaging communities with their narratives, often narratives similar to community residents’ own.
Benefits of Affordable Housing

The tools needed to implement a successful affordable housing project are already hard enough, however, the community is the bond that can make or break any project. Public opinion of affordable housing will vary depending on who's the one speaking. Though some may still oppose affordable housing, even after trying to be convinced, factually affordable housing brings many benefits to a community. The purpose of the this section is to provide the Carver County CDA tools to counter public opposition of affordable housing. The question we need to start asking ourselves is what comes to mind when “affordable” is said? Is it a moderately priced product or service that is accessible to certain demographics or an ever increasing reality we all hope we never have to face or say?

The public opinion of affordable housing ranges across the spectrum; what is one in a community to do if they can no longer afford housing their own city? Do you just kick them out? Put another way, how would you react to your community expelling you? Hurt, betrayal, “a community?” Are your aging-in-place parents exiled from their own city if their city doesn’t have the means of senior housing? These are all cases that fall under the label “Affordable Housing,” yet some communities in Carver County are still reluctant.

There are many benefits that can come to a community by developing affordable housing; Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) published their key findings from affordable housing that is implemented within a community. They stated the benefits a community may reap, if they chose to pursue a affordable housing project. There are three effects that happen: direct, indirect, and induced effects.
and induced effects (see Figure 5). Direct effects consist of the State’s direct effects on employment, output, and tax revenue when MHFA funding is used. The indirect effects of the funding consist of the inputs needed for the housing industry (drywall, windows, lumber, etc.). Most importantly the induced effects help those needing assistance to generate personal wealth which in turn is spent on good and services (MHFA, 2008). In today’s building market, many basic building materials can be sourced locally in Minnesota furthering this Minnesotan life-cycle effect by keeping the revenue within the state. According to the MHFA, the impact of affordable housing has been calculated with a output calculator of 1.9 in economic output; meaning that for every dollar spend on affordable housing, almost one extra dollar is generated in economic output for the community (MHFA, 2008). Existing communities should consider such an undertaking given the return on investment has proven to be quite substantial. There will be a point at which communities cannot sustain their current budgets and will be faced with ways to generate more local revenue to maintain upkeep of the city services. Property taxes can only be manipulated so much before property owners may soon reconsider their housing options given their input revenue versus output effect.

Carver County communities need to be prepared for the future change in housing needs. Chaska has seen, and is currently addressing, the demand for more affordable housing units for their residents. Many suburban neighborhoods are nearing 60-70 years of age and reinvestment within the community is now the tool of survival. An example of this reinvestment can be found in the northern suburb of St. Anthony Village. This “village” is a small inner-ring city, bordering northeast Minneapolis and Roseville, is a “sliver-of-a-city” in consideration of the metro area; however, this predominantly white aging-in-place community needed to address the problems of a dying community. In St. Anthony Villages’ sustainability plan, they address that their housing has already completing a full “suburban life cycle” compelling a redevelopment of the housing stock. The metropolitan council determined that only 45% of the City of St. Anthony’s rental housing was considered affordable (CSAV, 2012). The most notable change to the city was their redevelopment of the old Apache Plaza Mall, which housed one of the largest pieces of abandoned land in the city. The city created a
Planned Unit Development (PUD) to replace the old Apache Plaza with the new mixed-use Silver Lake Village PUD; providing an array of different housing options for the residents of the city as well as the surrounding neighborhoods. Silver Lake Village created a civic center for the city of St. Anthony while incorporating mixed-income development. As shown in Figure 6, you can see there are three residential phases which were built; the cottage townhomes on the corner of Stinson Blvd and 39th St, the Landings mixed-income development, and the Legacy senior housing development.

In order for a PUD to succeed, there needs to be three components: residential community, main street commercial core, and lastly a ‘third place’ beyond work and home for interaction, in this case a park (Tombari, 2010). In the case for Carver County, a PUD or redevelopment project can be more than housing. St. Anthony Village once was like the City of Carver before urbanization colonized the village. Carver County should not rule out the inner ring suburb approach to address affordable housing simply because they don’t “compare or relate.” Affordable housing can be more than just housing for a community. It can bring a sense of place and purpose back into a city that has seen little fluctuation in housing stock.

The fiscal benefits of affordable housing can be immediately reaped for any community who pursues this redevelopment. According to a review of literature done by the Center for Housing Policy, the redevelopment in St. Anthony Village generated an immediate revenue for the local municipality as well as the state. For instance, 100 Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) units serving families roughly generates $827,000 in one-time fees; senior housing of that type generating $768,000. Figure 7 shows the percentage breakdown of fees for an average 100 unit LIHTC project, with permit/impact fees accounting for the largest portion at 37 percent (Hauge, Williams, & Wardrip, 2011). Carver County should be mindful to consider that these one-time fees provide economic incentives for cities to charge more. If one-time fees increase to an unsustainable level for developers to build, those developers may seek opportunity in the surrounding neighborhoods. In the review of literature conducted by the Center for Housing Policy, three researchers, Hangen, Williams, and Wardrip, analyzed the development and
redevelopment of 582 affordable homes in Rhode Island. With there being $25 million in housing bond funds, “the authors estimated the state funding leveraged $231 million in investments. ... The total economic activity increased the state’s revenue by $16.7 million during the development” (Hauge, Williams, & Wardrip, 2011).

Carver County communities can have a sustainable, and expanding, fiscal bottom line from affordable housing development. If an affordable housing project was built, that community would also see fiscal benefits in their own local economy with more disposable income present within the community. The fiscal benefit of affordable housing is more than just the one-time fees; communities have opportunities to continually invest within their own city when an increase of tax revenue and disposable income is an induced effect.

**Surrounding Communities’ Action**

The surrounding communities that are most notable bordering the City of Carver are Chaska, Cologne, and Shakopee. Chaska and Cologne are more representative of the Carver County community, and have shown positive results from their affordable housing development programs. What neighboring cities should be mindful of is the competing marketplace for more affordable housing for all ages. If Carver County communities are trying to limit their amount of “affordable housing needs,” what’s to stop a neighboring city from indirectly impacting that community? Some communities in Carver County have already reacted to a very high-priced rental market by implementing affordable housing options for all age groups. The Carver County CDA must educate communities about the competitive housing marketplace and consider their own city policies with relation to their future sustainability in that marketplace.

The housing needs for Carver County communities vary, to an extent, but all have a recurring point- these communities need more housing. A report published by Maxfield Research, Inc., *Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment for Carver County, Minnesota*, assessed the housing needs for the Carver County CDA by accessing the current conditions and projections that will be needed. Figure 8 shows the breakdown of rental units from 2014-2020,
Carver County is projecting to add 2,200 units given the market demand for rental housing. In particular, 908 of those units is specified to be senior rental accounting for just over forty percent of the rental housing needed. The Carver communities must address this demand in a smart growth manner to ensure the development’s success. Making the potential development a part of the community is what scares and excites residents the most; a smart growth approach will successfully integrate mixed-income development with commercial, civic development whilst incorporating a third space to bring residents together (many times park space) (Tombari, 2010). Chaska and Waconia have been implementing this rental housing innovatively with projects such as Carver Ridge Townhomes, Crosstown Commons, Cloverfield Marketplace, Interlaken Place, adding up to 700 units in Carver county in 2014, alone.

The City of Carver is an interesting case given its ideal location and valuable potential in Carver County. Currently, the city has approved the development of Carver Crossings which is set to open summer of 2016. Before Carver Crossings, the City of Carver’s only affordable housing complex was Bluff Creek. This city faces much opposition from community members when affordable housing is presented making the area a taboo place to develop in. The Comprehensive Housing Assessment for Carver County, Minnesota housing study report forecasted the housing demands for Carver Counties CDA and specified what the City of Carver housing demand could be from 2014-2040 (see Figure 9). The report projected the city needed to build 5,010 more housing units, 4,270 of which are owner-occupied, leaving roughly 550 rental units project for Senior Adult rental and Affordable/Market rate rental (MRI, 2014). In short, the City of Carver is projected to allocate roughly a third of each, senior, affordable, and market rate rental units. Though the surrounding communities have barred the weight of affordable housing units, the City of Carver can no longer shut out affordable housing projects within their community.
The Carver County CDA should convey to opposing communities what cases of affordable housing look and sound like. For instance, if community members wish to live in a Carver community, but have aged out of their sustained income and home, where are they going to live? Is there affordable housing for all age groups? Carver communities need to be mindful that they must think about their current community (and surrounding communities) when addressing affordable housing. The reality these cities face is that any neighboring community could indirectly impact one another with an affordable housing project right across city boundaries. Those neighboring communities would benefit from control over the affordable housing unit as well as the economic incentives. In order to compete with the surrounding communities, all Carver communities must plan affordable housing units to serve the need of the surrounding community while being able to have control over the site.

Carver County has great market potential to compete with the surrounding counties for different housing options. Chaska and Shakopee drive a great deal of business traffic making Carver County a potential candidate when potential residents are searching for housing. With all this potential, it’s up to the Carver County CDA to assert the social and economic importance of affordable housing and leverage its role as a conversation-framer to bring opponents to the table.
References


