

Building Support for a Full Range of Housing Choices Talking Points

Talk about improving the community.

The most effective messages about housing are not about housing: they are about the benefits of a healthy, vital community to the people already living there and to new community residents". Whatever we do to improve our housing stock, we must maintain the current character of the community, and build on our assets. Here's how proposal X would do that.

- ✓ Our community is a good place to live and work. As we decide what, where and how to build, we want to keep up and improve our property values, maintain and build up our social and community participation, and take care of our parks, schools and other local advantages and amenities. Here's how proposal Y would do that.

Talk about opportunity, and building for the future.

Changes in regional transportation systems, in demographics, in the aging of local housing stock, and in economic conditions have to be considered in developing a better mix of housing choices.

- ✓ Protecting the investment we have in our homes requires new solutions, for economic development, transportation, and housing.
- ✓ We have specific opportunity in {land use, in transportation, in existing developments} and we can reap rewards from the opportunity by improving the mix of housing choices.
- ✓ Young people are the future of any community: would you like your children to be able to find a place to live here if they chose to?

Talk about life cycles and neighborhood change.

- ✓ A strong range of places to live allows young families to stay or move to town, older people to stay near friends and family, people just starting out to build assets toward home ownership.
- ✓ This is this community's current housing stock: This is how specific neighborhood has changed/ is changing in the years ahead: Let's look at ways to manage our mix of housing to meet our near and longer term needs.

Talk about the housing market.

- ✓ The collapse of the housing bubble and the on-going foreclosure crisis demonstrate the importance, for everyone's economic security, of a balanced housing market, with a mix of prices and types of homes.
- ✓ The market isn't working when it forces too many people out. Imagine a supermarket that only sells caviar and steak – for many working Minnesotans, that's what the

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housing market looks like. By increasing the variety and range of supply, in ways that meet current and future demand, we strengthen the housing market and strengthen our community.

- ✓ The market for new homes is changing: more and more of the demand will be for smaller, more efficient and conveniently located homes, targeted to young professionals, empty nesters and active seniors.

Be specific about “affordability.”

The phrase “affordable housing” should not be used as a stand in: be specific about cost points and incomes.

- ✓ The people who work in {local examples: retail mall, public school, health services, City services, major employer} earn a range of salaries, approximately \$X-XX. The homes in our community require on average an annual household income of \$XXX. Many of the people who work in our community cannot find a decent place to live here that they can afford. Project Z will attract housing units for people earning \$X-XX, working in jobs such as....

Talk about prosperity, vitality and economic competitiveness.

- ✓ When people spend too much of their income on trying to maintain a home, they have less for other necessities, and they and their children are kept in a state of economic insecurity. And the community as a whole deals with the instability and costs associated with homelessness, poverty and economic stagnation. We need to develop a range of housing choices, so that our residents can be full participants in the local community and its economic life.
- ✓ When employees travel long distances to work because they can’t afford to live close to their job, employers (provide anecdotes if available) pay the cost of recruitment and retention of workers, and lost productivity due to travel, while the community pays the cost of traffic congestion, road maintenance and time lost to commuting. A full range of housing choices builds our economic vitality, and competitiveness for attracting and keeping employers.
- ✓ As we develop new, more efficient travel options in the region, and work to keep energy costs down, we need a mix of housing that includes conveniently located, smaller homes with easy access to shopping, transportation and community amenities. (NOTE: “density” is not an objective or a value – talk about convenience and access, efficiency and choices, not density.)

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Talk about public participation, and be prepared to listen.

The political landmine in proposing more housing choices is the perception that solutions are being imposed on a community, especially from the outside. Leaders who lead – who engage the community in a discussion that is framed around what is best for current homeowners, for the community, and for new residents, will succeed.

- ✓ The people who live and work in this community are invested in its future, and its continuing success. We need to think together about our community's problems and opportunities, and bring neighbors together to guide decisions about what, where and how to build.
- ✓ We need information about the current status of our housing stock and policies, changes underway and that can be anticipated, and what the members of the community envision for our shared future.
- ✓ The decisions we make will be better if we get all the options on the table, and have a public process that allows people to engage in constructive, respectful dialogue.

Engage other community interests – this is not just a discussion between political leaders and property owners, but among all community interests. Find ways to bring in employers, faith leaders, school administrators, and others. Many such interests, especially employers, may be unwilling to advocate for a specific proposal, but can be important participants in a community process.

Talk about examples of other communities' successes.

Identify and portray as vividly as possible projects and communities that faced similar conditions and opportunities, and took positive action to increase the range of housing choices.

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