Why the Coalition?

The need for this coalition was identified in the 2008 Regional Housing Conference. At the time, it was determined that the affordability of housing in our community was an issue that needed more public attention. In the intervening years, housing has taken on an even greater sense of urgency. The message of the coalition is that an adequate supply of decent and affordable housing intersects with each of our community’s aspirations. A healthy housing supply truly is the foundation of community prosperity.

The Coalition consists of non-profit housing organizations, private developers, community foundations, local housing committees, and others. We are aligned in the mission of pointing the spotlight on our diverse housing needs and seeking a more favorable regulatory environment and funding support for safe, decent, and affordable housing.

Overview

Affordability Comparison

Economic Development

Public Health

Educational Opportunity

Transportation

Accessibility

Overview

Affordability Comparison

Economic Development

Public Health

Educational Opportunity

Transportation

Accessibility

Why the Coalition?

The need for this coalition was identified in the 2008 Regional Housing Conference. At the time, it was determined that the affordability of housing in our community was an issue that needed more public attention. In the intervening years, housing has taken on an even greater sense of urgency. The message of the coalition is that an adequate supply of decent and affordable housing intersects with each of our community’s aspirations. A healthy housing supply truly is the foundation of community prosperity.

The Coalition consists of non-profit housing organizations, private developers, community foundations, local housing committees, and others. We are aligned in the mission of pointing the spotlight on our diverse housing needs and seeking a more favorable regulatory environment and funding support for safe, decent, and affordable housing.

When the health of a community is compromised, the health of the individuals within it also suffers. A lack of housing options or livable neighborhoods impacts public health in a number of ways. High housing costs take away from necessary food and health care expenses in the household budget. Home instability leads to stress and a fragmented health care provider relationship. Finally, a poor quality home or neighborhood can lead directly to health consequences, as well diminished personal identity and disrupted familial relationships.

In recent years, national attention has been turned to preventative actions that may alleviate the health care cost burden we share as a society. Proactively supporting a housing supply that meets the needs of all citizens could prevent more serious expenses from arising in the future - not to mention enhancing our quality of life.

“When health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

– World Health Organization, New York 1946

“It is important to acknowledge the important and complex roles that housing and neighbourhood design play in public and children’s health and to promote systematic inclusion of health in the design of housing, housing technology and the urban and regional planning processes.”

– World Health Organization, Geneva 2002
Making Hard Budgetary Decisions

Every family must sit around the kitchen table to figure out how to keep spending in line with income. Those with limited incomes may respond to rising housing costs by making cuts to other essentials such as food or health care.

Housing Costs

Providing shelter is the single largest expense for families. Although it has historically hovered around 30% of expenditures, the proportion rose between 2000 and 2012. Low income families spend an even higher proportion of their income on housing. For many, housing costs are the most fixed of all. If sacrifices are necessary, other items will be squeezed first.

Food Costs

Although the proportion of income families spend on food has dropped dramatically over the years, products with high nutritional content generally still cost more. Families with housing cost burdens may choose lower-quality foods or less food quantity to make ends meet. Doctors in Boston found that children of low-income families that lacked housing subsidies were 50 percent more likely to be iron deficient than children in comparable families that received housing subsidies.

Health Care Costs

There is evidence to suggest that families avoid health insurance because of high housing costs. One study found that, even among the same low income group, the uninsured spent $88 more per quarter on housing than the insured.

The following chart depicts the contents of the average household budget in the United States. Very low income means households in the bottom quintile of the income range.

The Average Distribution of U.S. Household Expenditures

Source: BLS 2007 Consumer Expenditure Survey
“The availability of affordable housing shapes families’ choices about where they live, often relegating lower-income families to substandard housing in neighborhoods with higher rates of poverty and crime and fewer health promoting resources.”

– Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Commission to Build a Healthier America

Where we spend our time …

| in our own home | Inside elsewhere | outside |

Forced by Price into Substandard Housing

Without an affordable option for decent housing, those on the lower end of the income spectrum may have no choice but to occupy substandard housing. Although our country has seen remarkable improvements in housing standards, unhealthy homes are still a problem. In 2011, there were still 411 homes in our region with incomplete plumbing facilities. There are many potential health risks associated with poor housing.

- Lead paint poisoning can stunt brain development.
- Poor ventilation or pests can lead to molds and other allergens.
- Extreme cold or heat can trigger health risks.
- Unsafe construction leads to injuries.
- Various carcinogens can be present in homes.

Forced by Price into Long Commutes

Housing costs may compel some workers in search of more affordable options to drive from outside of the region to their workplace. While this may seem to be a feasible solution for many, there are health costs involved. Automobile commutes have been linked to high blood pressure and stress levels, particularly during rush hour, which is a contributing factor for many health problems. Constant road vibrations and sitting in the same position for a long time are bad for the neck and spine, as well as the musculatory system. Long commutes of over an hour have been linked to sleep disorders, and sedentary forms of commuting leave less time available for exercise or physical therapy. Some families may choose to trade a long commute for other lifestyle preferences, but others are priced out of more convenient locations by a lack of housing options.

Forced by Price into Overcrowding

“Doubling up” into a home with extended family and friends is another way some have sought to meet their housing needs on a tight budget. This has became common around the country as a result of the economic downturn, with an 11.6% increase in extended family households between 2008 and 2009.

This can be a healthy living environment, but crowding into an excessively small space, usually defined as more than one person per room, may lead to sanitary and mental health problems. A lack of space has been known to strain relationships and lead to stress for individuals, possibly attributed to lack of sleep or concentration. Persons living in a crowded household may also be more exposed to infectious disease. Not all health experts agree on the extent of this problem, but many residents themselves have reported stress due to tight living quarters.
Housing and Personal Identity

Although the intersections between mental health and housing may be less quantifiable than purely physical outcomes, there is evidence that an occupant’s sense of self and psychological condition are greatly influenced by his or her home. One survey of middle-income Americans found that the house “seemed to be a powerful symbol of order, continuity, physical safety, and a sense of place or physical belonging.” Likewise, those who are insecure in their housing because of a lack of affordability express feelings of insecurity throughout all of life. One study evaluated low-income women who received help from a non-profit to move from inadequate housing into their own home. Psychological testing of the participants revealed less worry for their children and a greater overall sense of wellbeing as a result of the change.

A Platform for Health Care Delivery

Living in a stable home can greatly enhance ongoing health care provision for the elderly or those with chronic health conditions. One study showed that patients with HIV/AIDS who were given housing assistance were four times as likely to receive adequate medical care than those who were not assisted. The same pattern likely applies to anyone in need of scheduled and persistent medical attention.