



Guide to TCHousingPolicy.org Website

This website is premised upon the notion that the Twin Cities metro area will suffer as a region if it fails to come to grips with the ever increasing gap between the need for affordable housing and the supply. As a community we must look to new strategies in order to make significant progress in closing this gap. We believe:

- Part of the solution is greater involvement by cities in fostering affordable housing production.
- To make progress toward closing the affordable housing gap, more public subsidy is needed, but also more effective city policies.
- Those cities which are most successful in promoting balanced housing patterns combine a political commitment to affordable housing with the aggressive use of a range of tools to facilitate production.
- Since all metro cities are now in the process of producing new comprehensive plans, this creates a once-in-a-decade opportunity to raise the bar on the quality of affordable housing planning throughout the region.

One major goal of this website is to shine a spotlight on the role of cities—how have they been doing in meeting housing goals, what practices have hindered housing development and what have helped, and what are the most promising underutilized practices that cities can look to in order to meet future goals. The information is organized in three categories, each consisting of a page linking to a number of articles:

- The section on **Understanding the Need** provides background. Articles cover what is meant by affordable housing, who is in need of such housing, and how large the current and anticipated future need is. Articles also explain state law affordable housing planning requirements, and how well cities are doing in meeting current goals while planning for future benchmarks.
- The section on **Potential Solutions** highlights best practices available to cities, many of which are underutilized. An article on Barrier Removal discusses city practices that impede affordable housing development or drive up costs. Another article covers proactive policies cities can use, such as Inclusionary Zoning, where cities offer developers incentives for including affordable units in their developments. Also featured are articles on how cities can contribute local resources to make these deals work, and on the importance of local policies that help preserve existing housing and ensure long term affordability.

- The section on **Act Locally** provides extensive data on each metro city—how they are doing on meeting current Livable Communities Act (LCA) housing goals, demographic information, what practices they have used to promote affordable housing, what barriers they've encountered, and what goals they've been assigned for the future. The summary results of a recent Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) survey of local officials is also included, providing a big-picture view of how city staff throughout the region see the barriers and opportunities to creating more low cost housing.

We anticipate that visitors to this website may use the information for a variety of needs, but there is one in particular we had in mind. All metro area cities must revise their comprehensive plans and submit them to the Metropolitan Council by 2008. Those plans must include a housing element that covers the city's strategy for achieving its share of the regional need for affordable housing. We now have a once-in-a-decade opportunity to get the best housing planning in place, and we believe that advocacy by local citizens with city officials provides one of the best ways to accomplish that. The information on this website was designed to give citizens everything they need to make their case at city hall.

Note that we view this website as an evolving source of information, in which we will be adding additional information as further research is conducted. We welcome all comments and suggestions.

There's one final point we'd like to make. Much of the emphasis on this website is on suburban local governments, for several reasons. It may not be widely understood, but the majority of the households who need low cost housing live in the suburbs. That's where most of the developable land is located. It is also where most of the job growth is projected to take place, with much of that growth representing relatively low wage jobs. Finally, basic fairness dictates a greater emphasis on these communities; in the past, the bulk of the region's low cost housing has been found in central city neighborhoods, contributing to the region's concentration of poverty and lack of housing choice. If we can create more balanced housing patterns, the entire region is better off.