



ENGAGING NEIGHBORHOODS FOR A MORE

Affordable Houston

This study was executed and prepared by





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An aerial photograph of a city skyline, featuring numerous skyscrapers and a highway interchange in the foreground. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text 'Executive Summary' is centered in the middle of the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Executive Summary



Houston is a city of constant, dynamic change and is hailed as a city of opportunity. Tens of thousands of people have moved to Houston in the past decade, and this explosive growth is creating pressures on systems and infrastructure across the region.

This includes the housing market.

Costs for safe, quality homes in Houston have been steadily rising, and development has increased and extended across the city to meet this demand.

Houston's historically working-class neighborhoods are becoming more expensive. If not addressed, waves of economic displacement will ripple outward from the Loop to the Beltway and beyond.

Preserving and developing affordable homes is essential to Houston's economic wellbeing. A displaced essential workforce will sap economic productivity and stress families.

This research project identifies best practices for effective messaging and engagement strategies to gain community support for affordable homes. In its entirety, this report will serve as a guide for the City of Houston, developers, nonprofits, small business owners, activists, and community members to use when speaking about affordable home developments.

Houston needs greater investment and engagement to preserve affordable home options and to develop new home options in neighborhoods across the city.

The challenge is these investments encounter many hurdles on the path to approval, usually resulting from a lack of information or even misinformation about a given affordable home development or the type of residents each development is designed to serve.

Poorly designed messaging approaches can backfire, with the use of consumerist or shaming language often leading to resentment instead of consensus. Shallow, check-the-box engagement triggers cynicism and doubt when residents feel their concerns are being ignored. Messaging solely about systemic or broad arguments - instead of acknowledging local concerns and contexts - talks past the needs of local residents, and misses opportunities to build coalitions of support.

This lack of trust or understanding actually helps opposition to affordable homes to take root. Missteps by previous developers or local government agencies have created a climate of skepticism, making it more difficult to earn support for current efforts and the many positive impacts and outcomes affordable homes can help create.

Overcoming these hurdles is possible when developers, agency staff, nonprofits, and advocates are willing to listen to existing residents and invest in effective engagement to leverage neighborhood support.

This research project consisted of three phases – a **literature review**, **partner and expert interviews**, and **six focus groups** with residents in neighborhoods across Houston.

The **literature review** was national in scope, evaluating how different municipalities have responded to looming unaffordability, and explored existing recommendations on messaging in support of affordable homes. The **partner interviews** gathered insights from nonprofit organizations, developers, agency staff, advocates, and service providers across Houston. The **focus groups** explored the opinions and responses of Houston residents to affordable home policies, the quality of construction, the people who live in affordable homes, and the participants’ levels of civic engagement. The focus groups also evaluated messaging content for their relative applicability and effectiveness in a Houston-specific context.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

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Findings from the research indicate there are three core aspects to effective engagement:

What to Say – the best content practices and messaging to earn support for affordable homes

How to Say It – the effective frames and situational interactions with individuals and neighborhoods

Who to Say It To – how to identify and engage supporters (and local media) for each development.

This document is meant to be a resource for those interested in leading local conversations and engagement to support quality, affordable homes in Houston. The document outlines researched messaging frameworks and provides neighborhood stakeholders with foundational guides and resources.



Key Findings

KEY FINDINGS

What to Say

Effective communication starts by understanding the sources of opposition to affordable homes. The research demonstrates how some opposition is rooted in the lack of information or a lack of understanding, which can be overcome through effective messaging, while other opposition is rooted in deeper motivations or mindsets and is therefore much more intractable.

There are no silver bullet statements to instantly win support for affordable homes. Instead, each affordable development requires a specific messaging and engagement plan for the neighborhood where it will be located.

The following are found to be effective communication strategies:

Learn how to LISTEN. Everyone in a neighborhood has the right to be heard, and it's the responsibility of development leaders to take the feedback into account as affordable homes move towards approval. Negativity cannot be met with negativity. Striking a positive contrast will provide cover for fair-minded neighbors to accept the new homes and their eventual new neighbors.

Share information about the nature of the development. Change will usually raise neighborhood concerns. Provide neighbors with details about the size of the project, who the people are who will live there, the benefits for the local neighborhood, and the potential impact on property values.

Facts are not enough. Data and statistics without appropriate context and framing can be counterproductive or have no effect at all. Instead, find the right frame for each development. The research demonstrates how metaphors and values-based messaging are the most effective approaches to overcoming opposition and encouraging proponents to more actively support affordable home developments.

Define affordable homes as a broad benefit to neighborhoods, and for everyone involved. Instead of solely focusing on individual narratives of those who will benefit from access to affordable homes, make the issue more relatable by painting a larger picture of the families, neighbors, and businesses who stand to benefit.

Offer short, crisp, and truthful explanations of development intentions and outcomes. Opposition can take root when intentions are unclear.

Share accurate and concise presentations to earn neighborhood support, and forestall negative misperceptions.

Avoid consumerist language. Outline the systemic issues causing the need for affordable homes and pivot away from narratives which trigger or enable negativity. Reject any consumerist language painting the potential residents of affordable homes as irresponsible or having made poor choices in life leading to them not be able to afford market-rate homes.

Address concern. Ameliorate opposition by speaking – truthfully – to neighborhood concerns about the quality of potential structures and the people who will become their new neighbors.

How to Say It

A proactive and positive engagement strategy can rally support for proposed affordable homes. Engaged residents of the affected neighborhood will stand in support of new affordable homes make the process much easier at every step of the way.

Map the local landscape. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for engaging Houston neighborhoods. The diversity, demographics, income, education, and density varies from neighborhood to neighborhood, and in some instances, from block to block. Identify and engage local associations, civic clubs, churches, businesses, and other leaders to foster opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Build Trust. Without trust, developers and partners are much more likely to experience pushback. To earn neighborhood trust, messengers must continuously be clear, honest, and transparent on the goals and intentions for the homes. Visibility and simple language not only ensures neighborhood understanding but allows one to more effectively engage with diverse members who make up the entire neighborhood.

Engage local media. News outlets and reporters can act as an essential intermediary for the neighborhood. Create a media toolkit to send to partners, news outlets, and supporters to help spread the facts and key information about the development. The toolkit should make the situation surrounding the affordable homes as specific, simple, and straightforward as possible.

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Storytelling works. The literature review and expert interviews revealed how the term “affordable housing” is unfortunately often associated with “dangerous” and “lazy” inhabitants. To counter this misperception, illustrate the personal stories of the future neighbors who will be living there, making sure to do so in the context of the complex systems creating the need for affordable homes.

Stay positive (and honest). Opposition is inevitable, and developments can fail by triggering resentments when ignoring local concerns or misleading local residents. Offering rationales framed through inclusive and beneficial frameworks is far more effective than reductive or scarcity based frameworks.

Use stories and images to promote affordable homes. Putting a human face on the future will not drive developments to approval on their own, but can help prevent gaps of information or trust from escalating into overt opposition or “otherism.”

Informal conversations and personal connections are more effective than formal meetings. Informal meetings tend to work much better to assuage concerns and encourage undecided residents and supporters to be more actively involved. This provides space for more resident questions as well as provides the opportunity for residents to hear their neighbors discuss why affordable home developments are positive for their neighborhood. It also counteracts the “us versus them” mentality which can ferment once barriers are formed in more rigidly structured meetings.



Leverage local media coverage into social media engagement. Effective engagement will bring the “silent, supportive majority” to the table, and make it easier for projects to gain municipal approval.

Who Say it To

Earning support starts with understanding the various people and leaders who drive opinion in each neighborhood. Supporters of affordable homes can identify these local leaders who can then expand the reach of the messaging to earn even more support for approval.

Learn the neighborhood. To win the neighborhood, go beyond the town hall setting and get involved in the neighborhood. Visibility and presence create opportunities to listen, collect feedback, address concerns, and gain support from those most active in the neighborhood. To earn supportive allies, first find them where they live, and engage them on their terms.

Audiences are development-specific. Advocates, nonprofit organizations, developers, and government officials have to focus communications on the neighborhood where the project is to be located, rather than trying to solve the broader argument about the value of affordable homes. Each project is different, so the messaging framework, messaging toolkit, neighborhood partners, and critical audiences may need to be different each time.

Identify and support allies to counter the loudest voices. While contrary voices - which are usually the loudest voices - deserve to be heard, earning approval for a development can sometimes come down to how well advocates, nonprofit organizations, and developers can engage a broad cross-section of the neighborhood, and bring them together to publicly voice their support.

Build local coalitions. Recruit local champions for the development, and train them to communicate the benefits the project will provide to the neighborhood. These partnerships will make earning support and changing negative perceptions much easier by demonstrating to existing residents - especially those who may be on the fence about a given development - how the project is supported by members of their own communities. This includes identifying and recruiting planners, developers, neighborhood leaders, religious leaders, business owners, and political figures.

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Messaging Toolkit

Earning support for affordable home developments requires the collaboration of local advocates - a diverse and unified team of engaged and invested neighbors, local community leaders, business owners, public officials, and developers - to get the job done in the best way for each unique neighborhood.

The following pages serve as a toolkit for partners interested in promoting affordable homes across Houston through comprehensive neighborhood engagement.

First, this toolkit outlines best practices of tactics, words, imagery, and coalition organizing to use when creating effective messaging. Next, the Messaging Map summarizes effective messaging strategies discovered in this study's literature review, interviews, and focus groups. Finally, there is a list of documents which city partners, developers, and neighborhood advocates can use and share in neighborhood engagement efforts.

AN INTEGRATED MESSAGING APPROACH

Effective communication weaves together the message, messenger, and distribution.

To raise neighborhood awareness of and receptivity towards affordable homes, messaging has to go beyond the technical delivery of government policy content. Both the message and messenger must resonate with, be relevant to, and reflective of the neighborhood.

Trusted Messengers

A message is only as effective as the person delivering it.

While many engagement strategies focus on crafting the perfect message and spreading it widely, building inroads into the neighborhood helps develop relationships with the leaders and neighbors who are essential to determining whether a neighborhood accepts a development.

Simply repeating information will not be enough to overcome the innate human tendency to seek information which confirms preexisting beliefs. Engaging trusted messengers can significantly improve how neighbors receive and react to new affordable homes in their neighborhood.

Partnering with trusted messengers who are similar to or a part of the neighborhood is often most effective. In interviews with partners and experts in neighborhood engagement, they reiterated the sentiment: “it takes someone inside to change minds” to get a neighborhood on board.

“The city could put up one thousand posters, it wouldn’t matter, it takes the right voice.”

Rather than utilizing a spokesperson, deep and effective neighborhood engagement is about having the voice of institutions and leaders who are deeply connected to the people and how they think and what they believe.

Trusted messengers can be long-standing residents, members of houses of worship, or local business owners who know how to build partnerships with the people who drive neighborhood opinion and action.

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WINNING WORDS

The intention behind a message is irrelevant if it is not properly received by the audience. Sometimes, the language used to communicate on behalf of affordable home developments can trigger a potential backfire.

When advocating for affordable homes, there is a responsibility to educate the public on the necessity of building quality affordable homes in all neighborhoods. Through intentional, focused language, neighborhood leaders, partners, advocates, and developers can effectively communicate with neighborhoods and reach a consensus.

This section offers language and messaging frameworks to keep in mind, as well as terms to use or to avoid to reduce stigma and negative bias when discussing affordable homes.

Fostering Empathy and Alignment

Effective neighborhood engagement starts with meaningful listening.

There will be many people who reflexively oppose change in their neighborhood, and their concerns are often based on lived experiences. Advocates, nonprofits, and developers bear a responsibility to meet people and neighbors where they are and see neighborhood engagement as an opportunity, not an obstacle.

When messaging on behalf of affordable home development, recognition and consideration of outside viewpoints in both planning and engagement are essential, and the language must reflect this. To illustrate understanding and active listening, steer clear of assumptive language or exaggeration in the messaging. The failure to recognize oppositional viewpoints can actually increase neighborhood resistance.

Words to Foster Empathy and Alignment

Language to Use	Language to Avoid
“I understand your concern”	“Clearly” or “Obviously”
“We have found”	“Always” and “Never”
“You might consider” or “One possibility is”	“Should”

The best way to gain neighborhood support is through concise, simple language which demonstrates empathy and acceptance of divergent viewpoints and a willingness to work with the neighborhood for a shared, positive outcome.

Shaming and Blaming will Backfire

Across the research, there is consistent guidance to avoid meeting negativity with negativity. Rather than respond to or make assumptions about the unknowable motivations behind potential opposition, counter negativity with a consistent flow of information from respected and trusted sources.

The antidote to the [“isms” \(skepticism, cynicism, and NIMBYism\)](#) is transparency and truthful information, properly presented to a fair-minded audience. This does not mean supporters should acquiesce to negative voices or fail to correct incorrect statements, especially when the statements may be divisive. Instead - these are opportunities supporters should use to turn the conversation back to the positive outcomes they are seeking to create within and for the neighborhood.

Avoid Consumerism

The research shows how the stigma of “affordable housing” often stems from the belief that an individual’s inability to afford a home is the product of laziness, bad behavior, poor decisions, or improper budgeting, rather than the complex systems impacting affordability.

The very term “affordability” often cues this consumerist thinking, which leads people to think of outcomes as the result of individual choices rather than of systems.

Words to Address the Project and Substance

Language to Use	Language to Avoid
“Affordable Homes”	“Affordable Housing”
“Homes” and “Neighborhoods” (“We need more homes in neighborhoods”)	Referring to the housing “market”
“Access or Availability [to safe and quality homes]”	“Scarcity” or “Supply”
“Investments in your neighborhood”	“Subsidies” or “Incentives”
“Neighbors,” “Workers,” “Families,” “Seniors,” and “Veterans”	“Residents” or “Tenants”

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Because housing and affordability are often, by default, considered through a consumerist lens, partners should avoid using consumerist language. The research from *The FrameWorks Institute* shows “consumerist thinking makes it easy to conclude that differential access is normal” and simply a natural result of market forces.

To avoid this line of thinking and to be persuasive when messaging in support of affordable homes, shift the narrative frame from a market-centric to a neighborhood-centric explanation. Demonstrate how the cost of homes can have numerous non-economic (civic, social, and health-related) outcomes.

To open people’s minds to neighborhood solutions, point to the source of the affordability problem in shared systems, not budgets and savings.

The *FrameWorks Institute* also suggests “communicators can avoid the problems introduced by the idea of affordability by focusing instead on cost and availability.”

DEPLOYING EFFECTIVE IMAGERY

A picture IS worth a thousand words.

Sharing images or renderings of safe, quality homes and of the future neighbors who are eligible to live in these homes will go a long way towards earning neighborhood support.

Images strengthen communication by capturing attention, evoking emotions, and better aiding understanding and recollection.

Neighborhood hesitance towards new affordable developments frequently stems from fear of the unknown and unforeseen. Using images can help residents better visualize their future, and contextualize the potential changes coming to their neighborhood. The effective use of visual collateral will “show, not tell” neighbors what is going to happen. This will help counter potential misrepresentations by others about aspects of the new affordable homes, and pre-emptively address underlying concerns.



ORGANIZING COALITIONS OF INTEREST



Houston’s dwindling affordability also impacts local businesses and the economy.

Many of Houston’s businesses are finding it difficult - if not impossible - to recruit and retain workers who are able or willing to pay the surging prices required to live near the city’s less affordable job centers.

The economic strain placed on local businesses from Houston’s diminishing affordability creates an opportunity for partners to build coalitions of local business leaders and interest groups impacted by the city’s affordability.

To address the complicated and multifaceted obstacles associated with Houston’s affordability, supporters must recruit and organize resources among nonprofits, city departments, private industry professionals, developers, advocacy groups, academics, and neighborhood leaders with legal, environmental, educational, employment, infrastructure, health, philanthropic, community development, and housing backgrounds.

Once convened, this coalition has to lead and win the broader argument in support of affordable homes across Houston and the Gulf Coast region.

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MESSAGING MAP

The message map presents a comprehensive strategy to approach and engage neighborhoods to earn support for affordable homes.

The map incorporates findings from across the research and recommends messages, tactics, and images to use to address neighborhood concerns, and ease the path to approval and acceptance.

The Messaging Map illustrates the items needed for anyone to effectively champion an affordable Houston, including, the who, what, where, and how of advocating for affordable homes, and outlines potential pitfalls and common neighborhood concerns.

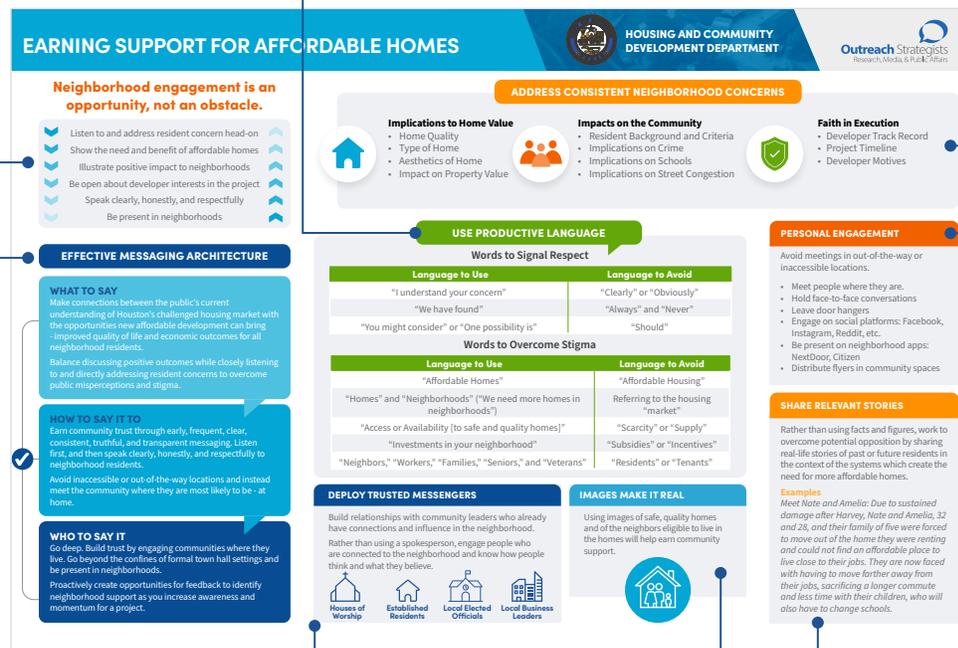
This map can be utilized by all as a tool to build consensus within neighborhoods and communities.

Words that work

Frequent resident concerns

Steps to follow for effective engagement

Fundamental affordable messaging frames



How to identify and partner with trusted messengers

Images to deepen understanding

Frequent resident concerns

Contextual sample testimonials



Neighborhood engagement is an opportunity, not an obstacle.

- ✓ Listen to and address resident concern head-on
- ✓ Show the need and benefit of affordable homes
- ✓ Illustrate positive impact to neighborhoods
- ✓ Be open about developer interests in the project
- ✓ Speak clearly, honestly, and respectfully
- ✓ Be present in neighborhoods

EFFECTIVE MESSAGING ARCHITECTURE

WHAT TO SAY

Make connections between the public's current understanding of Houston's challenged housing market with the opportunities new affordable development can bring - improved quality of life and economic outcomes for all neighborhood residents.

Balance discussing positive outcomes while closely listening to and directly addressing resident concerns to overcome public misperceptions and stigma.

HOW TO SAY IT TO

Earn community trust through early, frequent, clear, consistent, truthful, and transparent messaging. Listen first, and then speak clearly, honestly, and respectfully to neighborhood residents.

Avoid inaccessible or out-of-the-way locations and instead meet the community where they are most likely to be - at home.

WHO TO SAY IT

Go deep. Build trust by engaging communities where they live. Go beyond the confines of formal town hall settings and be present in neighborhoods.

Proactively create opportunities for feedback to identify neighborhood support as you increase awareness and momentum for a project.

ADDRESS CONSISTENT NEIGHBORHOOD CONCERNS



Implications to Home Value

- Home Quality
- Type of Home
- Aesthetics of Home
- Impact on Property Value



Impacts on the Community

- Resident Background and Criteria
- Implications on Crime
- Implications on Schools
- Implications on Street Congestion



Faith in Execution

- Developer Track Record
- Project Timeline
- Developer Motives

USE PRODUCTIVE LANGUAGE

Words to Signal Respect

Language to Use	Language to Avoid
"I understand your concern"	"Clearly" or "Obviously"
"We have found"	"Always" and "Never"
"You might consider" or "One possibility is"	"Should"

Words to Overcome Stigma

Language to Use	Language to Avoid
"Affordable Homes"	"Affordable Housing"
"Homes" and "Neighborhoods" ("We need more homes in neighborhoods")	Referring to the housing "market"
"Access or Availability [to safe and quality homes]"	"Scarcity" or "Supply"
"Investments in your neighborhood"	"Subsidies" or "Incentives"
"Neighbors," "Workers," "Families," "Seniors," and "Veterans"	"Residents" or "Tenants"

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

Avoid meetings in out-of-the-way or inaccessible locations.

- Meet people where they are.
- Hold face-to-face conversations
- Leave door hangers
- Engage on social platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, etc.
- Be present on neighborhood apps: NextDoor, Citizen
- Distribute flyers in community spaces

SHARE RELEVANT STORIES

Rather than using facts and figures, work to overcome potential opposition by sharing real-life stories of past or future residents in the context of the systems which create the need for more affordable homes.

Examples

Meet Nate and Amelia: Due to sustained damage after Harvey, Nate and Amelia, 32 and 28, and their family of five were forced to move out of the home they were renting and could not find an affordable place to live close to their jobs. They are now faced with having to move farther away from their jobs, sacrificing a longer commute and less time with their children, who will also have to change schools.

DEPLOY TRUSTED MESSENGERS

Build relationships with community leaders who already have connections and influence in the neighborhood.

Rather than using a spokesperson, engage people who are connected to the neighborhood and know how people think and what they believe.



Houses of Worship



Established Residents



Local Elected Officials



Local Business Leaders

IMAGES MAKE IT REAL

Using images of safe, quality homes and of the neighbors eligible to live in the homes will help earn community support.



SUMMARY OF DOCUMENTS

While every project is different and will require a specific approach, the following materials can be used to earn neighborhood support for affordable homes. Each item is briefly described followed by examples of the materials. These materials include:

- **Developer Brochure**
- **Meeting Flyer**
- **Social Media Posts**
- **Meeting Sign**
- **Public Comment Card**
- **Affordability Infographic**
- **Petition Template**
- **Lawn Signs**
- **Neighborhood Pamphlet**
- **Letter to Your Local Official**
- **Business Storefront Sign**
- **Press Release**
- **FAQs (Developers Will Have to Address)**
- **Resource List**

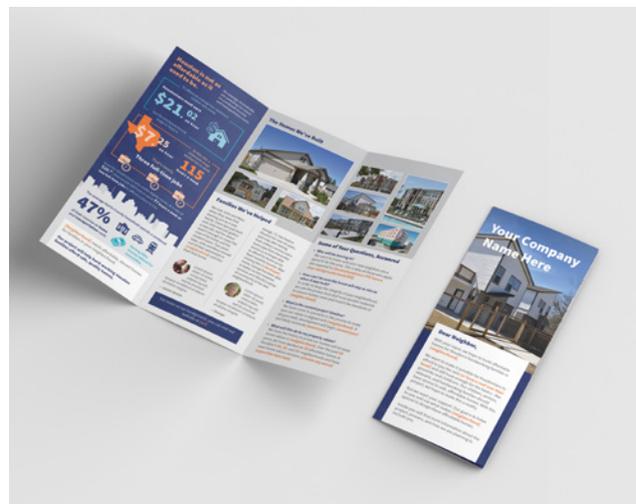
Developer Brochure

Establishing neighborhood trust is the foundation for the successful approval and acceptance of quality, affordable homes which are responsive to the unique needs of each neighborhood.

The very idea of new affordable homes can trigger uncertainty for neighbors concerned about their home values, the quality of the new homes, developer intentions, and potential impacts to the neighborhood. All of these concerns must be addressed.

This sample brochure can be an important step to introduce the new affordable homes to the neighborhood. Concise, transparent, and honest communication of the developers' goals and intentions can help pre-empt misinformation and misconceptions.

This brochure should be delivered early in the development timeline as an introduction to the neighborhood.



We Invest in Houston

We build safe, quality, affordable homes to grow communities and neighborhoods here in Houston.

We make smart investments in people and places that promote vibrant, inclusive neighborhoods that strengthen and bring value to our city.

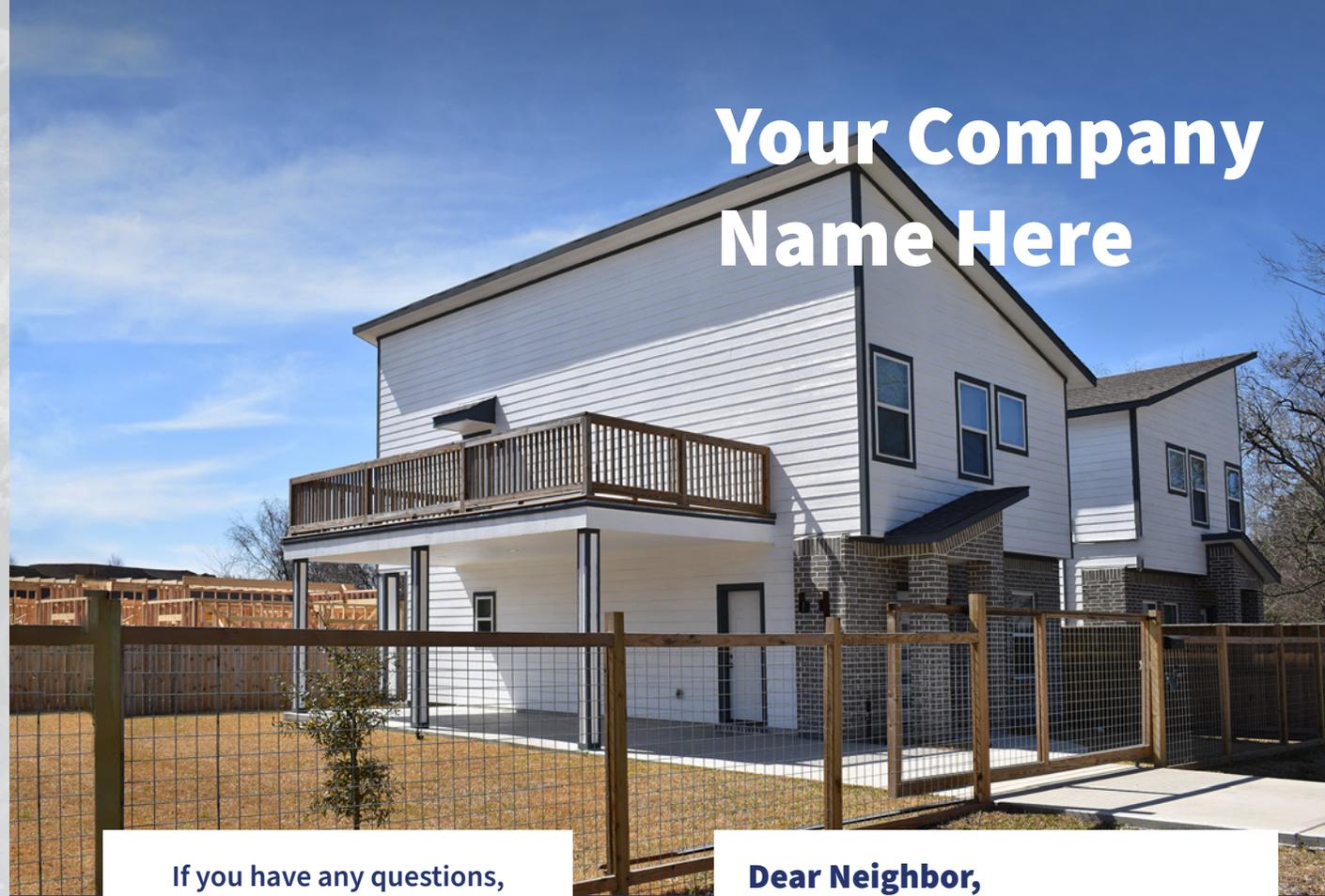
More specifically, we:

- 1** Build affordable homes for purchase and rent
- 2** Provide education and coaching that helps families grow and adapt in the long term
- 3** Support and develop neighborhood and community programs

This is all in the hopes of **improving the quality of life for all Houstonians** and leaving each neighborhood better than we found it.



Your Company Name Here



If you have any questions, concerns or suggestions, we want to hear them.

Call: XXX - XXX - XXXX

Email: XXX@XXXXX.com

Or come to one of our meetings!

Dear Neighbor,

With your input, we hope to build affordable homes for Houston's hardworking families in **[neighborhood]**.

We want to make it possible for Houstonians to afford to pay the rent **[or have a roof over their head]** and still have enough for the basics - like groceries and childcare. Our children, seniors, veterans, and hardworking families should have access to safe, affordable homes. With this development, we hope to make this a reality.

But we want your support. Our goal is to listen to you and use what makes **[neighborhood]** special to design these affordable homes.

Inside you will find more information about the project and process.

Houston is not as affordable as it used to be.

On average, households are spending too much on combined income and transportation costs.

To afford an average two-bedroom, market-rate rental,

Houstonians must earn

\$21.02 an hour



but the minimum hourly wage in Texas is

\$7.25 an hour

At this rate, a minimum-wage worker has to work

115

hours a week

That's nearly

Three full-time jobs



Even for Houstonians who make slightly more, at a rate of **\$10.92**, they would still have to work **77 hours a week or two full-time jobs** to afford a place to live.

The average Harris County household spends a combined

47%



of their income on **home and transportation costs**



leaving little money behind for necessities.

[Neighborhood] needs affordable, decent homes for families in your neighborhood.

Our project will help hard-working Houston families afford safe, quality homes.

The Homes We've Built



Families We've Helped

We met John and Mary when they were first starting out as a new family. Clara was just born and John had just gotten a new job, but his salary wasn't enough to cover the cost of his home and his student loans. Two years later, John and Mary moved out of their apartment in [neighborhood] and into their first home.



Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna.

— John and Mary

George, 72, has lived in Houston for over 60 years, and now after retiring from military service and a burst pipe from the winter storms is no longer able to afford his home on his fixed monthly income. After moving into a [developer] home, George has been able to better access essential services and rebuild a sense of community in his new neighborhood.



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— George

For more on our background, you can visit our website at [url]

Some of Your Questions, Answered

- Who will be moving in?**
We want to make sure your new neighbors are a good fit for the area. This is why all those who apply are required to [be employed/earn YYY/ have a clear background check/XXX].
- How can I be sure the house will stay as nice as when it was built?**
In order to keep the integrity of your neighborhood, we use the proven best and most durable materials to ensure homes meet and match the standards of [neighborhood].
- What is the current project timeline?**
We have come to you early in the process to make sure our vision is aligned with [neighborhood]. If all goes well, development will begin [season/year] and likely conclude [season/year].
- What will this do to my property values?**
We have the history to prove our homes will increase home values in [neighborhood]. Over the past XX years, we have worked on XX affordable homes in Houston's XX, XX, and XX neighborhoods and have seen home values increase [provide any and all supportive stats here].

Meeting Flyer

In many instances, earning neighborhood support will require attending or hosting public meetings. Whether at a civic club, tenant association, local nonprofit, business association, or a meeting organized by supporters of the proposed affordable homes - for neighbors to attend a meeting, they must first be aware of it. This requires promotion.

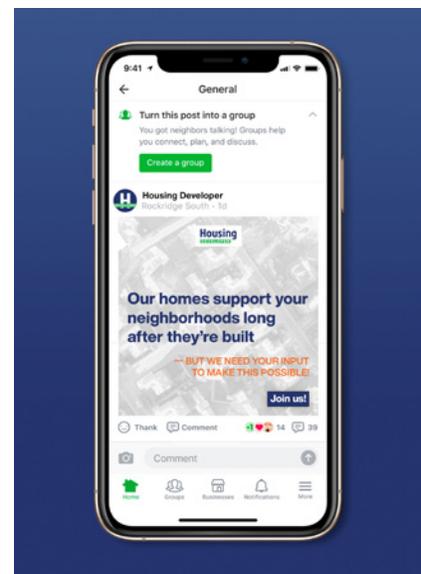
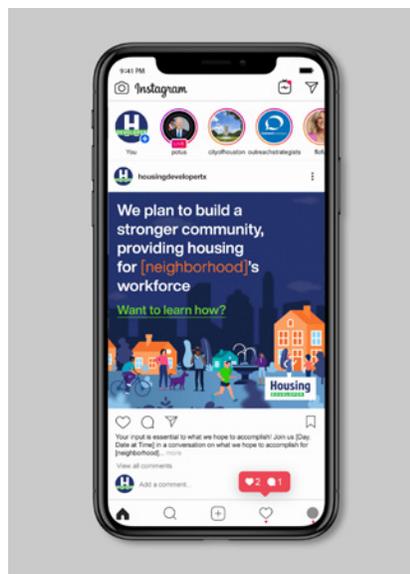
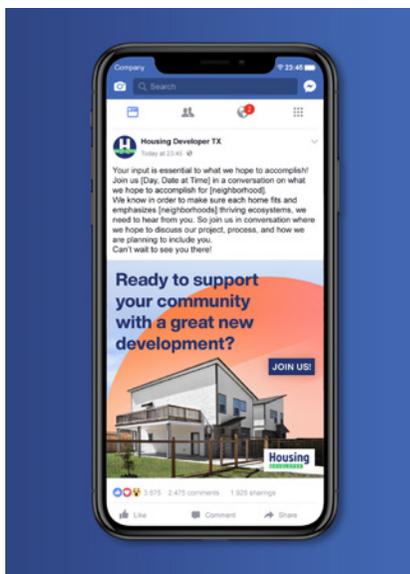
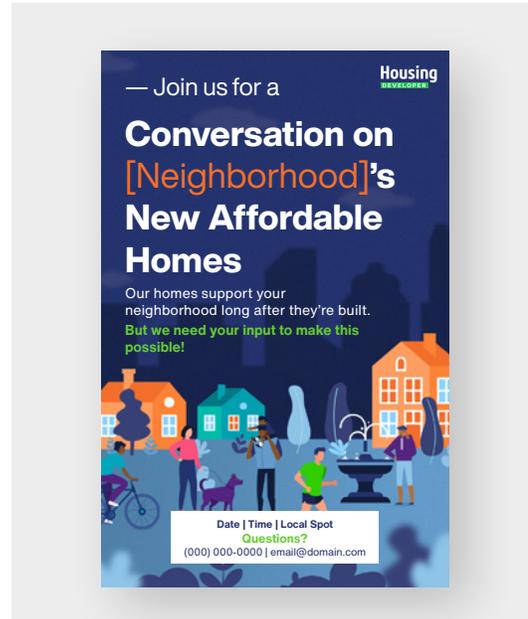
To ensure maximum attendance, flyers could be distributed to homes within the neighborhood, through community partner organizations, or at frequently used locations like post offices, grocery stores, or transit hubs.

These flyers should be used in conjunction with digital promotion efforts, including posting similarly branded collateral on social media and neighborhood applications.

Social Media Posts

Effective neighborhood engagement requires a layered approach. To supplement direct neighborhood efforts, supporters of affordable homes should take advantage of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, NextDoor, etc.).

Social media posts can be used during every phase of the approval process.

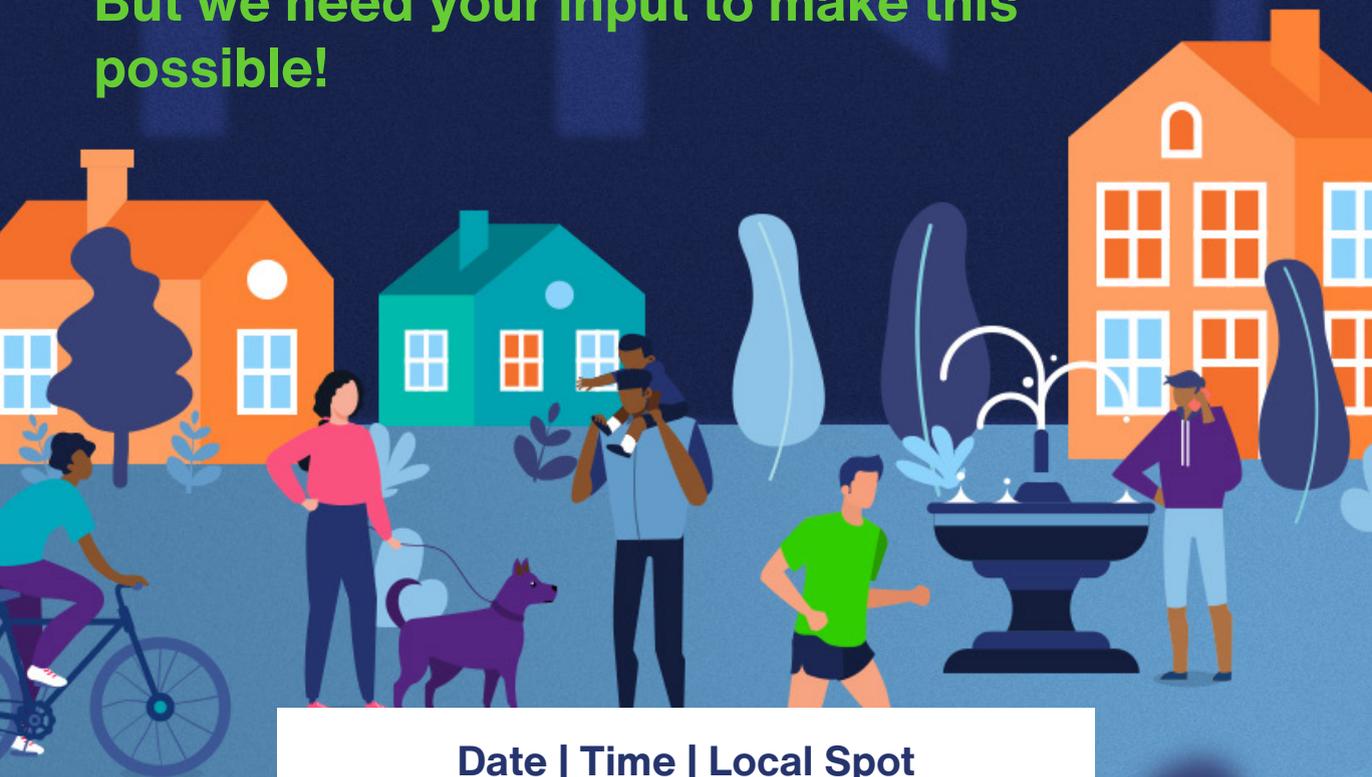


— Join us for a

Conversation on [Neighborhood]'s New Affordable Homes

Our homes support your neighborhood long after they're built.

But we need your input to make this possible!



Date | Time | Local Spot

Questions?

(000) 000-0000 | email@domain.com

**Ready to support
your community
with a great new
development?**

JOIN US!



**We plan to build a
stronger community,
providing housing
for [neighborhood]'s
workforce**

Want to learn how?



**Housing
DEVELOPER**

**Our homes support your
neighborhoods long
after they're built**

**— BUT WE NEED YOUR INPUT
TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE!**

Join us!



Meeting Sign

If the outreach has been done properly, there could be many first-time attendees to a public meeting or neighborhood conversation. Make sure these neighbors know how to get to the meeting with effective directional signage outside the venue, and use it as an opportunity to push your message at the same time.



Public Comment Cards

Earning neighborhood support for new affordable homes can start by listening and understanding the needs and concerns of the neighborhood.

Not every neighbor will be comfortable speaking in public or in group settings, so comment cards provide the opportunity for these neighbors to share their views.

This sample card can be used for any neighborhood event and will allow the City, developers, and neighborhood advocates to collect and address all resident concerns. The cards are particularly helpful during the planning and neighborhood outreach phases of the approval process.

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**Conversation on
[Neighborhood]'s
New Affordable
Homes**

Affordable Homes in [Neighborhood]



Resident Comment Card

NAME

EMAIL

PHONE

HOME ADDRESS

Would you like to receive notification of our next meeting?

Yes

No

How would you prefer we follow up with you?
(check any/all that apply)

Email

Phone

Our next
meeting

COMMENTS



Affordability Infographic

The economic reasons for supporting more affordable homes in Houston are sound. However, it is sometimes difficult to verbalize the many impacts affordable homes can have on a city's health and prosperity.

This infographic can be used to demonstrate how building more affordable homes throughout the city can help boost Houston's local economy.

The infographic can be shared throughout the approval process to illustrate the impact affordable homes can have on the neighborhood.

Petition Template

Dwindling affordability is a problem impacting hundreds of thousands of Houstonians.

Collecting signatures through a petition can help demonstrate the scale of support from the people who stand to benefit from new, quality, affordable homes.

This petition should be used when engaging deeper in neighborhoods, particularly during the earlier phases of listening, learning, and planning.

Petition for a More Affordable Houston

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Petition Summary and Background

To invest in Houston's future, and to preserve our status as an affordable City, people of all income levels should be able to afford to live here. Our teachers, firefighters, nursing aides, and other essential workers are struggling to find a place to live where they serve. We need to preserve and develop affordable homes to ensure workers and their families have a stable, affordable place to call home.

Action Petition

We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge our leaders to act now to build a more affordable Houston through the development of new affordable homes.

Printed Name	Signature	Address	Comment	Date

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How access to **QUALITY AFFORDABLE HOMES** affects Houston's economy

When people have access to homes they can afford close to where they work, we all benefit.



Teachers, home health aides, after-school carers

Teachers, home health aides, and after-school carers are paid less than they should.

Affordable homes in the community make positions more attractive to those who teach and care for our loved ones. If we want our children to receive the best education possible, we must make it affordable for our teachers to live close to the communities they teach.

Mechanic, social worker, chef

To attract the most talented and qualified workers, we need to make it more attractive and affordable to live near the communities they serve.



First responders

Getting on-site as soon as possible is critical to the role of a first responder. For them to do so, our first responders need to be able to afford homes close by.



Grocery clerk, wait staff, baristas

For people who work hourly and serve us daily, longer commute times reduce the overall wages/rates of the people who serve our most essential roles. By making homes more affordable close to local businesses, we support our local industry.



Housing insecurity becomes everyone's problem when the people who teach our children, maintain our lawns, fix our plumbing, serve our food, and provide care for our seniors and children cannot afford to live close to where they work.

Houston housing costs are surging past the median annual income of people living in our community, which, in turn, is making it more difficult for Houstonians to find or remain in affordable homes.

As housing prices increase, fewer people will be able to afford to work at the low costs we have come to expect. To attract talented and qualified workers, local businesses will have to raise wages to keep up with the cost of homes, which in the long run will likely be unsustainable for many of our locally run businesses.

When faced with a shortage of workers and a lack of affordable homes in the area, local businesses will likely raise prices, resulting in you paying more for goods and services in addition to higher property taxes.

Lawn Signs

Many times, affordable homes have broad neighborhood support, but few people may have the time or ability to participate in neighborhood meetings. These sample yard signs allow neighbors to visually demonstrate their support, and be a part of the “silent majority” without having to personally participate.



These signs should be developed and distributed to supportive residents throughout the approval process.

Neighborhood Pamphlet

It will take the efforts of many neighborhood voices to help Houston cultivate and develop new, quality, affordable homes responsive to the needs of neighborhoods and residents. Developers, local officials, city agents, community advocates, small business owners, and residents will all have to come together for the best outcomes.

Supportive coalitions empower people to apply their unique talents to each project and help push improvements to their neighborhoods forward. While identifying and cultivating local neighborhood advocates to serve as key points of entry and trusted messengers within a neighborhood, they still need tools to foster support.

This sample pamphlet is one way neighborhood advocates can find aligned and trusted neighborhood voices interested in advocating within their communities for affordable homes.



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Keep Houston Strong Keep Houston Affordable.



Hardworking Houstonians are being hurt by skyrocketing rents.

We need more quality options to keep Houston affordable.

It's why we support the preservation and construction of affordable homes in [neighborhood].



The City of Houston supports and partners with developers and nonprofits to create affordable homes. These homes are for people who already work and live in neighborhoods like ours but who are being priced out by rising rents.

We believe the people who help drive our economy - as small business owners, entrepreneurs, service workers, and rising professionals should be able to live close to where they work. It's better for their families, and better for us to have people invested in our neighborhoods - where they both work and live.

If you agree with the need for stronger neighborhoods and better opportunities for all, please join our effort to strengthen [neighborhood] the right way.

If you are interested in promoting fair housing and helping hardworking Houstonians to obtain or retain safe, quality, affordable housing, here's how you can help.

1

Join [organization name] and become a community leader for a stronger neighborhood.

2

Sign up for our updates. We periodically share information with our neighbors about the opportunities to participate in local conversations about how we want our neighborhood to grow and improve and would love to have your feedback and participation.

3

Share this information with your friends and neighbors and ask them to join with you in ensuring our neighborhood remains affordable and safe for everyone.

Letter to Local Officials

For local officials to act on behalf of new affordable homes, they need to know their constituents support new, quality affordable homes. One way to demonstrate support is through a letter-writing campaign

This document provides an example of what a letter could look like for neighborhood residents interested in keeping their neighborhoods affordable.



Business Storefront Signs

It is not only neighbors who stand to benefit from affordable homes; increasing Houston’s affordability supports local businesses by sustaining diverse jobs and wage levels in addition to attracting and retaining higher-quality workers - all of which are critical to the long-term success of a city.

To demonstrate support for and the economic value of affordable homes, we’ve provided templates for signs local businesses can feature in their storefronts in support of affordable homes.

As supporters organize in neighborhoods, they can provide standardized or customized signage to supportive businesses. These signs can be distributed throughout the approval process, but with a priority for the earliest phases of engagement to maximize their effectiveness and impact.



Dear **[Addressee]**,

I am writing in support of the proposed affordable home(s) **[or development name]** in our neighborhood.

We live in Houston because of the opportunities the city provides and want to ensure that this is an opportunity afforded to all who live here.

As a city, we are facing a housing affordability crisis, and one of the most important actions we can take to address that crisis is to build more affordable homes. As a leader in diversity and industry, it is important Houston be a leader in affordable housing and build homes all income levels can afford in any neighborhood they choose.

I look forward to contributing my voice and learning more as the conversation about this affordable development continues in the coming months. In the meantime, I wanted you to know how important this issue is to me, and I hope we can work together to build a stronger, more affordable Houston.

Thank you for your time,

John Doe
Housing Developer

[Business Name]

WE SUPPORT

A More Affordable Houston

Housing
DEVELOPER



**Support our Staff,
Support Affordable Homes**

Housing
DEVELOPER

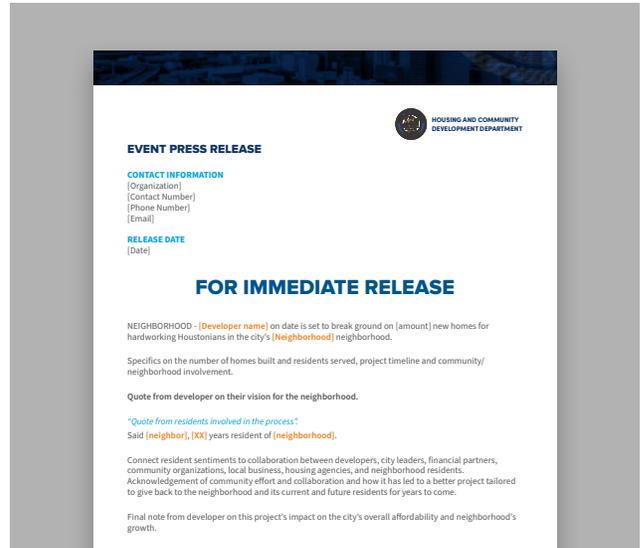


Press Release

The media can serve as both gateway and referee for engaging communities. Truthful and proactive information sharing will smooth the path to approval and acceptance, by demonstrating success and collaboration within the neighborhood.

Through effective media engagement, supporters can make their case and cultivate supportive relationships to make it easier to earn support in the future.

This document is a sample press release to be used as a template for what to say following the completion of new affordable homes, but releases can be deployed across the approval process.



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EVENT PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT INFORMATION

[Organization]
[Contact Number]
[Phone Number]
[Email]

RELEASE DATE

[Date]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEIGHBORHOOD - **[Developer name]** on date is set to break ground on [amount] new homes for hardworking Houstonians in the city's **[Neighborhood]** neighborhood.

Specifics on the number of homes built and residents served, project timeline and community/ neighborhood involvement.

Quote from developer on their vision for the neighborhood.

“Quote from residents involved in the process”

Said **[neighbor]**, **[XX]** years resident of **[neighborhood]**.

Connect resident sentiments to collaboration between developers, city leaders, financial partners, community organizations, local business, housing agencies, and neighborhood residents. Acknowledgement of community effort and collaboration and how it has led to a better project tailored to give back to the neighborhood and its current and future residents for years to come.

Final note from developer on this project's impact on the city's overall affordability and neighborhood's growth.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Frequently Asked Questions for Developers

Developers will bear most of the responsibility in earning neighborhood support, and will face many questions from neighbors. Being prepared to proactively address many of these questions as soon as the project is announced in a transparent and consistent way will ease the path to approval and acceptance.

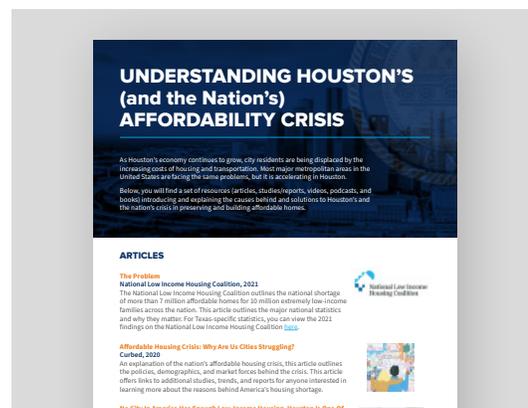
The research identified many questions neighbors will have when presented with the potential for affordable homes to be developed in their neighborhoods. This document provides a list of questions developers will likely encounter. Preparing responses, and having a proactive plan to share honest information with neighbors will limit the impact of misinformation or disinformation as developers seek to cultivate support and earn approval for their affordable homes.

How each developer decides to address these questions (for each project) is up to them. Whether through a project-specific mircosite, in printed collateral distributed at meetings, or incorporating the content into other engagement strategies - these questions will come up, and developers will likely need to be prepared to address these questions more than once throughout the approval process.

Resource List

During the research process, there were several resources which stood out as the best summaries or explanations in building a comprehensive understanding of the need for and ways to communicate about affordable homes.

These resources - articles, studies, books, videos, and podcasts - can serve as important background materials for organizers and advocates, as well as for neighborhood partners, trusted messengers, and interested members of the public.



FAQs

QUESTIONS DEVELOPERS MUST BE PREPARED TO ANSWER



Implications to Home Value

- What is the quality of the materials being used?
- Will it keep in appearance with the rest of the neighborhood?
- Will it be a single or multi-family development?
- Who is in charge of maintaining the property? Are they subject to our HOA?
- What will the impact be on my property value? Provide previous examples when appropriate.



Impacts on the Neighborhood

- What is the background of the residents? What criteria do they have to meet?
Be prepared to answer specific questions on: employment, income level, criminal history, whether certain people would be prioritized (families, teachers, firefighters, etc.)
- Will the residents be renters or homeowners?
- What does the application process look like?
- Will there be increased traffic?
- Will the development have on-site parking?
- How will the project impact the schools and class sizes?



Faith in Execution

- What is your track record as a developer?
- What is your safety record during construction?
- What other developments have you worked on?
- Will your contractors go through a background check?
- What was the impact on public safety and property values?
- How long will construction take?
- Why are you building in our neighborhood?
- What other projects are you planning for our neighborhood?



UNDERSTANDING HOUSTON'S (and the Nation's) AFFORDABILITY CRISIS

As Houston's economy continues to grow, city residents are being displaced by the increasing costs of housing and transportation. Most major metropolitan areas in the United States are facing the same problems, but it is accelerating in Houston.

Below, you will find a set of resources (articles, studies/reports, videos, podcasts, and books) introducing and explaining the causes behind and solutions to Houston's and the nation's crisis in preserving and building affordable homes.

ARTICLES

The Problem

National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2021

The National Low Income Housing Coalition outlines the national shortage of more than 7 million affordable homes for 10 million extremely low-income families across the nation. This article outlines the major national statistics and why they matter. For Texas-specific statistics, you can view the 2021 findings on the National Low Income Housing Coalition [here](#).



Affordable Housing Crisis: Why Are Us Cities Struggling? **Curbed, 2020**

An explanation of the nation's affordable housing crisis, this article outlines the policies, demographics, and market forces behind the crisis. This article offers links to additional studies, trends, and reports for anyone interested in learning more about the reasons behind America's housing shortage.



No City In America Has Enough Low-Income Housing. Houston Is One Of The Worst.

Houston Chronicle, 2021

This article published by the Houston Chronicle addresses the severity of the city's shortage of affordable homes as summarized in a report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition.



Houston Is Now Less Affordable Than New York City **Texas Monthly, 2020**

This article argues when factoring in the city's higher transportation costs and lower incomes, Houston is less affordable than the notoriously expensive New York City.



20 Housing Terms You Need To Know **Housing Action Coalition, 2018**

This article explains 20 key technical terms used in housing policy.



Why Neighborhoods—And The Policies That Shape Them—Matter **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2020**

The article illustrates how inequality in neighborhoods affects children, using a tool to measure that inequality: the Child Opportunity Index. By comparing two kids growing up in different neighborhoods of Cleveland, the article shows how where one lives influences life experiences.



How Whole Communities Benefit From Affordable Housing **Forbes, 2020**



How Affordable Homes Can Improve The American Economy **Bloomberg City Lab, 2019**

Both these articles illustrate how increasing affordable housing in metropolitan centers is vital for a city's economic health. Both articles discuss how having affordable places to live increases a city's economic prosperity and productivity.



STUDIES AND REPORTS

The 2021 State Of Housing In Harris County And Houston **Kinder Institute for Urban Research, 2020**

This inaugural report conducted by Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research found Houston, overall, has become less affordable, especially for renters. The city's dwindling supply of affordable housing and rising construction costs suggest this problem will only continue to grow.



Where Affordable Housing And Transportation Meet In Houston **Kinder Institute for Urban Research and LINK Houston, 2020**

In this report, the Kinder Institute for Urban Research partnered with LINK Houston to examine the intersection of housing and transportation. This report shows in order to effectively address affordability, it is essential to consider housing and transportation expenses together.



VIDEOS

[Why Rent Is Rising In The U.S.](#)

CNBC, 2021

This video gives a more detailed background as to why rental prices are increasing across the United States. A decades-long slowdown in development and increased construction costs have led to a shortage of quality affordable homes. In addition to issues in supply, most of the new homes built are for higher-income residents, leaving many renters paying more for a place to call home.



[Cruel Musical Chairs \(Or Why Is Rent So High?\)](#)

Sightline Institute, 2017

This animated video produced by the Sightline Institute demonstrates the impact of the housing shortage. By comparing housing to a game of musical chairs, this video illustrates the need for diverse home pricing for all income levels needed to grow and sustain a prosperous city.



[The Housing Affordability Crisis We Don't Want To Solve](#) [Economics Explained, 2021](#)

In a longer video format, Economics Explained was able to illustrate a number of barriers to the nation's affordability crisis. This video examines the reasons behind increasing house prices pre and post-pandemic, the economic impact and implications, and address some potential solutions.



PODCASTS

[Three Reasons For The Housing Shortage](#)

NPR - Planet Money, 2021

The United States does not have enough homes. This podcast produced by NPR's Planet Money, outlines the three big reasons for the shortage.



[America's Two Housing Crises](#)

Vox - The Weeds, 2019

In this podcast, Matt Yglesias interviews Jenny Schuetz, a housing economist and David Rubenstein fellow at the Brookings Institution, on housing affordability. In the interview, Dr. Schuetz outlines two distinct issues when it comes to the national affordability crisis. First, low-income families across the United States do not earn enough to afford to live. Second, a number of major metropolitan areas have not built sufficient enough housing to meet the demands to live in these areas, driving up housing costs and making housing unaffordable for hard-working residents.



PODCAST SERIES

UCLA's Housing Voices

UCLA - Housing Voices, 2021 - ongoing

This podcast series produced by UCLA tackles questions on the national shortage of quality, affordable homes. Co-hosted by UCLA Lewis Center's Mike Lens and Shane Phillips, each episode invites a housing expert in conversation on housing affordability, displacement, development, and policy and how it impacts the creation of more affordable and accessible communities.

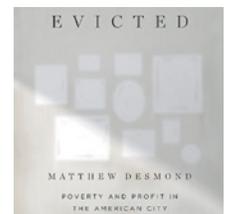


BOOKS

Evicted: Poverty And Profit Of The American City

Matthew Desmond, 2017

A book that examines the effect of poverty on housing in the United States, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit of the American City* follows eight Milwaukee families struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Supplemented with statistics from court records, police call logs, school reports, and other documents, author and professor of sociology at Princeton University, Matthew Desmond illustrates the importance of safe, affordable housing in fostering stable cities.



Golden Gates: Fighting For Housing In America

Conor Dougherty, 2020

In his book, Connor Dougherty, a housing reporter with the New York Times, chronicles America's housing crisis from the lens of the Bay Area, examining the many factors - home supply shortage, zoning restrictions, NIMBYism (the not in my backyard argument), structural racism, gentrification, and private wealth interest - behind the affordability crisis.



Literature Review





KEY FINDINGS: UNDERSTANDING NEIGHBORHOOD RESISTANCE

Any affordable homes effort which requires public comment or input may trigger opposition, depending on the project size, location, or families to be served, developer background, or local landscape.

The literature identifies a series of “isms”, including NIMBYism, Cynicism, and Skepticism as sources of neighborhood opposition to affordable homes.

NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) is a common and well-documented phenomenon where opponents latch onto the impacts of change and expound real, imagined, or theoretical threats to their home value, quality of life, or other unarticulated concerns. While they claim they are not against progress or change, they want it done somewhere else. This group is the most difficult to influence. In many instances they can be the loudest voices, attracting media coverage and thereby driving the public narrative.

Cynicism is a similar framework. With a lack of trust for the motives of parties involved, people often have a fatalistic viewpoint of projects. Cynics have often had negative experiences with systems, and do not believe any single action or effort can impact systemic problems like access to affordable homes. This group is difficult to win over, but leaving them alone can lead them to become vocal opponents if they are not engaged or heard.

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Skepticism is rooted in a lack of understanding. Some people have doubts about the impacts and outcomes of a given project. Support with skeptics is possible if engaged and involved in the discussion early, but they can also become more resistant if their concerns and questions are not addressed.

This group is also difficult to win over and can also become vocal opponents if they are not engaged. Ignoring or dismissing their concerns can trigger backlash. Advocates, nonprofit organizations, developers, and municipal stakeholders must understand and respect neighborhood viewpoints in order for the value of a specific project or initiative to be heard.

Earning Neighborhood Support

The literature demonstrates how earning neighborhood support for affordable homes requires an effective messaging strategy to help neighborhoods understand the value of creating opportunities for others and to assuage their pre-existing fears associated with affordable homes, such as lower home values and neighborhood safety. Countering these personal concerns can turn potential opponents into allies - but it takes real effort, and sharing truthful and transparent information to earn trust and support.

The literature also reveals how ineffective neighborhood engagement and poorly designed communications can lead to messages backfiring, and actually increase negative sentiment towards affordable homes. Some of these missteps include: developers delaying neighborhood engagement, acquiescing to NIMBY concerns to dictate the project narrative, and improperly framing the message.

The literature demonstrates the importance of a proactive and comprehensive plan for both content and engagement - allowing the opportunity to build coalitions among key neighborhood members, foster a positive media presence, and actively interact with future neighbors.

The research falls into three functional insight categories - **what to say**, **how to say it**, and **who to say it to**.

What to Say

Understanding the importance of how to frame affordable projects is the first step in determining how to interact with the neighborhood. Many times, opposition to affordable homes flows from a misunderstanding of the

concept itself, placing a significant burden on those leading or supporting affordable homes to educate and advocate, not simply inform the public.

Several sources identify a well-crafted plan as essential to successfully educating local residents about the affordable homes. Planning ahead allows developers to pre-empt opposition and create a productive and positive context for proposed affordable homes.

This means defining affordable homes as a win for neighborhoods, and for everyone involved. While highlighting positive stories of the people and families who will be future neighbors is important, it has to be part of a broader narrative. Individual stories connect the benefits affordable homes will have on the local neighborhood and to Houston.

This requires advocates, nonprofits, and developers to directly and honestly address the concerns raised by the neighborhood - specifically to prevent the spread of misinformation. Supportive voices - including the developers - have to preempt potential negatives while simultaneously offering a constructive narrative of the benefits affordable homes will bring to the neighborhood.

The research also demonstrates it isn't enough to merely cite facts as to why affordable homes will have a positive impact in the neighborhood. Data without appropriate context and framing can be counterproductive or have no effect at all. Instead, find the right metaphor to frame the central message about a certain development. Metaphors and values-based messaging are most effective in winning over opposition, and encouraging proponents to more actively support affordable housing developments.

Finally, make sure to avoid and reject any consumerist language which paints the potential residents of affordable homes as irresponsible or having made poor choices in life. This requires explicitly laying out the difference between market-rate homes and the proposed affordable homes as well as avoiding using terms such as “social housing” or “safety net” and instead focusing on the idea of “complete communities” and “neighborhoods.” Identify the systemic issues causing the need for such developments and pivot away from narratives which trigger or enable negativity.

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How to Say It

Once a central message has been determined, it becomes a matter of getting the message in front of potential supporters. The literature demonstrates how local news outlets present affordable homes on their terms, and how their coverage is pivotal to the way developments are received and perceived by neighborhood members. Therefore, building a positive relationship with local media will make interacting with the local neighborhood significantly easier.

Advocates, nonprofits, and developers should apply the framing and language to be used for a given project, and create a media toolkit to send to partners, news outlets, and supporters to help spread the facts and key information about the development. Because it is hard to include all of the context and nuances surrounding affordable homes, focus on the main benefits in the toolkit to ensure everyone stays on message.

The media toolkit is especially important for interacting with news outlets and reporters, because they act as an intermediary for the neighborhood. The toolkit should make the situation surrounding the affordable project as specific and straightforward as possible.

With these steps done, developers need to then create a plan to engage with the public directly. Choosing how to approach residents involves deciding how formal the interactions will be, the level of direct communication and questioning, and factoring in how different audiences will receive different approaches.

Some of the research shows informal meetings can work much better at assuaging concerns and encouraging undecided residents and supporters to be more actively involved. This allows residents to ask more questions and hear from their neighbors as to why affordable home developments are positive for their neighborhood. It also counteracts the “us versus them” mentality which can become cemented when barriers are formed in more rigidly structured meetings.

With the right engagement strategy, neighbors will stand in support of proposed developments, making the process much easier at every step of the way. By being proactive, positive, and engaged in neighborhoods, support for proposed affordable developments can be identified, gathered, and activated.

The next step is identifying key stakeholders and building a coalition to better promote affordable homes. These partnerships make earning support and changing negative perceptions much easier by demonstrating to existing residents - especially those who may be on the fence about a given development - how the project is supported by members of their own communities. This includes identifying and engaging planners, developers, neighborhood leaders, religious leaders, business owners, and political figures. Some of the research even recommends including members of the opposition to ensure they feel their worries are being heard.

Who to Say It To

It is important to identify and engage potential supporters, rather than spending a lot of time trying to convince those in opposition. While contrary voices - which can usually be the loudest - deserve to be heard, earning approval for affordable homes can sometimes come down to how well advocates, nonprofit organizations, and developers can engage a broad cross-section of the neighborhood, and bring those people together to publicly voice their support.

Identify key stakeholders and build a coalition to better promote affordable homes. These partnerships make earning support and changing negative perceptions much easier by demonstrating to existing residents - especially those who may be on the fence about a given development - how the project is supported by members of their own communities. This includes identifying and engaging planners, developers, neighborhood leaders, religious leaders, business owners, and political figures. Some of the research even recommends including members of the opposition to ensure they feel their worries are being heard.

These structures - the coalitions - do not have to be “official” or formal, which can backfire if neighbors feel they are being overly pushed into accepting the inevitable. They are designed to serve as a supplement to direct engagement, not a hammer to force approval and acceptance.

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METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

The literature review compiled and analyzed research and reporting from a range of sources, including academic papers and publications, organizational releases, governmental studies from federal, state, and local housing agencies, media coverage, advocates, and industry groups. In addition to online searches for public documents, JSTOR and Nexis were used to identify publications, articles, papers, and stories, which were then analyzed for content and sentiment.

Preliminary searches yielded tens of thousands of search results. The search terms were narrowed to include more relevant terms, like “affordable housing,” “messaging,” public opinion,” “NIMBYism,” “disaster relief,” “recovery,” and “affordable homes.”

Searches were also conducted for location-specific case studies for the cities of New Orleans, Jacksonville, and San Francisco to identify established challenges and tested solutions applicable to the city of Houston.

While New Orleans, Jacksonville, and San Francisco do not match Houston’s size, economy, or diversity, both New Orleans and Jacksonville’s circumstantial overlap in their affordable home development in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Irma and San Francisco’s acute housing shortage and innovative, locally-driven response made them exemplary case studies.

This resulted in a review of 1,386 articles, 242 of which were determined to be relevant for this report (22 of which dealt with Houston specifically). The majority of the sources were from the last seven years.

Once the articles were compiled and sorted they were assessed to determine which were most relevant for this review. This led to 48 of the original articles being used. An analysis of these articles uncovered a consistent set of ideas with which to structure the review.

The preliminary focus was to identify established challenges and tested solutions to measure potential applicability to the current landscape in Houston, and identified valuable sources of information, especially the *FrameWorks Institute* and *Enterprise Community Partners* databases.



This image is a visual representation of the frequently used words in the literature review. Larger words indicate a higher frequency and prominence. The graphic filtered out commonly used words, such as if, and or, but, the, etc.

This presents the importance of neighborhood engagement and public prioritization.

GEOGRAPHIC COMPARISONS

With a focus on a more urban context, the literature review examined the need for affordable homes in other major metropolitan areas including the San Francisco Bay Area, New Orleans, and Jacksonville. These cities also face high-demand high-price housing challenges, are home to large and diverse populations, and have received federal funding to preserve and develop affordable homes in the aftermath of natural disasters. Findings from their experiences inform how to create stronger narratives and approaches for affordable homes in Houston.

San Francisco

In the aftermath of the 1994 Northridge earthquake, the city of San Francisco adopted a strategy of acquisition-rehab to address the lack of affordable homes through its Small-Sites Program. This strategy promoted diversity and opportunity for all income levels by acquiring properties often occupied by low- and middle-income tenants and encouraging neighborhood participation. Affordable housing initiatives throughout the city also provided other services including employment coaching, computer skills training, and empowering residents by fostering socio-economic mobility.



The messaging strategy in San Francisco was strongly influenced by YIMBY (“Yes In My Backyard”) arguments. While much more progressive than general recommendations from other sources, YIMBY arguments have prevailed in San Francisco.

Messaging toolkits designed for San Francisco and Bay Area planners highlight the idea of “inclusionary housing” and have managed to garner a groundswell of liberal support for affordable homes. While these arguments are identified as prone to backfiring by strengthening opposition rather than rallying support, they seemed to have worked in San Francisco.

Studies of efforts to support affordable homes in San Francisco found how openness, transparency, and verifiable facts helped win approval for projects, in line with recommendations from other sources for effective messaging.

The review of the San Francisco efforts demonstrate the importance of not only providing homes but offering other tools and tactics to uplift communities. Distance between homes and places of work was seen as a large obstacle

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in a number of affordable projects sites and were identified as an area for improvement in future developments either through siting or providing upgrades and access to public transportation. Residents appreciated the efforts made towards their integration into surrounding communities. Survey research also found residents of mixed-income communities were much happier with the quality and conditions of affordable developments.

New Orleans

Another geography of comparison is New Orleans, LA where there is a large volume of research centered on the post-Katrina landscape. The city made use of the Community Revitalization Fund (CRF), FEMA grants, and implemented the Road Home program in an effort to promote owner-owned affordable options.

Post-Katrina FEMA assistance took two forms: temporary homes, and long-term payments for trailer homes. These options were met with opposition by the people FEMA aimed to support, help due to the poor quality of the housing, and the lack of opportunity created by these programs. To better tailor efforts to those who need it the most, planners had to find way to more effectively evaluate the needs of and serve residents displaced by Katrina.

Philanthropic contributors also played a large role in rebuilding New Orleans including organizations such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Greater New Orleans Foundation. The large role of philanthropic organizations made it possible to use the experiences of individuals to frame the need for affordable homes in a neighborhood. The CRF encouraged residents to become “citizen planners,” making activism a central lens to understanding affordable efforts in the city of New Orleans.

In the face of a disaster such as Katrina, the role of philanthropic organizations was especially important in avoiding messaging backfires fueled by crisis, fatalism, and the role of government by instead highlighting the role of each individual in uplifting other individuals in the neighborhood.

The efforts to develop and preserve affordable homes have met with mixed results, but there are plenty of lessons to be learned. While initial efforts did not meet constituent needs, and many neighborhoods lost their previously affordable characteristics, the CRF eventually did surpass the number of



affordable homes compared to pre-Katrina levels. A key lesson is how large part of New Orleans’s success was driven by neighborhood involvement and the promotion of tactics which took into account the needs of both home-owners and home-renters.

While Hurricane Harvey did not devastate housing stock to the degree Katrina impacted New Orleans, identifying civic leaders to help address Houston’s dwindling affordability will still be an important factor in overcoming neighborhood opposition to affordable homes solutions.

Jacksonville

Much like New Orleans and Houston, Jacksonville, FL faces the impact of extreme weather events. Jacksonville had to rebuild following Hurricane Irma for which it received HUD funding totaling approximately \$616 million.

Florida has also codified affordability efforts by enacting the William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act which aims to create more diverse, resident-informed neighborhoods with affordable options.

Even with this state-wide effort, organizations such as the Florida Housing Coalition have highlighted the need for local governments to be heavily involved in attempts to make homes more accessible to citizens. In fact, they suggest the local government is the “linchpin” to the success of affordability efforts within Jacksonville and Florida as a whole.

Reports by affordable housing actors within the state of Florida again highlight the need for cohesive messaging plans, the involvement of residents in the planning process, and the use of verifiable facts to counteract NIMBY arguments and to pre-empt opposition to affordable developments.

The scholarship suggests strong leadership and adequate organization and preparation are keys to success for creating successful mixed-income neighborhoods. This aligns with the broader research findings with respect to messaging, since these factors contribute to the success of the messaging guides and engagement strategies used by affordable housing advocates.

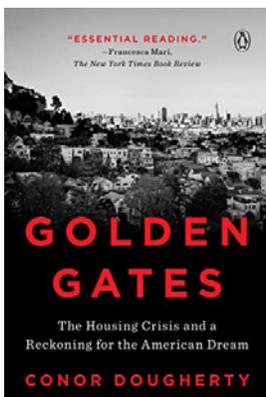


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KEY LITERATURE REVIEW SOURCES

Within the scope of the research review, four documents crystallized arguments for affordable homes and the best way to earn public support.

- Golden Gates: The Housing Crisis and a Reckoning for the American Dream
- “You Don’t Have to Live Here” Why Housing Messages Are Backfiring and 10 Things We Can Do About It
- Opposition to Affordable Housing in the USA: Debate Framing and the Responses of Local Actors
- National Low-Income Housing Coalition’s Advocates’ Guide 2021



Golden Gates: The Housing Crisis and a Reckoning for the American Dream

For many Americans, owning a home is an essential part of the American dream, offering security, opportunity, and neighborhood investment to those who achieve it. However, more recently, the dream of owning a home has become a fantasy as the nation faces a crisis of residents being priced out of its major metropolitan cities.

Nowhere is this more evident than in San Francisco’s Bay Area, the hometown and focus of study for *New York Times* economics reporter Connor Dougherty in his book *Golden Gates: The Housing Crisis and a Reckoning for the American Dream*.

In his book, Dougherty chronicles America’s housing crisis from the lens of the Bay Area, examining the many factors behind the affordability crisis: home supply shortage, zoning restrictions, NIMBYism (the not in my backyard argument), structural racism, gentrification, and private wealth interest.

While locally focused and non-prescriptive, *Golden Gates* offered a key insight into a major factor and mindset driving the nation’s housing affordability crisis.

In *Golden Gates*, Dougherty traces the intensity of neighborhood resistance to development, particularly in established neighborhoods, to homeowners’ belief their home is how they will build wealth.

For many Americans, the purchasing of a home signifies one of the greatest assets they will ever own. People often bank their retirement, children’s

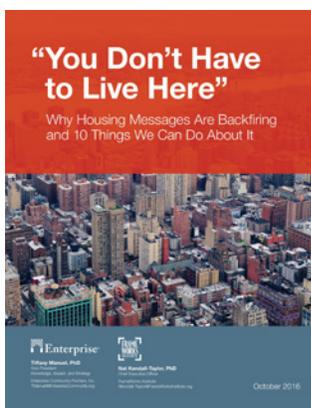
education, and economic future all into their homes. As a result, anything which can impact the value of one’s home takes on added significance.

“Homes are an all-eggs-in-one-basket kind of investment. You can’t diversify them like stock, and you can’t buy insurance on falling values. You can buy insurance, but the one thing you can’t buy insurance on is the thing homeowners fear most, which is the fear that their neighborhood will go to hell and they’ll be stuck in a house nobody wants to buy.”

This is known as the *Homevoter Hypothesis* first introduced by economist William Fischel. As part of the hypothesis, Fischel concluded resident resistance to new development and attendance at poorly represented council meetings is a way of ensuring their home values stay high.

Further, the more one spends and invests in their home the more resistant they are to change or development which would negatively affect their home value. Thus, the more expensive a neighborhood and city become and the more people have to stretch to purchase a home, the more motivated homeowners are to protect their property value. Their opposition to new, affordable options has the unfortunate effect of increasing neighborhood prices further.

Despite the differences between Houston and the Bay Area, the symptoms of unaffordability are consistent: a shortage of homes and growth in high-paying jobs leads to increasing rents and home prices, particularly in job-rich neighborhoods. This leads to increasing property value for homeowners, resident concern over displacement, and resentment towards developers.



“You Don’t Have to Live Here” Why Housing Messages Are Backfiring and 10 Things We Can Do About It

Enterprise Community Partners and the Frameworks Institute released *You Don’t Have to Live Here* in 2016, which focused on the potential for well-intentioned messaging to actually backfire due to preconceptions and/or misperceptions about the motivations of various audiences.

Part of the explanation for this backfire effect is “confirmation bias”—the tendency to accept arguments that confirm our views. But message backfires are also related to the way our brains

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are wired to process information. Research has shown that “people will resist abandoning a false belief unless they have a compelling alternative explanation” or frame from which to think about new information (Ignatius, 2016). With piles of data but no alternative frame to hang them on, advocates may be seeing renewed interest from local legislators but are facing an increasingly unsympathetic public.

The report then displays a series of potential backfire effects encountered during their research, with explanations how some messaging fails, and potential corrective steps to ensure connection. They created a graphic showing the range of messages subject to potential backfire.

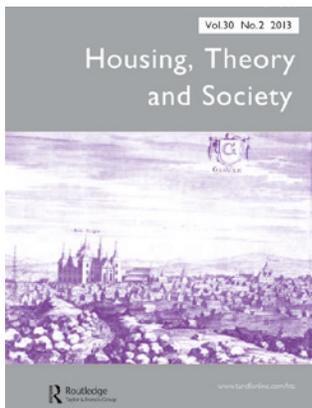
We need ways of turning down the backfire and turning up public understanding of these issues. This is a precondition for generating support for necessary policies and interventions. Building public will requires both better evidence about the relative benefits of alternative solutions and also more effective ways of using this evidence to lift up stories about homes as an important shared concern.



—
Manuel, Tiffany, and Nat Kendall-Taylor. 2016. "You Don't Have to Live Here' Why Housing Messages Are Backfiring and 10 Things We Can Do About It." FrameWorks Institute, Enterprise Community Partners.

The report then makes ten recommendations for more effective messaging, including:

- Tell stories that balance the people, places, and systems perspectives.
- Tell a “Story of Us” rather than a “Story of Them.”
- Use robust examples that show how new housing policies worked.
- Avoid leading or over-relying on the terms “housing” or “affordable housing.”



Opposition to Affordable Housing in the USA: Debate Framing and the Responses of Local Actors

This article, published in the journal *Housing, Theory and Society* in 2013 takes a look at how the obstacle of opposition to “affordable housing” itself is expressed, how it affects attempts at affordable development, and possible solutions.

The authors start with an overview on the importance of framing in shaping public policy, and specifically affordable projects. They identify framing and reframing as key tools in identifying and countering negative beliefs about “affordable housing” while reaffirming and galvanizing supporters. The discussion then turns to understanding how opponents, specifically those with NIMBY arguments (“Not In My Backyard”), frame their arguments.

NIMBY arguments focus on development design/aesthetics, neighborhood effects, and assumptions of future tenants that present in two stages:

- **“Youth” Stage** - This tends to be more reactionary comments about tenants that capture public attention.
- **“Maturity” Stage** - Sentiments are ‘legitimized’ by moving to public forums and now center on the design of the homes and the possible effects on the neighborhood.

These arguments seem to be successful because of the way in which they formulate their social constructions to appeal to similarly minded audiences.

These social constructions are often based on negative assumptions and stereotypes rooted in notions of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and immigration status. These oppositional elements often paint potential

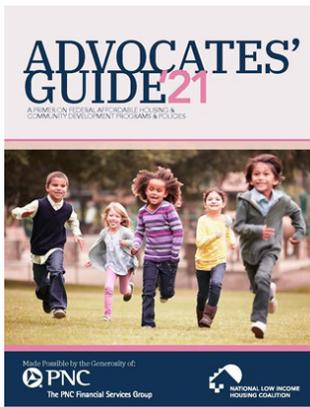
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tenants as ‘undeserving’ due to poor judgment or deviant behavior. Frames used by opposition often invoke the “us vs. them” mentality and misuse planning jargon to lend themselves more credibility.

The research also examined the different responses to NIMBYism at every juncture of affordable projects and found developers bear the most responsibility in responding to this opposition. Their acquiescence or abdication will give NIMBYs being more of a say in siting and design aspects of affordable homes.

The research also examined the different responses to NIMBYism at every juncture of affordable projects and found developers bear the most responsibility in responding to this opposition. Their acquiescence or abdication give NIMBY arguments more of a say in the location and design aspects of affordable homes.

The research concludes how if planners, advocates and developers better understand the roots of NIMBY concerns and how oppositional residents frame their arguments they can respond better and reframe the issues at hand. They highlight the need to counteract the “othering” of minorities and possible tenants by NIMBY groups.



Advocates' Guide '21

The Advocates' Guide includes a series of institutional, policy, and legal references and resources in support of affordable preservation and development.

While written through a mostly federal advocacy perspective, the guide includes several important recommendations in building support for affordable homes, including:

- Launch General Audience Education Campaigns
- Garner Support from a Broad Range of Interests
- Engage Elected Officials
- Engage Neighborhood Groups with Specific Developments
- Address All Legitimate Opposition
- Know the Law and Expand Legal Protections

With other research showing how perceptions of negative impacts on home value can drive opposition. *The Advocates Guide* specifically cites research showing how in almost every instance, there has been a net positive impact on property values from the preservation and creation of more affordable stock.

The Guide invokes a 2016 Trulia study, showing the net-positive impact on property values, and links to additional resources addressing misconceptions about the purported negative impact of affordable homes through statistical and other research.

The Guide also includes links to additional primary resources to advocates learn more about the policy and economic dynamics driving opinion and action.

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QUOTES AND ABSTRACTS

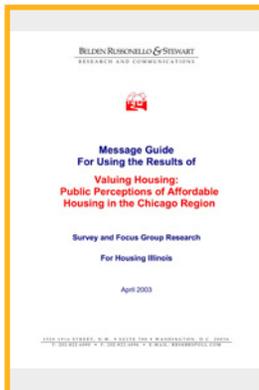
The following lists important sources used in this literature review while identifying and categorizing key quotes and source abstracts which can assist in developing effective messaging:

- **What to Say** – Effective and Ineffective Frameworks
- **How to Say It** – Effective and Less Effective Approaches
- **Who to Say It To** – Understanding the Audience Landscape
- **Addressing Opposition** – Building Empathy and Understanding

What to Say

Effective Frameworks

Define affordable housing as broadly as possible. The more broadly we can present the issue of affordable housing, the more we will reinforce the message that it benefits all of us. (Belden and Russonello, 3)



The research tells us that two most decisive values associated with support for affordable housing are: Community self-interest (It is going to help me and my community if there is affordable housing to all.) Responsibility to others (We have a responsibility to help other people who need help.) (Belden and Russonello, 4)

Make the focus of the public education campaign about everybody, not just low-income families. Anyone can find themselves in need of affordable housing—as we witnessed very recently during the housing crisis of 2008—and everyone is impacted by housing affordability. (Rios et al., 19)

The strongest frame begins with the value of Collective Growth and Prosperity—or the idea that economic and community vitality requires that people have the resources they need to participate and contribute—to talk about economic and racial segregation. (Sweetland and O’Neil, 12)

Policy explanations are particularly effective among groups that may otherwise be resistant to affordable housing development. (Levay et al., 21)



Housing stimulates state and local economies. When a developer creates housing that is affordable through new construction or rehabilitation, the community gains jobs through direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts. (Home Matters, 2)



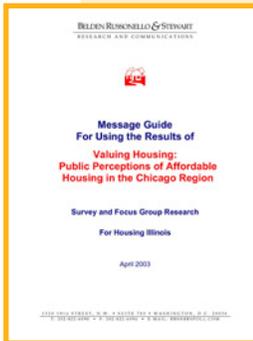
Messages that focus on the immediate and long-term benefits and keeping people safe and healthy are the most persuasive. (A Call for Action on Housing Amid COVID-19, 38)

Framing housing as a basic human need, especially one that supports children and is connected to people’s health and well-being, generates much stronger support. “A human-needs framework that taps into people’s real experience really helps us fight individualism,” says Lake. (Axel-Lute)

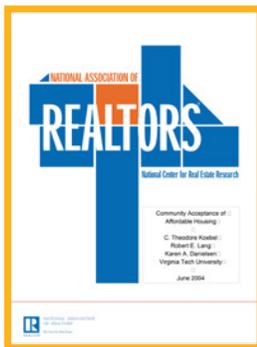
While a shortage of housing that is affordable can contribute to ill health and educational problems among low-income families and children, housing affordability is a solution for good health and achievement in school. (Home Matters, 4)

Multi-issue campaigns often used “quality of life” messages to unify the different interests represented within the campaign and to create a broad appeal. (Building Public Will, 2)

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Address the big negatives. The other side will say you want to burden them with gangs, drugs, and crime – and depress property values in the process. If you don’t answer that, you lose. Your goal must include presenting a new image. Some of this is accomplished with language – especially talking about neighborhood or community – and some of it with visuals and examples of attractive, respectable dwellings and people. Your work must include describing anew what affordable housing looks like, how it is managed, how it is cared for, and how it fits in and contributes to healthy communities and neighborhoods. (Belden and Russonello, 3)



Affordable housing developers need to demonstrate that they deliver a quality product that will continue to be maintained and managed as a valuable asset within a neighborhood. (Koebel et al., 67)



The Opportunity Agenda, a strong proponent of values-based messaging, explains on its website, “Leading with facts and figures can reinforce an idea, but it doesn’t do much to persuade, particularly in this age of ‘fake news.’ Leading with values, on the other hand, activates emotions and opens an audience’s hearts and ears to the message.” (Axel-Lute)

In devising messages for particular audiences, we start with the same universal call on the values and then tweak the appeal to concerns particularly important to specific audiences (as revealed in the Housing Illinois research). Also the sequence of the components (values, problem, solution) may at times vary – when it is important to state a problem or solution early so that the audience knows what you are talking about. (Belden and Russonello, 7)

A 2004 study by the Fannie Mae Foundation, which involved 22 focus groups and 2800 phone interviews, also determined that frames that elicit notions of deservingness were more likely to be supported by the general public (Stewart 2004). Two examples of this include: (1) people who work hard and

play by the rules deserve affordable housing and (2) affordable housing is not an entitlement programme for poor Americans – it is a wealth building programme for all Americans (Holtzman 2006). (Nguyen et al., 112)

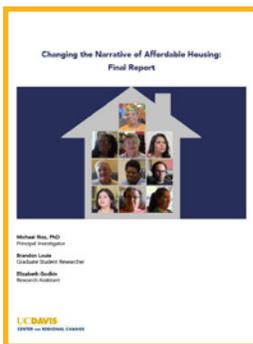
Fairness and property rights messages seem to appeal to all ideological and partisan camps, or at least not to actively offend any of them. (Matheis and Sorens, 27)

Explain disparities. Help people understand what restricts access to quality affordable housing and how racial discrimination contributes to problems. (Sweetland and O’Neil, 1)

To reframe housing as an equity issue, then, advocates need to offer people alternative ways to understand how housing disparities happen...Carefully crafted “what-affects-what” sequences, known as explanatory chains, can provide people with an alternative way of understanding a problem and lead them to more fully appreciate advocates’ suggested solutions. (Sweetland and O’Neil, 10)

Ineffective Frameworks

Don’t focus on the individual, can lead to lack of context (Borum Chattoo et al., 559)



“When the issue transforms from general to specific—when it becomes personal—the public is far less supportive of accepting housing for moderate and low-income people. Darker feelings of fear overtake fairness and opportunity for many Americans” (Campaign for Affordable Housing 2004, 5). (Rios et al., 8)



Don’t directly refute the idea that individual choice is the driving factor behind housing affordability issues. Instead of rebutting—which can reinforce the unproductive assumption— pivot directly to a more structural view. (Sweetland and O’Neil, 8)

Don’t zoom in on the housing plights of individuals or families in an attempt to build compassion. Social science shows that these types of stories rarely cause

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the public to understand the bigger issue or support collective responses. Instead, craft stories in which people, advocates, and systems are all major characters—and in which a collective response is needed for a satisfying conclusion to the plot. (Sweetland and O’Neil, 8)



Be wary of portrait frames. Often reporters, and other storytellers, will want to focus on the personal aspect of the story and the impact of COVID-19 on individuals. These are important stories, but they sometimes do not go far enough if they keep the solutions focused on individuals. And they can do damage when they create an “us versus them” narrative. (Martínez Cuestas, 3)

We suspect that Economic Strength was less successful because “the economy” is highly abstract; as such, people may have a hard time drawing a connection between strengthening the economy and their own interests. People can readily understand how they prosper when their community or region prospers, but their connection to the larger economy is more tenuous. (Levay et al., 15)

Avoid relying on a general “opportunity” frame. The concept of opportunity leaves space for unproductive ways of thinking about housing to take hold—in particular, individualistic and consumerist thinking. Once these ways of thinking are active in people’s minds and in the public discourse, they lead in directions that block the goals of housing affordability advocates. This strongly suggests that simple references to opportunity are unlikely to foster a collective, systemic orientation toward affordable housing reform. (Reframing Affordable Housing, 5)

As a result, messaging meant to highlight the unique challenges that low- and moderate-income residents face easily backfires and often morphs into Zero-Sum Thinking—triggering the perception of competition for scarce resources. (Manuel and Kendall-Taylor, 7)

Avoid narratives that activate understandings that impede productive engagement with housing affordability issues. Both media and advocacy narratives activate a slew of unproductive public understandings — consumerism, government inefficiency and individual responsibility chief among them. Communicators should avoid explicitly activating these perspectives as an effective strategy to engage more productive public thinking about affordable housing. (O’Neil et al., 22)

Don't use consumerist language (Sweetland and O'Neil, 6) or affordability language.

Avoid framing individuals as consumers. Communicators should avoid references to individuals' decisions to buy or rent houses or apartments, as this is likely to trigger Consumerist thinking. Communicators should especially avoid the language of housing "choices," as this focuses thinking on individuals' actions rather than on the context within which people act and which constrains their lives and decisions. When talking about housing costs, communicators should make sure to keep the discussion at the neighborhood or community level to shift the focus away from individual-level decisions. (Reframing Affordable Housing, 4)



While the public recognizes that some people struggle to afford good housing, they tend to assume, because of consumerist assumptions, that the solution is for individuals to make different choices (e.g., moving to a place where housing is cheaper or budgeting more effectively). (Levay et al., 9)

When the problem is understood as one of affordability, people move quickly to thinking about what individuals can or should do so they can afford housing. They assume that housing is a demand-side issue and that the solution is for individuals to make better decisions so that they can afford the housing they want. These individualistic solutions often include working harder to get a better job and using stricter self-discipline in personal budgeting. (Levay et al., 10)

We found that opportunity language can lead to individualistic and consumeristic thinking and can produce backfire effects (that is, it can make people more resistant to affordable housing and community development). (Levay et al., 15)

Faced with messages about the need to make housing more affordable, the public reasons that people who are struggling with housing challenges (and especially with affordability) are: (1) poor money managers who have made bad decisions about their resources; (2) irresponsible and unwilling to take ownership of and solve their own personal problems; and (3) lazy and unwilling to take the initiative to move to better places where housing is more affordable. (Manuel and Kendall-Taylor, 6)

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FrameWorks’ previous research found that the image of “crooked” or “greedy” landlords who are only focused on money figures prominently in public thinking. The Individual Responsibility narrative that focuses on individual discrimination is likely to reinforce the assumption that housing problems are just the result of “bad actors” or rotten apples. With exposure to this narrative, the public is likely to conclude that the solution to housing discrimination is to punish these bad actors, rather than changing the policies that have historically created contexts in which discriminatory and exploitative behavior is possible. (O’Neil et al., 17)



Members of the public already recognize the harmful effects of housing insecurity and are primed to be fatalistic about the possibility of reining in high housing costs. In other words, the public’s default thinking is negative and fatalistic. The Negative Valence frame largely reinforces existing thinking and does not fully convince people that changes in policy and practice could make a difference. (Levay et al., 30)

Avoid stories of impending housing crises. (O’Neil et al., 4)

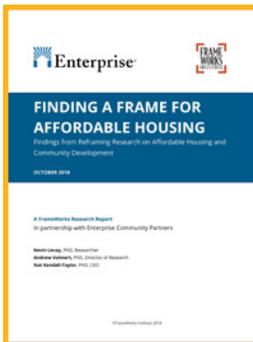
[If] using an opportunity frame, be sure to stress people’s interdependence. Though other values are likely to be more productive, when communicators want to use the concept of opportunity, they should frame opportunity in terms of interdependence to foster a more collective orientation. When using the opportunity frame, steps should be taken to connect the frame to collective responsibility and shared benefits. This will help avoid the frame’s tendency to shift people into individualistic thinking and analyze whether a particular person or family truly “deserves” opportunity. (Reframing Affordable Housing, 6)



Don’t use facts as the frame. Communicators cannot assume that facts have the self-evident meaning for the public that they have for experts and advocates. Housing advocates must fully and deeply realize that they are not their audience and apply this to their messaging.

Facts need frames. Given people’s fatalism about affordability, including values and policy solutions within messages is likely to be important, as these frame elements can potentially orient people toward effective collective action and help them understand that there are steps that can be taken to make housing more affordable. (Reframing Affordable Housing, 5)

Housing insecurity is a problem that affects almost every community in the nation today. Yet there is not a strong public sense of connectedness to this issue or to the people who are experiencing housing challenges nor an understanding of how housing impacts the vibrancy and health of communities. This leads to a second, fairly predictable message backfire. Reasoning from a Separate Fates perspective, people struggle to see how the issue relates to their interests or circumstances. (Manuel and Kendall-Taylor, 7)



Don't focus on the abstract ideas like the economy. (Levey et al., 15)

But some things didn't test so well. And one of those things was a message that led with the history of racism in housing policy. Participants responded well to references to getting rid of current discrimination, but all demographic groups except Black respondents (and advocates) dropped way off when the history of racism was emphasized. (Axel-Lute)

DON'T: assume people understand all the differences between private and social housing; show how the different systems work and how they can lead to different experiences. (Moving from Concern to Concrete Change, 6)

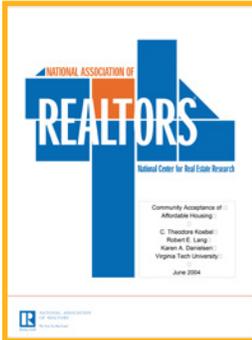
However, messaging focused on "workforce housing" has been shown to be ineffective. Messaging highlighting housing for teachers, firefighters, police officers and other workers did not resonate with voters in previous initiatives, possibly because of the enduring power of the meritocracy myth in the United States. (Rios et al., 21)

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How to Say it

Effective Approaches

However, we also see evidence that respondents can be swayed by pro-housing messaging to support policies that make building homes easier. (Matheis and Sorens, 27)



He suggests that developers be flexible in their plans to accommodate neighbors' concerns. Be honest without sugar coating, do not try to buy your way into the community and keep to the high road. Finally, find allies and isolate those who are intractable. (Koebel et al., 25)

Our messages should make the landscape around housing easier to see, from the history of how the problem got this way to the communities, agencies, and organizations that can be enlisted to repair it, as well as the vision of where we can go together. In a quick sound bite to a reporter, you won't be able to include all of the landscape, so select one thing that is most important to include at this moment for the specific solution you seek. (Martínez Cuestas, 4)

Data should also compare the cost of supporting affordable housing developments versus the costs associated with the increased social services and programs needed to assist those who lack a healthy, safe, decent place to live. This can demonstrate that money not invested in affordable homes will have to be spent many times over down the road due to all of the problems associated with inadequate housing. (Rios et al., 20)



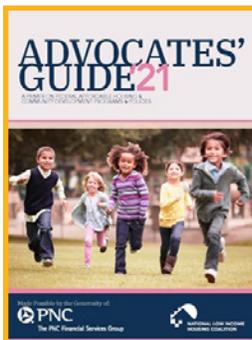
Data and facts alone rarely change minds. Data is most effective when it bolsters strong explanations and value statements. ("Overcoming NIMBY")



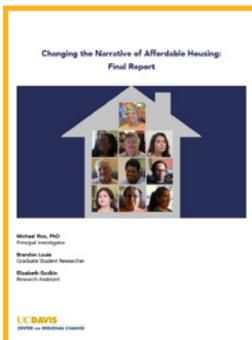
Formal participation processes are sometimes helpful but informal processes tend to work better. (Scully and Tighe, 13)

Get ahead of the story--contact media before opponents dominate the story (Advocates' Guide 2020, 2-74)

The ways in which the media present stories about affordable housing can create opportunities for change or impede progress for those seeking to build greater public will for housing reform. The media act as a “gatekeeper,” both filtering and amplifying the messages that enter into public conversations. (O’Neil et al., 1)



Create a media toolkit for partners/stakeholders to use when talking to media/public (Advocates' Guide 2020, 2-73)



The four tactics that developers and advocates can prepare for and utilize are political support, community support, positive media coverage and litigation/legal support (Iglesias 2002). (Rios et al., 10)

The media can be a crucial ally; whenever advocates foresee a potential NIMBY problem, it is best to contact the media right away so that they understand the development plans, the public purpose, and the population to be served before they hear neighborhood opposition. (Advocates' Guide 2020, 2-41)

The media is looking for newsworthy stories—such as the one USA Today ran on the unexpected findings of the NAR survey. They love a “man bites dog story.” The problem is that most housing news is more in the category of “dog bites man”—or the standard “poor people cannot find housing” stories. The media will respond to stories about people who should be able to afford housing that cannot. (Koebel et al., 63)

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Media relationships are reciprocal and should generate benefits for both parties. Before initiating any relationship, it will be important to determine your overall goal in reaching out to press and to identify your key messages around ending homelessness and increasing housing affordability. (Advocates’ Guide 2020, 2-74)

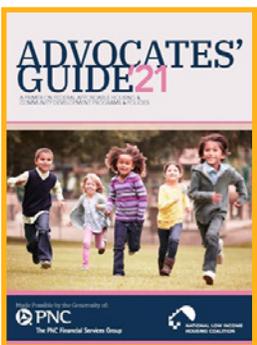


The news media play a significant role in reaching decision-makers. If the link between housing and health is not explicit in the news, decision-makers and the public may not prioritize addressing housing needs. (Martínez Cuestas, 1)

Provide specific examples of housing policies that can increase affordability. Offering examples of housing policies is critical to keeping thinking tethered to housing and not letting it slide to education and employment. Communicators should offer concrete examples of current policies and explain how they influence affordability. Messages should also focus on developing examples of changes in policy that would make good housing more affordable. (Reframing Affordable Housing, 3)

The creation and maintenance of a local coalition, sensitive to local concerns, that can work with state legislators on regional issues over time seems the most promising route. (Basolo and Hastings, 468)

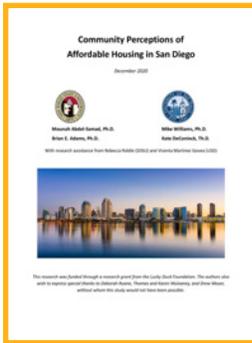
Expanding education and campaign approaches to address the negative construction of affordable housing tenants should involve inclusive public forums with participation from planners, elected officials, developers, representatives of the “opposition” and representatives of the target population. (Nguyen et al., 127)



Advocates should ask members of the business community, clergy, social service agencies, and others who will be well received, to stand with them in advancing affordable housing goals. (Advocates’ Guide 2020, 2-41)

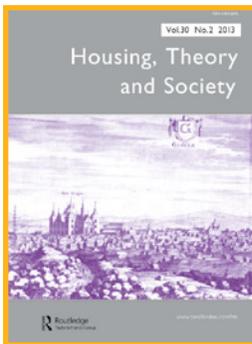
Having the “right” people at the table was important for both single-issue and multi-issue campaigns. The “right” people included people from sectors of strategic interest, people with political clout, and people able to work well in coalitions. (Building Public Will, 2)

Less Effective Approaches



By engaging an array of community leaders, affordable housing advocates can educate the public about the impact of affordable housing on the community and on homeless individuals. This action will also create champions that keep supporting the process of creating affordable housing and that increase the reach of these efforts. (Abdel-Samad et al., 15)

DON’T: dilute your message by listing the many ways that social housing is a resource that benefits everyone. (Moving from Concern to Concrete Change, 3)



Don’t delay getting involved/communication (Nguyen et al., 125)

Ignorance about negative social constructions or delayed action by housing practitioners, elected officials and developers may allow those opposed to affordable housing to rapidly crystallize a unifying message, creating an insurmountable barrier to overcome. (Nguyen et al., 127)



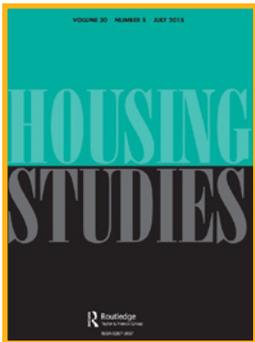
DON’T: describe social housing as ‘for the poor’, ‘the poorest’ or ‘a safety net’. Shift thinking to social housing as a way to prevent poverty for many more people who could benefit from decent, stable, affordable homes. (Moving from Concern to Concrete Change, 3)

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Holes in media and organizational stories are not left vacant by those exposed to these stories. People fill in the narrative blanks with their own existing understandings of these issues. For example, if the “Why does this issue matter” slot is not filled in, people will use their own understandings of affordable housing to answer this fundamental question. The problem with this “fill it in” phenomenon is that many of the public’s existing understandings of housing are unproductive in relation to the goals of those working on progressive housing reforms. Therefore, the incompleteness of advocacy and media narratives actually reinforces existing public understandings, rather than shifting or expanding them. (O’Neil et al., 10)

Who to Say It To

Effective Approaches

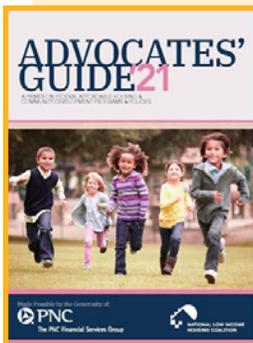


Engage with the public (Scully and Tighe, 13)

Outreach to the neighborhood can be key to avoiding a NIMBY battle but it can also ignite a NIMBY battle. The decision about when and how to engage the neighborhood is one that is best done with as much consideration as the development plans themselves. If neighborhood engagement is done well, it can smooth the development process to success. (Advocates’ Guide 2020, 2-42)

For many projects, activating renters to come to hearings and express their views is a way to boost public expressions of support for housing, but for other projects, that may not be the case. (Sorens, 13)

Developers typically reacted to opponents’ initiatives in an isolated, piecemeal, tactical fashion.” Their responses focused primarily on dealing with upset, often angry, neighbors rather than seeking to gain political support, developing active community support, enabling good media coverage, and using the available laws to their advantage. (Iglesias, 82)

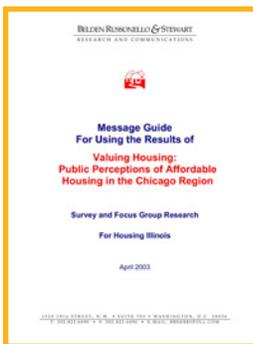


Here is some general, but critical guidance for neighborhood engagement: (1) find out if there is a neighborhood association, either formally incorporated or organically comprised; (2) identify the leader (s) of the neighborhood group; (3) set up a one on one or very small group meeting with the leaders; (4) encourage the neighborhood leaders to share any concerns with you after you have shared your development plans; (5) be willing to revise your plans in ways that respond to any legitimate concerns of the neighborhood; (6) include the neighborhood leaders in your presentation to the larger neighborhood group. **(Advocates' Guide 2020, 2-42)**



The process for organizing supporters includes four sequential steps: first, brainstorming potential supporters; second, prioritizing who to recruit and what one wants them to do to help obtain approvals; third, recruiting, educating, and preparing the selected supporters; and fourth, mobilizing supporters at key points and keeping them on board, including demonstrating appreciation. **(Iglesias, 88)**

Yet, the benefits of planning are substantial. They include the opportunity to act strategically; to frame the issues” and to assemble pertinent information to address likely concerns; the chance to gather and train active community supporters; the prospect of preventing concerned neighbors from forming a single opposition group; the potential for integrating different strategies (including the opportunity to use law short of litigation); and the likelihood of reducing the costs and delays attributable to local opposition compared to acting without planning ahead. **(Iglesias, 83)**



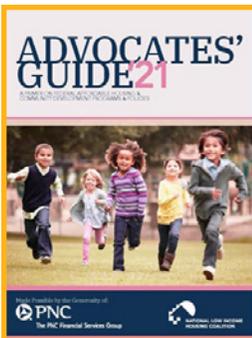
Answering questions about affordable housing should be approached as an opportunity to present the overall campaign message. **(Belden and Russonello, 11)**

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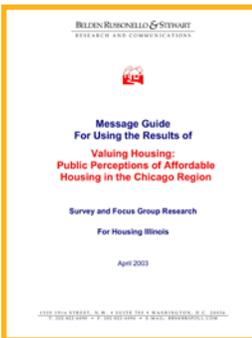
ADDRESSING OPPOSITION

The outcry from constituents expressing concerns over the siting and permitting of affordable housing can lead to lengthy and hostile public proceedings, frustrated Consolidated Plan implementation, increased development costs, and property rights disputes. The consequence is less development and preservation of housing at a time when the country is in desperate need of more rental housing. The resulting unmet need for rental units leads to an increase in homelessness. Avoiding and overcoming opposition to affordable rental housing is key to producing and preserving desperately needed affordable homes (Advocates’ Guide 2020, 2-40).

A number of NIMBY studies have found NIMBY attitudes are not rational, or merely appear to be rational to mask socially unacceptable viewpoints, and can change over time (Nguyen, Basolo, & Tewari, 2013; Scally, 2012) (Nguyen and Payton Scally, 366).



Property values are often at the root of neighborhood opposition. Yet, virtually without exception, property value and affordable housing research finds no negative effect on neighboring market rate property values. In fact, in some instances, affordable housing has increased the value of neighboring property. (Advocates’ Guide 2020, 2-42)



The bottom line is that there is a reservoir of understanding among the public of the importance of helping everyone in a community have a decent home, but in any particular application this understanding may come up against experiences and fears – real and imagined – that must be answered, if affordable housing is to be significantly expanded. (Belden and Russonello, 2)



In any local-opposition conflict, developers are communicating with five potentially critical audiences or forums: local government (including staff, decision makers, and the city attorney), supporters, concerned neighbors, the media, and the courts. (Iglesias, 83)

Opposition to affordable housing projects in wealthy communities, in the Houston area and around the state, creates intense (and often successful) political pressure to block development. The stated reasons for opposition are varied, from worries about increased traffic to barely-veiled racial dog whistles about the people who might live in the new affordable complexes (Beeler).

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SUMMARY - HOUSTON FACES UNIQUE CHALLENGES

While the literature review generated several significant insights, it is important to emphasize Houston's qualitative differences with other major American cities. In many ways, Houston is an aberration in size, scale, economy, and diversity.

Today, Houston has more than 2.3 million people in its 665-square-mile incorporated area.

As the nation's fourth most populous city, Houston has obvious urban characteristics, but as Houston has grown in population, its size and sprawl (primarily composed of single-family detached homes) has contributed to the large physical footprint of the city, and limited density.

In addition to the city's unique geographic landscape, Houston's sustained population growth has resulted in dramatic changes to its demographics.

Houston is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in the United States. Houston surpassed New York's diversity in 2010 and projections show Houston will continue to become younger and more diverse.

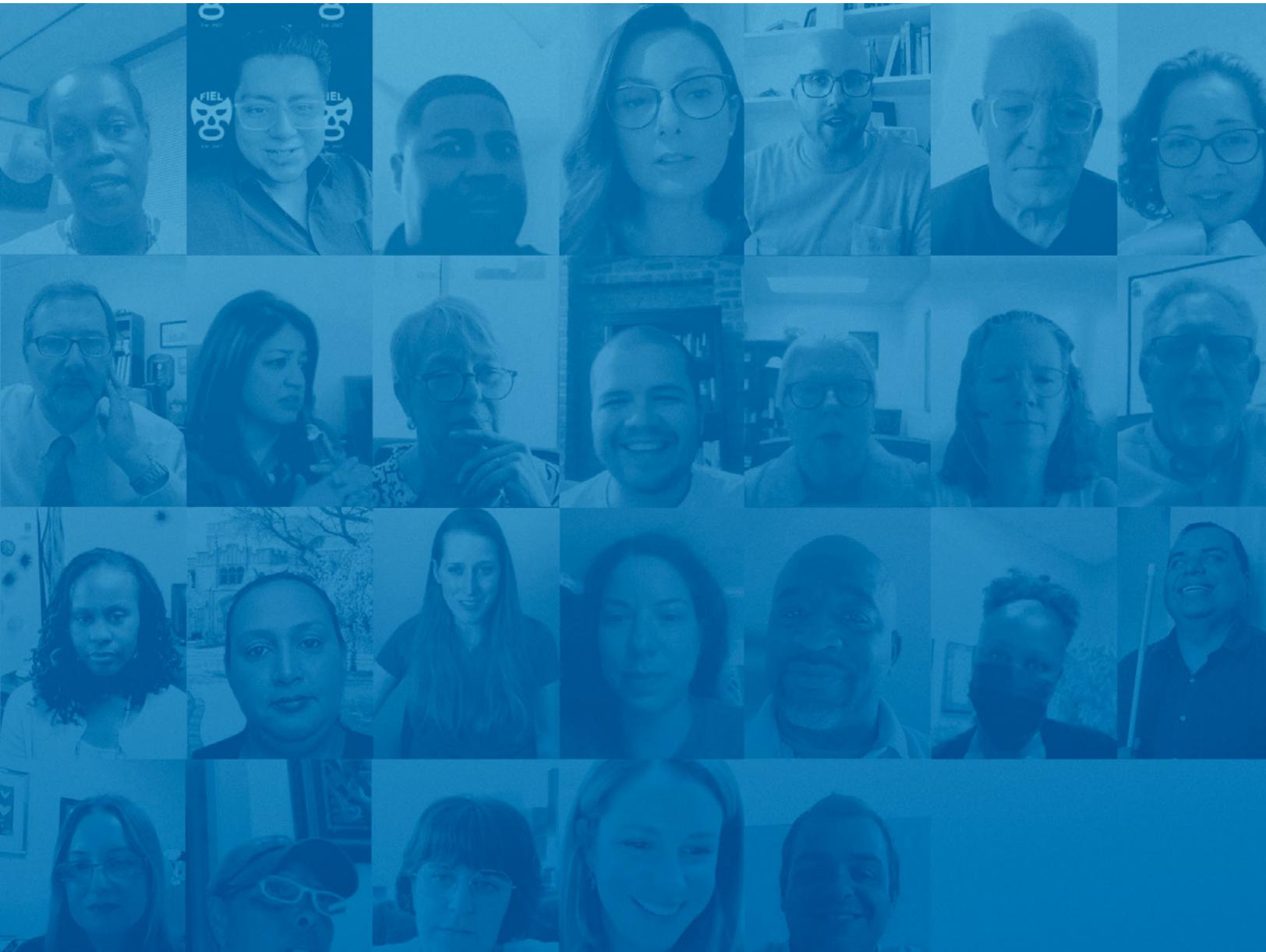
Traditionally considered a city centered on oil and gas, Houston's economy has also diversified and seen explosive growth in the healthcare, technology, arts and entertainment sectors, with the city's service workers serving as a backbone to this changing economic landscape.

Houston's unique composition means the findings from the literature review cannot be taken as perfect predictors for how to approach advocacy for affordable homes. Houston's distinct structure, views, values, and economy necessitate tailored messaging.

Taking the findings from the literature review and conducting partner and expert interviews as well as local focus groups helps evaluate, verify or modify the findings for a relevant Houston context.



Partner and Expert Interviews



INTERVIEW SUMMARY/STRUCTURE

The consequences of Houston's shortage of affordable homes go beyond the number of residents who can comfortably afford to live within the city and ultimately impact several key sectors essential to the city's health.

To build upon the findings from the Literature Review, partners and experts from across the region were interviewed to obtain a local and informed perspective of Houston's affordability challenges, and to identify some existing practices and messages being used to support affordable home development and neighborhood engagement.

Between August 19 and September 21, 2021, 28 interviews were conducted with 33 participants from 24 separate groups and organizations.

Participants represented nonprofits, city departments, private industry professionals, developers, advocacy groups, super neighborhood leaders, and academics with legal, environmental, educational, employment, infrastructure, community development, and housing competencies.

For more affordable homes to be built, a wide range of people and disciplines need to be engaged. The interviews helped identify holes in pre-existing studies and research and further developed comprehensive strategies applicable to the specific needs and unique nature of the City of Houston.

KEY FINDINGS

As supply reaches record lows, a growing number of Houstonians are forced to contend over a dwindling supply of affordable homes and are losing hope they can find an affordable place to live. As recent Kinder Institute research demonstrates, the pressures of affordability are no longer concentrated in Houston's low-income neighborhoods and are, instead being felt across the city.

While the need for more affordable homes is apparent to policy-makers, developers, and advocates, there are several hurdles to overcome to leverage neighborhood support and gain approval for projects.

By engaging with advocates, professionals, experts, and neighborhood leaders, several best practices on neighborhood outreach and messaging emerged from the discussions:

What to Say

- Framing the Need For Affordable Homes
- Addressing Opposition and Misinformation

How to Say It

- Developing Trust through Transparency and Truth
- Overcoming Resident Stigma Through Storytelling
- Finding Allies in Trusted Messengers

Who to Say It To

- Deep Neighborhood Engagement

What to Say: Framing the Need for Affordable Homes

A prerequisite for earning neighborhood support is building public awareness. Without understanding the benefits and needs, a neighborhood has no reason to support affordable homes. By making simple connections between affordable homes and the potential positive impacts for neighborhoods, partners can fill the gaps in public knowledge and define the need for affordable development.

Making an effective case for affordable homes starts with explaining the benefits of and the need for affordable homes by sharing the context of Houston’s dwindling affordability.

“You have to begin with the big picture saying Houston is not as affordable as it seems for lots of people who keep the city going.” (Kinder Institute)

Affordability is a question of context. Many people, especially those who live in wealthier, higher opportunity areas, may not be aware of the magnitude of the city’s dwindling affordability.

Among Houstonians, there is limited understanding of how the lack of quality, affordable homes can exacerbate social and economic issues. Thus, when communicating on affordable development, outline the problem and the possible economic risks and repercussions of inaction.

“It’s really to educate and mobilize to understand what we are really trying to do.” (Avenue)

“Education wherever possible, when people are willing.” (SEARCH Homeless Services)

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Once awareness of the threats to Houston's affordability is established, advocates for affordable development are better able to frame the lack of affordable homes as a problem which ultimately impacts everyone - the shortage of affordable homes in Houston reinforces the risk to every neighborhood's bottom line.

Communicating the need for affordable homes means illustrating how Houston's future success is dependent on the essential workers who move the Houston economy - as well as the consequences and negative impacts to the City if these challenges of access are not addressed.

*"People have a hard time relating to things unless it directly impacts them."
(Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston)*

"You have to appeal to people's self-interest." (HEART Program)

Making simple connections between affordable homes and the potential positive impacts for neighborhoods, allows the City and its partners to fill the gaps in public knowledge and define the need for affordable development.

"Create the real links to folks to see that it really does impact their own lives." (Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston)

*"The human infrastructure that we all depend on is, in turn, dependent on this extremely fragile housing ecosystem and that has to be stabilized or else the prosperity and quality of life of the entire region will be at risk"
(Kinder Institute)*

"There are lots of people who are coming here for opportunity. If the people who already live here don't have that same opportunity they are going to be a drag on the entire economy and the entire system. They are going to drag you down. The rising tide is going to lift all boats and this is how you do that." (Kinder Institute)

Logic and facts conveyed to the target audience are partially effective in creating an understanding of Houston's affordability problem and the need for more affordable homes. By communicating the realities of the state of affordability of homes in the city and clearly connecting it to undesirable outcomes for neighborhoods, partners can start to counter preconceptions and misinformation as to why so many Houstonians can't afford to live close to where they work.

What to Say: Addressing Opposition and Misinformation

Many well-intentioned efforts to engage neighborhoods can backfire because of an inelegant or impatient reaction to opposition. Everyone in a neighborhood has the right to be heard, and it's the responsibility of developer leaders to take the feedback into account as projects move towards approval. Negativity cannot be met with negativity. Striking a positive contrast will provide cover for fair-minded residents to accept the new homes and their eventual new neighbors.

When responding to opposition, many experts stressed the need for partners not to get overly “emotional” or even to refute people’s falsely held misconceptions.

“When you point out to people that they are wrong, sometimes they just dig in their heels all the more.” (Kinder Institute)

The experts believed “shaming and blaming” does not work. They argued the more someone’s previously-held beliefs are attacked or refuted, the more “truculent” and resistant to conversation and collaboration they will become. Challenging beliefs can actually serve to reinforce them.

Using facts to counter a falsely held belief is not an effective way of managing opposition. Instead, our experts assert, pivoting to how the project is addressing concerns, benefitting the neighborhood, or in one’s own self-interest can be a more effective way of reframing the conversation.

“You take away the sting from some of these, on their face, neutral claims that are not really fact-based by saying we already considered that and it will not increase traffic or flooding.” (Lone Star Legal Aid)

While there are exceptions, it is important to acknowledge opposition arguments and individuals, meet their concerns with respectful listening, and then offer careful responses to address the substance of their questions or criticisms.

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How to Say It: Developing Trust Through Transparency and Truth

While it is important to educate residents and neighbors about the benefits of affordable development, residents will still have hesitation or misconceptions about affordable homes based on their personal concerns.

Building Trust: The Antidote to “isms”

When communicating on new affordable development, be concise, consistent, and truthful.

The mere prospect of new affordable homes can create great neighborhood uncertainty and prompt concerns of financial security for homeowners. Some people will approach the process with mistrust and draw their own quick conclusions about the impact on safety and property values.

“Keep it simple and keep it truthful.”
– City of Houston Health Department

Against this backdrop, experts asserted it is essential for the City and its partners to swiftly engage with neighbors about the goals and intentions for affordable homes to earn neighborhood trust.

“The most important parts that we’ve found are transparency and honesty.”
(NestQuest Houston)

“My philosophy has been to, one, be transparent - as much as you can.” (SER Jobs)

“If you are upfront with people, they’ll deal with you. If you come with some other stuff, they’ll kind of shut you out. So you’ve got to be transparent.”
(City of Houston Health Department)

Without trust, affordable homes are much more likely to experience pushback. Simple language not only ensures neighborhood understanding but also allows more effective engagement with the diverse members and voices who make up each neighborhood.

Because housing policy and choices are complex, it is important to develop concise and truthful messaging, using the language and context most accessible and relevant to the neighborhood. Residents are more likely to understand and support the benefits of affordable homes in their neighborhoods if simple language is used in presentations and conversations..

“Avoid any language that is too lofty.” (FordMomentum!)

Overcoming Resident Stigma Through Storytelling

The term “affordable housing” is often associated with “dangerous” and “lazy” inhabitants. Rather than citing facts, figures, and statistics to counter these public misperceptions, interviewees encouraged messengers to illustrate the personal stories of the future neighbors. These stories can be shared in the context of the complex systems and pressures which create the need for affordable homes.

Across many interviews, participants described how they encountered a general misconception about of the people who live in affordable homes as “dangerous,” “lazy, low-income people” who “should just work hard and not get any handouts.” This belief in individual fault can significantly interfere with the public’s willingness to support new affordable homes.

“People hear about affordable housing and they think it’s for lazy, low-income people who aren’t like them. [...] The fact is that affordable housing is generally for people like them [oppositional residents] or their children or their parents and they just don’t realize it.” (Avenue)

Experts assert overcoming the pre-existing stigma and misconceptions held towards those who qualify for affordable homes is achieved by providing real-life examples of individuals and families who benefit from affordable homes.

Partners and experts encouraged educating residents on how a majority of the families who qualify for affordable homes are often the workers and professionals most essential to the local economy and neighborhood: teachers, police officers, firefighters, and service workers.

“It’s telling the story. Figuring out how to tell the story. That’s going to change somebody’s mind a whole lot more than statistics.” (Healthcare for the Homeless)

Overcoming this perception of individual fault also requires supplying context and perspective of the complex systems which have created certain circumstances.

“Facts are good, but it has got to be emotional.”
– Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

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“It matters how we tell stories of people who have fallen into a housing crisis or just anybody who is in a vulnerable situation to make sure not to make it sound like their fault, or bad decision making. [...] Broader context matters.”
(Coalition for the Homeless Houston)

With many Houstonians having faced economic and personal impacts from the pandemic, the partners and experts acknowledged the vulnerability many families face. Rather than focus on the negative, instead celebrate Houston’s resilience, and how it knows how to bounce back from adversity. Positive stories about the people who bring benefits to neighborhoods are an effective part of the tool kit for earning neighborhood support.

How to Say It: Utilizing Allies as Trusted Messengers

A message is only as powerful as the person delivering it. Rather than only utilizing a professional spokesperson, effective neighborhood engagement also requires the voices of the institutions and leaders who are deeply connected to the neighborhood. The partners and experts encouraged fostering partnerships with trusted allies who already have established relationships within the area to help earn broad support.

When looking to dispel misinformation and gain neighborhood support, effective messaging “has more to do with the person delivering the message” and “how the message is delivered” than the content of the message itself.

Countering misinformation and mistrust for specific projects requires identifying “ambassadors” or “people who can be your advocates” to support the project and communicate the message is essential to approval.

“I could say whatever I wanted to say but it takes somebody inside to change minds.”

– Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

“Identifying trusted voices that can help advocate on this issue are going to be key.” (Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities)

“It really is putting together a lot of allies” (Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston)

Cultivating neighborhood trust is a fragile process, and by aligning with allies who already have established relationships within neighborhoods, the City and partners can build the inroads and connections they need to gain larger support.

“They know us. They recognize us. They have trust in community organizations like FIEL and other organizations and are more willing to share information because they know we are on their side. We are not out to get them.” (FIEL Houston)

“Connect with organizations that are on the ground . . . I think that’s really important because they already have the trust of the community.” (Texas Housers)

Reaching out to churches, independent school districts, neighborhood organizations, local businesses, and family homes helps to better understand the neighborhood’s needs and the potential support to counter reflexive, vocal opposition.

“It is about having the voice of the institutions that are deeply connected to people and how they think and what they believe.” (Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston)

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Who To Say It To: Deep Neighborhood Engagement

Be present. To win the neighborhood, go beyond the town hall setting and get involved in the neighborhood. Visibility and presence create opportunities to listen, collect feedback, address concerns, and gain support from those most active in the neighborhood.

Oftentimes those who speak the loudest are believed to be the voices of their entire neighborhood. However, neighborhoods are far more complex than may appear on the surface.

“Really when you want to engage community, whether that’s a community that’s pushing against you or pushing with you, there has to be a sense of understand and trust. Someone has to get to know you before they believe what you are going to say.” (FordMomentum!)

Some partners will use an open process and ask what the neighborhood would like to see to observe the “mixed perspectives” on affordable homes and can help counter vocal opposition. For other partners, gaining a true sense of the neighborhood’s outlook means “going deep” inside the neighborhood.

Meaningful engagement requires repeated conversations in spaces people frequently utilize (usually not city facilities). Being present in neighborhoods and proactively creating opportunities to gather feedback will enable partners to identify neighborhood support and then leverage it into the approval process.

“Get to where the people are.” (Habitat For Humanity)

“Make sure it’s not one time messaging that it’s a repeated message.” (Fifth Ward CRC)

In some neighborhoods, the lack of transportation, trust, and time means more effort will be required than just meetings at downtown city facilities or one-off meetings with limited attendance and participation. Supporters should plan and provide multiple opportunities for listening and engagement.

“Community engagement is extremely important in order to make sure that we are dispelling some of the misinformation that is being shared.”
– Fifth Ward CRC

“I’m a big proponent of going and asking for people’s opinions on what they’d like to see in their neighborhood and then filling them in every three months with how it’s going.” (Habitat For Humanity)

By engaging with trusted neighborhood leaders, sticking with one’s message, and continually following through and following up on promises, advocates can better combat the “loud voices” who drown out the “silent [supportive] majority.”

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These interviews with advocates, professionals, experts, and neighborhood leaders surfaced additional insights outside of the realm of messaging strategies.

Houston’s affordability problem does not end with building or preserving enough “affordable” homes.

Quality of Life and Connection to the Neighborhood

Many partners and experts believe the availability of quality affordable homes has a host of positive effects on communities.

When given the opportunity to live in an affordable home, families, experience more security related to healthcare, retirement, transportation, and overall social stability.

To take advantage of these opportunities, partners and experts encouraged the development of affordable homes within high opportunity communities and neighborhoods with available employment, services, transportation, and accessibility improvements.

“Try to have more equity in housing. I mean that in where public housing is and therefore the opportunities for those families to really change, kind of, the generational direction of those families.” (Healthcare for the Homeless)

From the vantage point of several partners, affordable homes should include the amenities necessary for a healthy lifestyle and should be incorporated through the city (“not just in fringe areas”).

“It gets into community planning of what types of housing and employment and services are within communities.” (Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston)

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One participant emphasized the importance of neighborhood ownership and homeownership. Homeownership and integration services would ensure residents living in affordable homes would see the greatest benefit from the neighborhood with which they live.

“I think there is a really big loss when people at a lower income level are not able to own their own home and, therefore, own their own community.”
(Healthcare for the Homeless)

Connectivity and Mobility

Participants repeatedly emphasized the link between Houston’s affordability and transportation.

While Houston’s expansion and development have earned the city a reputation of affordability, partners and experts noted the financial burden of transportation costs. Experts assert the lack of affordable homes proximate to Houston’s job centers necessitates better transportation solutions.

Houston’s sprawl has spiked the transportation costs for many Houstonians. When combining the cost of transportation, many are cost-burdened.

“These two topics, housing affordability and transportation a lot of times they are talked about separately and really [...] they should be talked about in concert because they are so directly related to each other.” (LINK Houston)

This problem is even worse for Houston’s lowest earners. The inability to afford a car and the many associated costs, such as gas, car payments, repairs, insurance, and maintenance, has implications on earning potential and quality of life.

“With Houston being as big as it is and being as widespread as everything is, it creates barriers for people to have access to things. So for example, it’s almost impossible to find employment within five to ten miles of your home. [...] Which means they have to travel. Which means your insurance goes up. Your commute time goes up. Which means you’re paying more for childcare.” (SER Jobs)

According to partners and experts, the three biggest barriers in helping her clients find employment for are housing, transportation, and childcare.

“When you don’t have transportation and you have to, you know, commute for two to three hours to get from home to work and back, what do you do with your kids? What do you do with the elderly that you are providing care for? When you put all those pieces together, it gets really hard.” (SER Jobs)

Accessibility

In addition to the need for better connectivity to job centers, interviews illuminated how much more needs to be done to improve accessibility.

In interviews with those who represent Houstonians with disabilities and those who speak English as a second language, it was noted how most communications are frequently not provided to those who may need translated or accessible accommodations.

“It is important to deliver messaging in Spanish, and also remember, there are a lot of dialects.” (Fiel)

According to the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities, in Houston, people with disabilities make up about 9.4 percent of the population (over 215,000 residents - a majority of whom are seniors), however, the city lacks the necessary accessible infrastructure to accommodate those in need.

“People want affordable housing, but the double whammy for people with disabilities is people want affordable housing that’s accessible and that’s almost nonexistent.” (Mayor’s Office of People with Disabilities)

A majority of people with disabilities are economically disadvantaged. They are often underemployed and displaced, so they need accessible, affordable homes. Unfortunately, affordable, accessible homes (connected by a walk network, public transportation options, walkable sidewalks, wide door frames, grab bars, braille signage, etc.) are almost non-existent in the city.

The need for accessible, affordable homes is projected to grow as the people of Houston live longer. While accessible features in a home are not a disqualifying factor for people who don’t require them, they are essential to those who do. Including advocates for and members of Houston’s senior and disabled populations in the conversation with developers makes it more likely accessible homes will be built to better meet a previously invisible need.

“Keeping in mind basic accessibility accommodations from the very beginning can make a big difference.” (Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities)

The purposeful inclusion of people with disabilities in neighborhood engagement by using intentionally inclusive messaging, in accessible

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formats (translation of online flyers, making online flyers and social media graphics accessible with alt-text, offering ASL interpreters, using larger prints, etc.) will earn the support of advocates

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Houston is increasingly unaffordable.

The lack of public understanding/awareness undermines the urgency of Houston's dwindling affordability and undercuts the value of proposed affordable homes. By illustrating what is at stake for neighborhoods, developers and partners can better present and establish the value of and necessity for more affordable homes.

When dealing with opposition and resistance, partners must acknowledge neighborhood concerns by listening and then offering concise, consistent, and transparent responses to address the substance of the neighborhood questions or criticisms.

In addition to a lack of understanding, affordable homes still carry a social stigma with long-term negative impacts on the quality of the neighborhood and those who live there.

Rather than citing facts and figures, participants encourage advocates to address this pre-existing stigma by appealing to the personal story of the tenants who would be moving in.

For the message to be successful, however, the City and partners must earn trust within the neighborhood.

By fostering partnerships with allies who already have established relationships within neighborhoods, connections can be developed. This assists in the goal of gaining neighborhood support by allowing developers to better engage with the neighborhood.

In a city as diverse as Houston, solutions to gaining neighborhood support are as diverse as the city's demographics. By engaging with trusted neighborhood leaders, sticking with one's message, and continually following through and following up on promises and representations, advocates can better overcome the "loud voices" who can drown out the "silent [supportive] majority."

In the simplest messaging framework, focus on what to say, how to say it, and who to say it to:

- **What to Say:** Make simple connections between the city’s lack of affordable homes and the potential positive impacts for neighborhoods in order to fill the gaps in public knowledge and define the need for affordable development.

Things to Avoid: When met with opposition, resist the urge to point to facts and instead directly address neighborhood concerns and reframe the development as a positive outcome to the neighborhood.

- **How to Say It:** Always be clear, consistent, frequent, truthful, and transparent in our communication. In response to concerns, use storytelling techniques, and utilize trusted messengers to deliver your messages.
- **Who to Say It To:** Be present in neighborhoods and proactively create opportunities to gather feedback from communities to identify supportive allies and advocates which will ultimately help in the approval process.

Overall, interview participants believe Houston’s affordability problem cannot be solved by simply meeting demand through development. Facts and statistics will not win people over; there must be a planned and intentional process - best achieved by consulting those with local neighborhood expertise to cultivate meaningful relationships and by sharing transparent and responsive information.

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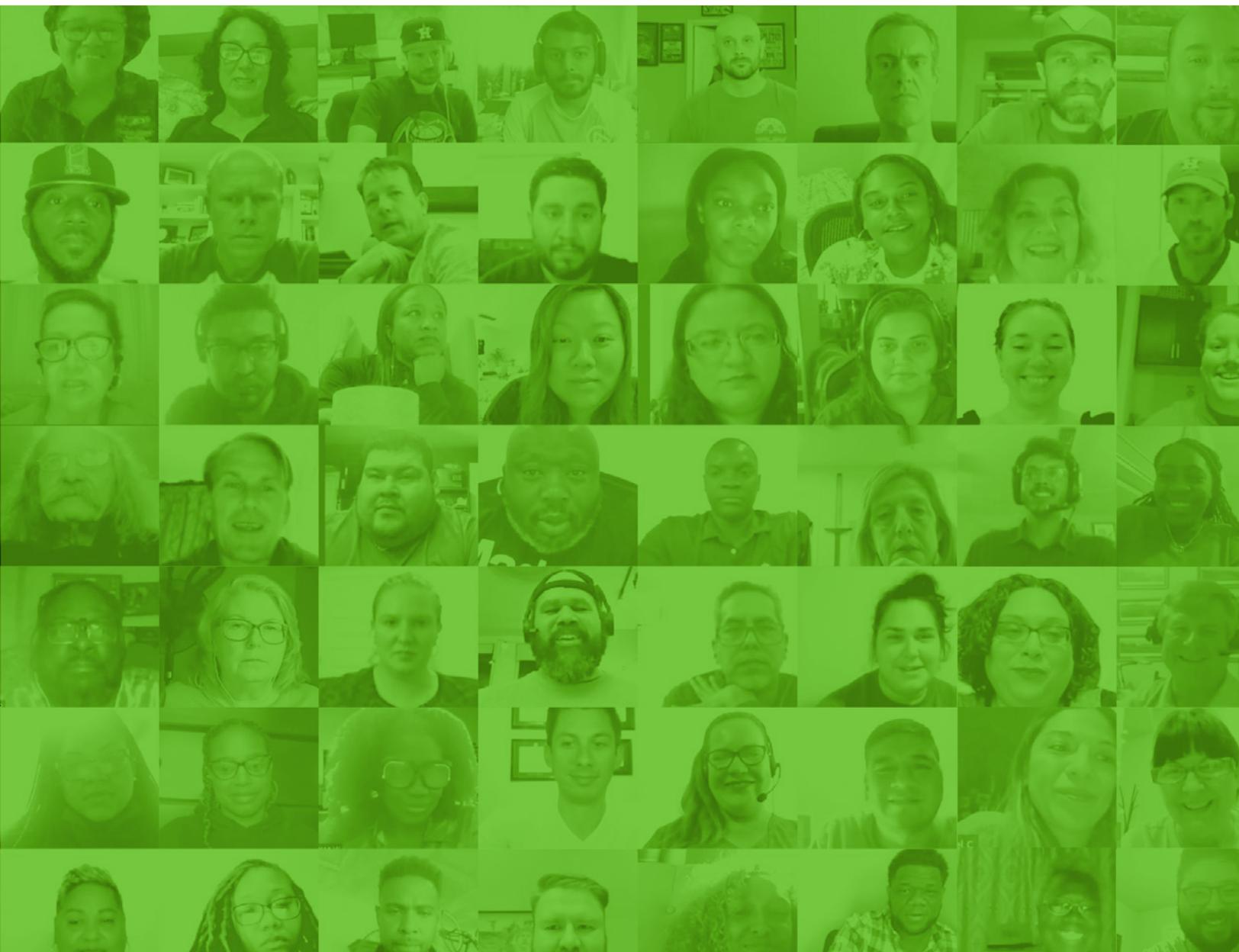


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Focus Group Interviews



FOCUS GROUP KEY FINDINGS

The focus groups began by identifying existing perceptions on financial pressures within the market, and then perceptions about affordable homes (many of which were negative). This baseline was overcome through the blind presentation of structures and stories (about people), which prove the need for conversation and meaningful neighborhood engagement.

By displaying images of homes participants have seen in their everyday lives, explaining the various types of people who are income-eligible for affordable homes, and by observing the group interactions, elements of the literature review and interviews were confirmed – even as some of the specific policy arguments built upon frameworks of fairness, scarcity, and shared destiny did not move the public in a meaningful way.

What to Say (and Show) – There are no silver bullet messages to ensure support for affordable homes. There will be opposition, and the concerns of “who is going to live there” can transform into “otherism” if not addressed. Focus groups participants understand the challenges of the affordability landscape in Houston and are open to the idea of providing opportunities for others (and themselves). They have questions, and using images of the potential structures and stories of their future neighbors was persuasive to group participants.

How to Say It – In the survey and in the groups, participants identified NextDoor and Facebook as platforms they use to get neighborhood information and keep in touch. Only a handful of participants across the six groups had ever attended a neighborhood meeting or spoken at a meeting. Effective engagement will bring the “silent, supportive majority” to the table, and make it easier for projects to gain municipal approval.

Who to Say it To – Supporters of affordable homes need to identify local residents who see this big picture and who will step forward to support affordable homes in their neighborhoods to offset others who may be in opposition. Interested parties also need to identify the people who local residents will respect and engage with, be it a business owner, relative, or other authoritative persona. Earn public support by demonstrating the value to individuals and to neighborhoods of what affordable homes will bring; and ameliorate opposition by speaking – truthfully – to local concerns about the quality of potential structures and the people who will become their new neighbors.

FOCUS GROUP COMPOSITION AND DESIGN

In Houston, due to the city’s demographic, geographic, and economic diversity, finding consensus among Houstonians requires broad engagement. Using focus groups organized by neighborhoods helped gain greater insight into regional attitudes on new affordable development, discern distinctions between neighborhoods, and identify common sentiments shared across participants.

Outreach Strategists conducted six virtual focus groups across two days, among 52 participants living in seven council districts.

Council District	Number of Participants	Identified Neighborhoods
District A	8	Spring Branch
District B	10	Acres Homes, Oak Forest
District C	10	Heights, Rice Military, Montrose, Northwest
District D	8	Sunnyside, Pearland
District G	8	Galleria Area, Westchase
Districts H & I	8	East Downtown, Downtown, Midtown, Gulfgate, Idlewood

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FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FLOW

Introductions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How long have you lived in Houston? How long have you lived in your current neighborhood? 2. Why do you live where you live?
Houston Is Changing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has the city changed? How? Why? 2. Do you think the city lives up to its reputation for affordability? 3. Have you witnessed changes to your cost of housing?
Changes To The Neighborhood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you noticed changes in your own neighborhood? 2. What do those changes look like?
Perceptions Of “Affordable Housing”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When you think about affordable housing, what are some words you would use to describe affordable homes? 2. Participants presented images of affordable projects in Houston. 3. Perceptions of recipients of “affordable housing?” 4. Participants presented with resident scenarios.
What About Your Backyard	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you feel about an affordable project in your neighborhood? 2. Would you have any concerns? 3. What questions would you have for the developer?
Reactions To Statements About Affordable Homes	<p>Participants were presented with a series of agree-disagree statements on affordable homes (statements ranged on issues from neighborhood outcomes, proximity to work, economic implications, etc.), and asked to share their reactions.</p>

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

Houston is Changing

Focus group participants universally agreed Houston is rapidly changing.

Rent, construction, the height of neighborhood homes, and property taxes have all increased.

“I feel like everything is going up.” (LaTonya, District D)

“Now, everywhere I go, is changes, you know.” (Christopher, District B)

“I’m noticing a change from big open spaces to more cosmopolitan. Everything is getting tighter. [...] We are moving upward [...] One house next to the other.” (Vincent, District B)

“It’s construction everywhere you go.” (Damita, District D)

As more people move to Houston, some participants did observe positive impacts within their neighborhoods even as costs increase.

Changes to Neighborhood

Single-story family homes have been replaced with newer, larger developments, with increases in traffic.

“I feel like a lot of homes, they get bought out, they get leveled out and then three townhomes go up.” (Mark, District C)

For some, these changes were “exciting” and for others, unwanted.

Participants noted these newer developments have driven the city’s diminishing “affordability,” as home prices and rents have outpaced wages, leaving many feeling excluded from buying homes in their communities.

“I shouldn’t have this much trouble finding a home for somebody that is, I hate to say it, I make a very good wage doing what I do. [...] Finding a home now is harder more than it’s ever been.” (David, District C)

“I can hardly recognize the streets, all the people that we grew up with and everything, they’re all gone and all of the houses have changed. Things are so expensive now. So that’s a big change for me.”

“The difference is night and day now, it’s not affordable anymore that’s for sure.”
– District C



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“Now that people are knowing that it’s affordable, it is starting to become not as affordable anymore. Now, it’s like the affordability is not there anymore; it keeps going up and no one’s pay is going up.” (Tia, District H/I)

“The affordability is just going to go down and down and down as they continue to overdevelop the expensively priced homes.” (Cathy, District B)

For some participants who are homeowners, these changes were considered positive. New neighborhood investments and amenities have increased their property values.

“I’ve seen substantial increases in the property values and taxes of the area. [...] My house has doubled in its value.” (Nick, District A)

“People are investing more in the neighborhood. It’s busier. [...] Property is more expensive here so we are paying higher taxes every year.” (Ade, District B)

However, for others, the increase in property values has increased concern. Some participants observed the changes to their neighborhood as established residents are being bought out of their homes. Many participants anticipate these departures signify a future in which they will be unable to live in their neighborhoods.

“It’s getting more and more expensive. [...] With all of the big houses and all of the developments coming in, it’s harder and harder and harder to afford to be able to stay here.” (Cathy, District B)

“It doesn’t feel like family anymore, but we still live here, we love it, but change is coming so we have to deal with it.” (Christopher, District B)

“We have teachers that don’t live close by because they can’t afford to live in the neighborhood.” (Ade, District B)

“They’re taking a lot of the older houses that are owned by the elderly people and buying them out. And they are starting to replace those with two stories, three stories even.” (Haley, District D)

While participants believed the city may still be comparatively affordable, they agreed Houston is far less affordable than its reputation.

“I think in Houston you get great bang for your buck, but I definitely think because of the influx of people it’s definitely changing. I think the costs are rising and will continue to rise.” (Grier, District D)

“I moved here for the affordability but that has definitely changed.” (Mack, District H/I)

Prices have “skyrocketed,” and for Houstonians to live within their means, they have to choose between living farther outside the city center or spending a higher percentage of their income on their homes.

“I make a decent salary, but I still DoorDash, I do all kinds of other things, just to make sure me and my family can make it with all of the bills and everything that comes with just the rent” (Kelsey, District B)

“We have a lot of affordable houses, but they are in a band that’s way outside the city. [...] It’s a significant drive or the homes are really expensive.” (Scott, District G)

“I think the affordability of the houses is hard on a lot of people so the apartment complexes are where they are turning.” (Carey, District G)

Perceptions of “Affordable Housing”

When asked to articulate their associations with the term “affordable housing,” many participants across all groups had negative associations, both for the homes and the people who qualified.

Across neighborhood groups, the term “affordable housing” was associated with an overall decrease in home condition, quality, and upkeep.

“When I think ‘affordable housing,’ I think cheap and maybe less safe pops into my head. Even government-subsidized homes.”
– District A

“I have to compromise in security and maybe it’s going to be more crime around me. I don’t want that.” (Raquel, District A)

“Public housing tends to decay over time. ” (Carey, District G)



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This is in addition to a decrease in neighborhood property value and an increase in crime.

“You also think, as a homeowner, property value going down. [...] But I have friends that live in those type places and they are actually still really nice and the crime is not that high. [...] It depends on the people that move in” (Syreeta, District D)

“My stigma towards it is that it will be a freebie and therefore won’t be taken care of.”
– District A

When discussing their perceptions of the people benefiting from affordable homes, participants brought up issues of criminal background, employment, and lack of care for the property.



However, certain participants were also aware these associations are common “stereotypes,” not universally applicable to all affordable developments or recipients.

“They are going to see it as a bad thing to put affordable housing, because affordable housing has always been associated with these lower income projects. [...] There are plenty of people who, you know, are family oriented and need a cheaper place to rent. It’s not going to be full of crime and things like that.” (Ellissa, District B)

“You can have some really good people living there and you can have some really bad characters living there as well and you wouldn’t even want to be near them.”
– District A



“It’s kind of all about changing your perspective too. [...] You’ve got to think about the people that are going to live there. [...] We want these people close by. We want our teachers to be able to go ten minutes and get to school. We want the firefighters that are just starting out to be able to get to the firehouse so they can protect our homes. It’s also changing your outlook on what ‘affordable housing’ really is.” (Megan, District B).

“I just think about the mental conditioning. As soon as you hear the word ‘affordable homes,’ yes, bells go off in my head.” (Grier, District D)

Reactions to Affordable Homes

Despite the negative associations with “affordable housing,” when presented with images of affordable homes in Houston, participants approved of the look

“I wish I could afford it.” (Elissa, District B)

“Looks like the Heights Area. I like those. [...] It’s the type of style you find in the Heights.”
 (Raquel, District A)

“Very familiar.” (Felicia, District A)

“Kind of like my place.” (Dylan, District A)

“They look nice.” (Mack, District H/I)

“They look like a lot of the properties I’ve been looking at lately.” (Dave, District C)

“Personally, I’d rather see another house like this on my block than a mansion.”
 – District B



However, some participants suggested the homes may be lower in “quality of materials,” smaller in lot size, and generally “cookie-cutter.”

“They look nice, but I think they cut corners with the material.” (Jorge, District H/I)

What About Your Backyard?

Participants were presented with a scenario where if an affordable development was to be built in their neighborhood, what questions would they have about the project.

The aesthetics and quality of the homes, the background and eligibility requirements for the people moving in, resident transience, the type of development, and whether there will be parking for new residents were all raised as questions residents would have for the city and developers.

“Those don’t look like ‘Oh that’s definitely affordable housing.’”
 – District H/I



“What’s your background? Have they had any arrests? [...] and how they plan to keep up the house.” (Kathy, District A)

“I would also like to know are they are going to do some kind of background [check]?” (Clara, District G)

“A good understanding of the requirements for folks that could actually afford it, right? [...] Just knowing that process and what that looks like could go a long way.” (Ade, District B)

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“I think people are more leery of [...] an apartment complex of all affordable housing. That has more of a negative connotation, I think. You know single-family homes, sort of spread throughout, people may not look at that as negatively.” (Cathy, District B)

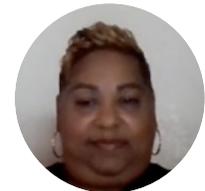
“Who’s targeted? What’s the target population? [...] Income level, certain types of workers, things such as that. To me that would be a big issue and I would think it would be for most people to know who would be living in these homes.” (Annette, District C)

“I would like to see families prioritized. [...] Putting it to its highest and best use.” (Erin, District C)

“Is it going to be one property? Is it going to be a multitude properties? Are they going to throw four or five of these properties on one to two lots?” (David, District C)

*“I would want to know how affordable is affordable. [...] Because if it’s too affordable, then I’ve got some problems.”
– District D*

As stakeholders in the neighborhood, certain homeownership participants had concerns about whether the homes would impact their own property value, be durable enough to stand the test of time, and whether residents would manage the upkeep and stay for a longer-term.



“A big question for me is whether or not the people would be renters or buyers. [...] If you own something you are certainly more likely to want to take care of it.” (Annette, District C)

“Are they homeowners. Will they own the property and pay taxes?” (Carey, District G)

“All my questions would come around the implications of what it would do to my home value. Would they be bought and sold at free market prices in the future? Or is there some sort of ceiling that says it can’t go above it? And if they can’t go above it, that is going to have implications on how much my home could gain in appreciation.” (Scott, District G)

“I think there should be affordable housing for different families, but it is a concern to know how much that will impact the value of your home in the future.” (Ada, District H/I)

“As for the buildings or apartment, who is going to manage it?” (Corey, District G)

“I think my first question would just be: what would be the upkeep of it? [...] They are beautiful houses. I would just want to make sure that they’re going to stay like that.” (Megan, District B)

*“What do they see property values doing? [...] I want to make sure I can get back what I paid, if not even more.”
– District B*

What Else Do You Want to Know?

In addition to concerns over the quality of construction and resident backgrounds, the focus group participants had questions about the developer’s track record, intentions, and the construction timeline.

“What is their track record of having successful neighborhoods like this . . . is [it] doing all of the things that we intended it for?” (Nick, District A)

“I would want to know how long it was going to take them, as well.” (Kevin, District A)

“What other cities, similar cities, comparable cities to Houston, have they [the developers] done such initiatives, and how have the outcomes been?” (Jack, District B)

“Why are you building it here? Why did you choose this neighborhood to build it in?” (Syreeta, District D)

“If your intents are not well, I want to know that. So I want to know what I’m dealing with in my neighborhood.” (Syreeta, District D)



During this discussion, home owning participants were more vocal on questions and concerns.

“I understand the concerns as one of the citizens in the area. I’m certainly not opposed but I am going to ask those questions” (Nick, District A)

While some group participants had experience attending civic and neighborhood meetings, a majority had not. When asked how to better involve and engage the neighborhood, the group supported social media, flyers, apps (NextDoor, Citizen), public announcement notices, and going door to door and engaging with the neighborhood.

“Maybe more flyers in the building, maybe they can email the people who live in this area or have some public announcement notices.” (Ada, District H/I)

When asked whether they would attend a neighborhood meeting on an affordable development in their neighborhood, younger renters

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disclosed they would be less likely to attend, whereas homeowners and more established neighborhood residents said they would likely participate.

*“As long as the actual folks that are doing the project, their vision is in line with the community”
– District B*

Responses to Test Statements about Affordable Homes

When asked to react to statements on affordable housing, participant responses varied widely.



Participants were shown statements invoking inequitable circumstances. Some responded by defining outcomes in the context of personal choice and accountability, while others recognized the impact of the external systems and circumstances on individual outcomes.

“I brought myself back up. I did do my own thing. [...] Is the bailout or helping them going to affect our situation? Is it going to have an impact to where if we continuously keep doing this is it going to hurt my neighborhood? Is it going to raise taxes on what I’m paying? is it going to

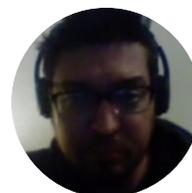
*“I think word of mouth is always the best. So if there was a way to spread it by word of mouth to have conversations about that with neighbors, I think that would get me there [...] I’d be a bit more likely to go.”
– District D*

*“I honestly, if I’m being completely honest, would not attend the meeting.”
– District D*



*“I feel like a lot of the meetings are not well advertised.”
– District H/I*

*“I think there’s various apps [...] the NextDoor app, I use that a lot. [...] Citizen.”
– District H/I*



bring a certain aspect to the neighborhood that wasn't there before?" (Antonia, District C)

"They may have emergencies in life that I might not face. So, you know, things happen all the time. No matter how affordable some things seem to be, one thing can happen and for that month or two it's not so affordable." (LaTonya, District D)

"I believe it can be a chain reaction. [...] Maybe for low wage working people, you know, they are working hard trying their best, but they don't make a lot of money, not trying to be a homeowner just trying pay rent, and if the rents keep going up and they get priced out where they can't afford rent, then it can lead to a chain reaction to some of these people, or like, they have spent most of their money for rent." (Corey, District G)

*"It's Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. You've got to have a home. Home is more important, but once you have that you can focus on improving things that aren't basic necessities."
- District C*



Generally, participants seemed to be dubious of the economic impact a lack of affordable homes can have on the local economy.

"I'm not sure if it hurts our economy, but it certainly hurts them." (Vincent, District B)

"Just because they are geographically located in a neighborhood, doesn't mean they are going to work or do anything in that neighborhood. They can go live somewhere else, or work somewhere else not in your immediate neighborhood. So I don't think it necessarily creates jobs and opportunity in that neighborhood." (Mark, District C)

However, once the participants were given additional context for the reasoning behind the economic statements, many accepted the argument. Some participants saw the value in having service workers live nearby.

"You do have to have people who, you know, are service workers, say for example the waiters the store clerks. Those folks. So if they are able to live in the areas in which they work, I mean yeah, you would be creating opportunities there because you are not going to have the folks that are living in million dollar homes who are going to be the waiters in your local restaurant or store or whatever. So you are building a neighborhood's economy by doing that. It allows these businesses, the restaurants, the stores, things like that, to actually prosper because they can hire people to

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work there.” (Annette, District C)

Finally, statements about proximity to work as an argument for affordable developments did not have a strong positive response. While the groups generally agreed people should have the choice to live close to where they work, when framed in the context “regardless of income,” it was less persuasive. For a majority of the group, commute times were a “personal choice,” and consequently, the income argument was not compelling.

“That’s nice, but if I work in River Oaks, why should I necessarily be entitled to afford to live in River Oaks?” (Scott, District G)

“I will say this, if I had to buy my house today, I wouldn’t be able to afford it. [...] Shouldn’t I be able to afford to live by my job too?” (Dorinda, District G)

ENTRY SURVEY ANALYSIS

To better understand the pathways towards building support for affordable homes, the focus group participants were selected from six different parts of the city and asked to complete a background survey to help inform insights from the focus groups. These studies are not completely representative of the people and neighborhoods of Houston, but the participant surveys and feedback can assist communications and engagement efforts.

Economics and Education

Focus group participants ranged in income from \$29,000 to \$200,000. In the entry survey, 49 of the 54 participants currently work part-time or full-time, with two retirees, two stay-at-home parents, and one person currently out of work (on disability). There are a mixture of careers and job positions, ranging from entry level to managerial, and six participants indicated they are self-employed.

Among the 45 participants who travel to work, 13 have less than a fifteen minute commute, 20 have a commute of 15-30 minutes, 11 between 30 and 60 minutes, and one with a commute of more than an hour. Given what is known about the long commutes many Houstonians face, these responses indicate the people with long commutes are under-represented in the focus group research.

Twenty-nine of the participants own their current home or live with their family, while 25 are renters. Three participants indicated they do not have a car, five are leasing a vehicle, two share a vehicle with someone else, and 44 own their vehicle – consistent with the Houston and Texas car culture.

The educational attainment of the participants skewed high – with nearly two-thirds (35 of 54) of participants indicating they have a bachelor or graduate degree.

Electoral and Civic Participation

These participants are not particularly political. While 48 of the 54 claimed to be registered to vote, and 34 claimed to vote in every election, only seven participants indicated they discuss politics or elections with their

Education	Number of Participants
Some High School	1
HS Diploma or GED	6
Certificate	1
Professional License	1
Some College	4
Associate Degree	6
Bachelor	20
Graduate Degree	15

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friends and family on a daily basis, and another 11 indicated they do so on a weekly basis. This leaves 36 participants (two-thirds) as infrequent political discussants.

Almost every participant indicated they had engaged in some form of civic participation. Participants were asked to select any of seven activities; 1) Attended a community meeting, 2) Signed a petition (online or offline), 3) Participated in a protest or demonstration, 4) Volunteered for a community group, 5) Written a letter to the editor of a news organization, 6) Written a letter to an elected official, or 7) Contributed to a cause (religions, relief fund, nonprofit organization). All but one indicated they had done something – but only a handful indicated they had done most of the activities.

Civic Activism	Participants
Signed a Petition	44
Contributed to a Cause	39
Volunteered	33
Attended a Public Meeting	33
Attended Protest or Demonstration	20
Letter to an Elected Official	19
Letter to the Editor	9

Civic Activism (Count)	Participants
0	1
1	11
2	8
3	6
4	14
5	9
6	4
7	4

In terms of the activities, few indicated they had proactively engaged their elected representatives or a member of the media, while a super majority had signed a petition or contributed to a cause.

Thirty-nine of the 54 indicated they knew how to contact their elected officials, and 26 of the 54 indicated they had previously contacted an elected official. Forty of the 54 participants could not name a local leader or neighborhood figure they follow or look up to. At least among the group participants, there are not particularly strong connections to the civic fabric of the City.

Social Media Use, News Sources, Media Trust

Media usage and media trust provide insights about how to engage Houstonians by indicating how they make decisions and gather information.

Participants were asked to indicate how they gathered information, in particular their news consumption. A supermajority indicated they get their news online, through social media, or from television news.

Participants further indicated they prefer to watch the news, rather than read or listen to it.

Eleven participants indicated they did not use social media – with 43 indicated they used Facebook, and only 11 indicating they use Reddit on a regular basis.

Additionally, 17 participants reported using NextDoor, the local neighborhood app, which several participants raised during the discussions as a source of knowing what’s going on in their neighborhoods.

In terms of media trust, participants prefer local news organizations to national news organizations, and television over print or radio outlets.

Mode	Participants
Watch	35
Read	13
Listen	6

Platform	Participants
Facebook	43
YouTube	38
Instagram	32
TikTok	20
Twitter	17
Pinterest	14
Snapchat	14
Reddit	11

Source	Participants
Online	49
Social	42
TV News	38
Radio	17
Messaging	17
Print	11

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	ABC13	KHOU	KPRC2	Chronicle	Houston Public Media	FOX26	CNN	Telemundo	MSNBC	NY Times	FOX News
Trust it a great deal	12	15	11	13	16	8	11	4	6	10	4
Tend to trust it	32	27	29	23	11	24	22	14	22	12	12
Not sure or don't know	2	5	6	9	22	7	2	32	7	15	4
Tend to distrust it	8	7	7	9	4	14	10	2	10	11	16
Distrust it greatly	0	0	1	0	1	1	9	2	9	6	18
Total trust	44	42	40	36	27	32	33	18	28	22	16
Total distrust	8	7	8	9	5	15	19	4	19	17	34
Net trust	36	35	32	27	22	17	14	14	9	5	-18

Taken together, these responses indicate advocates, nonprofits, developers and city staff should focus on driving news content through television coverage, and then share and promote the coverage through the appropriate social media channels to ensure it is watched by people in neighborhoods relevant to a given project or development.

EXIT SURVEY ANALYSIS

Houston Values

According to research, values-based messaging, or messaging which touches on generally-held beliefs, is essential to fostering a collective perspective of affordable housing and ultimately necessary for advocating for development.

Upon the conclusion of the focus groups, participants were asked to take an exit survey. Fifty-two participants submitted their agreement or disagreement on a series of values-based statements specific to housing affordability.

To determine the most effective value appeals to Houstonians, the exit survey incorporated several principles to determine the best messaging frameworks.

Value Statements	Disagree	Agree	Net Agree	Mean
Our homes provide the foundation for our success in life. Having a stable home makes it possible to pursue opportunities.	1	49	48	47.8
People’s opportunities in life shouldn’t be determined by their ZIP Code.	6	42	36	44.8
Making the American Dream a reality means giving all people the chance to live in good homes they can afford.	6	42	36	43.0
People have a right to live closer to where they work.	10	33	23	38.4
All people should be able to afford to live close to where they work.	10	32	22	37.4
It is a problem that many of the people who work in the neighborhood can’t afford to live in the neighborhood.	12	29	17	36.0
In Houston, people can largely pick where they want to live.	20	23	3	32.2

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Value: Opportunity – The strongest argument focuses on how having a stable home makes it possible to pursue opportunities. This resonates with the perspective of Houston as a city of opportunity but it still carries some risk.

Findings from the *Frameworks Institute* noted how using “opportunity “ in messaging has the potential to backfire, by triggering individualistic and consumerist thinking. It can lead some people to become more resistant to affordable homes because they may perceive “opportunity” to be a guise for a potential handout.

To effectively utilize Houstonians’ appreciation for the value of opportunity and to inoculate against individualistic mindsets, present messaging in a broader social context by discussing the importance of shared neighborhood benefits and impacts.

Value: Proximity to Work – Perhaps due to division in belief over whether “in Houston, people can largely pick where they want to live,” the survey findings show lower rates of consensus over the importance of being able to afford living close to where one works.

Despite the inherent connection between Houston’s diminishing affordability and transportation costs, participants show division on the importance of living in proximity to where they work.

REACTIONS TO SURVEY STATEMENTS

Individual and Collective Sensibilities

All of the research repeatedly reinforced how people, when left to their own devices, will believe the inability to afford a home is a result of individual actions.

The literature review and expert interviews revealed how some people view the inability to afford a home as a result of an individual’s laziness or a simple function of market forces: where some people can afford quality, healthy homes and others, simply, cannot.

This individualistic mindset creates one of the greatest barriers to gaining support for affordable homes.

To assess the strength of Houstonians’ individual and collective sensibilities, the entry survey incorporated questions to explore their individualism, collectivism, and overall faith in government as a system of change.

The survey results indicate Houstonians are largely individualistic, while still holding a healthy measure of respect and acceptance for collective arguments. These findings reinforce findings from the *Frameworks Institute*.

Individualist Statements	Disagree	Agree
I'd rather depend on myself than others.	5	42
I often do "my own thing".	3	41
People are responsible for their own outcomes in life.	6	40
Competition is the law of nature	6	36
I can personally impact important issues in my community.	9	35
Winning is everything.	20	14
Public officials care a lot about what people like me think.	27	12
Most policy issues are so complicated, a person like me cannot really understand what's going on.	34	15

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Collectivist Statements	Disagree	Agree
I have a responsibility to help make my community better.	3	48
Parents and children must stay together as much as possible.	2	43
The well-being of my neighbors is important to me	3	46
To me, pleasure is spending time with others.	3	43
It is important to me to respect the decision made by my groups.	4	40
Working on a team is better for me than working on my own.	9	31

To overcome resistance to affordable developments, reframe “housing” and “affordability” arguments from one of personal responsibility to one of shared destiny by making affordable homes an issue of broad concern and impact to society. Thus, when communicating on behalf of affordable homes, work to illustrate the systems and structures causing housing insecurity while balancing the narrative between “problems” and “solutions.”

Participant Faith in Government

The survey also indicated Houstonians have low confidence in the government’s ability to solve problems. While they agree voting is important and their opinions matter, participants have mixed feelings about whether they would be heard and doubt the government’s ability to do the right thing. Therefore, while Houstonians are receptive to a narrative of systemic factors and collective solutions, who the messenger is matters.

Advocates, nonprofits, and developers cannot rely on municipal agency support to drive neighborhood sentiment. It is important to identify and recruit advocates who are trusted by the neighborhood, and who share and embody the core values of the neighborhood. This reinforces how countering opposition is a process of earning trust.

As individuals, Houstonians are strivers who also support better outcomes for other people and for their communities. An emphasis on complementary and positive outcomes for both individuals and their neighborhoods will lay a foundation for earning support.

Build a complete narrative – connecting the stories of positive outcomes for future neighbors (individuals) with the benefits which will come in terms of jobs, improved home value, and better services for everyone (neighborhood).

Neighborhood Solutions

The final survey statements examined Houstonian’s perceptions of housing affordability solutions. The exit survey results aligned with the entry survey as participants remained divided as to whether the inability to access affordable housing is an individual issue.

However, a majority of respondents still supported the investment of public resources in the development of affordable homes for lower-income earners. Even among those who believe individuals are responsible for their own outcomes, there is support for collective solutions and a pathway towards support for new affordable homes.

Despite this overall support for affordable home development, participant responses reflect the need for solutions-focused messaging by trusted messengers. Relatively weak levels of confidence in the government’s ability to improve affordability or the market’s ability to solve the problem reveal the challenges in identifying who people will trust to fix Houston’s affordability.

To build faith in the ability for affordable home developments to produce change and to avoid fatalistic thinking about how “affordable housing” is too large a problem to solve, “problems” must be balanced with “solutions.”

Having the voices of institutions and leaders who are deeply connected to the community, and empowering them to speak about the benefits and positive effects improving affordability will have on people and neighborhoods can be far more persuasive.

Solution Statements	Disagree	Agree	Net Agree	Mean
We should devote more public resources to making good homes affordable to people with lower incomes.	7	39	32	41.2
I believe in the government’s ability to improve housing affordability.	17	32	15	35.2
Houston’s housing should be left to the market and developers.	16	25	9	32.6
Housing is an individual problem that requires individual agency.	19	17	-2	31.2

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Summary of Findings

For more affordable homes to be built, neighborhood support or consensus is essential. By conducting neighborhood focus groups, the research tested insights from the literature review and the partner and expert interviews to evaluate the opinions of local Houstonians. The inquiry illuminated areas of consensus and conflict, and explored messaging and engagement interactions to identify how to build support for affordable homes.

In concert with entry and exit surveys and in-group exercises, focus group participants were guided through a discussion on perceptions on Houston's affordability, their pre-existing attitudes towards affordable homes (and those who qualify to live there), and elicited responses to numerous messaging frameworks, which had been identified for testing in the literature review and partner and expert interviews.

Many of the test statements – which were drawn from policy research which highlights social impacts, time to work pressures, and percentages of income spent on housing – did not impress or persuade participants. This is consistent with elements of the literature review and interviews which emphasized the need for appealing to self-interest rather than collective interests or systemic solutions. Participants also reinforced the necessity for substantive engagement over shallow marketing.

The focus groups also surfaced meaningful differences between renters and homeowners. Homeowners were more likely to raise questions about the impacts affordable homes will have on their home values and neighborhoods. Understanding and responding to these sensitivities will be the foundation for effective engagement.

The Houstonians who participated in the focus groups were generally optimistic and compassionate, but they still wanted answers about the impacts to their families, their home values, and their neighborhoods. Supporters of affordable homes therefore have a responsibility to earn the trust of people in every neighborhood, by sharing information early, being transparent and truthful, and consistently engaging neighbors to build support for approval.

Appendices



A faded, light gray background image showing a person from the side, writing on a whiteboard. The person's hand is visible, holding a marker and writing on the board. The whiteboard has some faint lines and text on it, but they are not legible. The overall scene is a professional or educational setting.

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Entry Survey

ENTRY SURVEY

Q1 Please enter your First name and ONLY the first letter of your last name (for example "Abraham L.").

Q2 What is your current employment status?

- Full-time Student, not working
- Part-Time Worker
- Full-Time Worker
- Stay-at-Home Parent
- Retired
- Not currently employed

Q3 If you are currently employed or recently retired or not working, what do you or did you do?

Q4 Are you or were you self-employed?

- Yes
- No

Q5 How long does it take you (in time, not miles) to get to or from work or school every day?

- Less than 15 minutes
- 15 to 30 minutes
- 20 to 60 minutes
- More than an hour
- Not Applicable

Q6 What is the last year of school you completed or the highest degree you received?

- Less than a high school degree
- High school diploma or equivalent (GED)
- Some college, but no degree
- Professional license
- Work certificate or credential
- Associates degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

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Q7 Do you rent or own your current home?

- Rent
 - Own
 - I live with my family
-

Q8 Do you own or lease your own car?

- Own
 - Lease
 - Other (share a vehicle, etc.)
 - I do not have a car
-

Q9 If you could have any job in the world, what would it be?

Q10 Who are some people in business, sports, arts, or entertainment you like or respect the most?

Q11 What social media platforms do you frequently use (at least once a week)? Please mark any or all which apply.

- Facebook
- YouTube
- Instagram
- TikTok
- Twitter
- Snapchat
- Pinterest
- Reddit
- Other _____
- None

Q12 What online groups (Facebook groups, Reddit threads, NextDoor communities), if any, do you belong to or watch?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

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Q13 How do you keep up with current events? (Check any or all which apply to you)

- Print news (Newspapers or Magazines)
 - Online news (websites or blogs)
 - Social Media (Facebook, YouTube, etc.)
 - TV news (FOX26, Click2Houston, etc.)
 - Radio News (KHUF 88.7, KTRH 740, etc.)
 - Messages from family and friends
-

Q14 Do you prefer to watch, read or listen to news coverage?

- Watch
 - Read
 - Listen
 - I don't do any of them
-

Q15 Are you registered to vote?

- Yes
 - No
-

Q16 If not, do you know how to register to vote?

Yes

No

Q17 Do you vote?

Yes

No

Q18 If not, why not?

Q19 If you do vote, how often do you vote?

In every election (General Elections and Primary Elections, every year)

Only Presidential Elections

Only General Election

Only Primary Election

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Q20 How frequently do you speak or message with your friends about politics?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Q21 Are there any local leaders or people in your community you follow or look up to? If so, who and why?

Q22 If you use them, please score the news sources to the degree you find them to be trustworthy - meaning you would use them to make decisions on issues important to you or your family.

	Trust it a great deal	Tend to Trust it	Tend to distrust it	Distrust it greatly	Nor sure or don't know
ABC13	<input type="radio"/>				
KHOU CBS	<input type="radio"/>				
KRIV FOX26	<input type="radio"/>				
CNN	<input type="radio"/>				
FOX News	<input type="radio"/>				
msnbc	<input type="radio"/>				
KPRC2	<input type="radio"/>				
Houston Chronicle	<input type="radio"/>				
Telemundo Houston	<input type="radio"/>				
Houston Public Media	<input type="radio"/>				
New York Times	<input type="radio"/>				
Other	<input type="radio"/>				

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Q23 On a scale from one to five, with one being strong disagreement, and five being strong agreement, how strongly would you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Somewhat disagree	3 - Neither agree nor disagree	4 - Somewhat agree	5 - Strongly agree
I have faith in government to do the right thing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can personally impact important issues in my community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public officials care a lot about what people like me think.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a responsibility to help make my community better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most policy issues are so complicated, a person like me cannot really understand what's going on.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People like me don't have any say about what the government does.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have opinions about issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

and policy worth listening to.

Voting is important.

People are responsible for their own outcomes in life.

I'd rather depend on myself than others.

Competition is the law of nature

Winning is everything.

The well-being of my neighbors is important to me

I often do "my own thing."

To me, pleasure is spending time with others.

Working on a team is better for me than working on my own.

Parents and children must stay together as much as possible.

<input type="radio"/>				
<input type="radio"/>				
<input type="radio"/>				
<input type="radio"/>				
<input type="radio"/>				
<input type="radio"/>				
<input type="radio"/>				
<input type="radio"/>				
<input type="radio"/>				

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It is important
to me to
respect the
decision
made by my
groups.

Q24 Do you know how to contact your elected representatives (a state legislator or city council member)?

- Yes
 - No
-

Q25 Have you ever contacted your elected representatives?

- Yes
 - No
-

Q26 Have you ever done any of the following? (Check any which may apply to you.)

- Attended a community meeting
- Signed a petition (online or offline)
- Participated in a protest or demonstration
- Volunteered for a community group
- Written a letter to the editor of a news organization
- Written a letter to an elected official
- Contributed to a cause (religions, relief fund, nonprofit organization)

End of Block: Default Question Block

A faded, light blue background image showing a group of people in a meeting or presentation setting. The image is out of focus and serves as a backdrop for the text.

Group Presentation Collateral

GROUP PRESENTATION COLLATERAL



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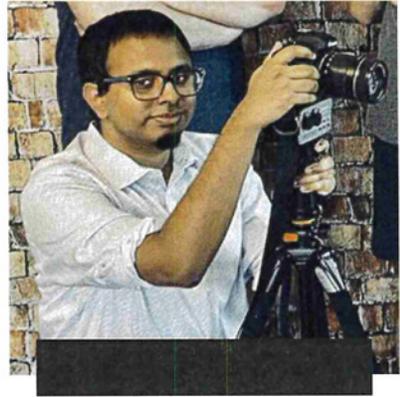




People Like You

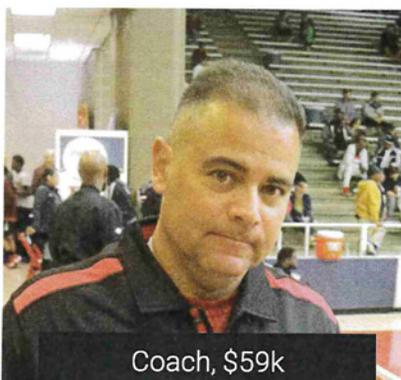
PEOPLE LIKE YOU

Images Taken from the Houston Chronicle

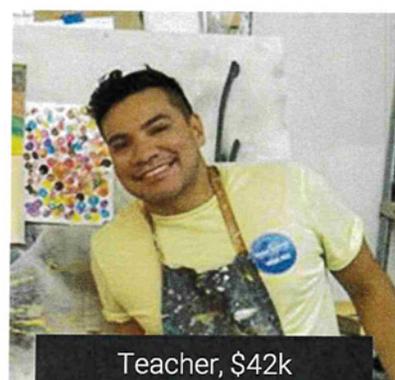




Restaurateur, \$58k



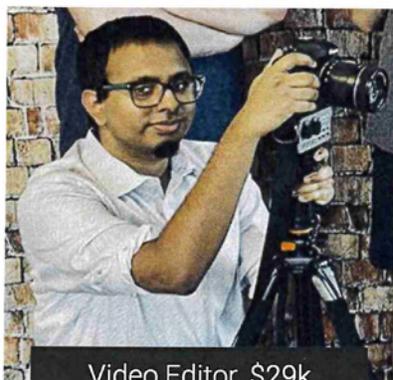
Coach, \$59k



Teacher, \$42k



Counselor, \$51k



Video Editor, \$29k

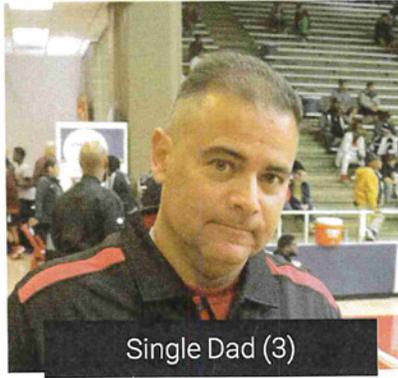


Hostess, \$18k

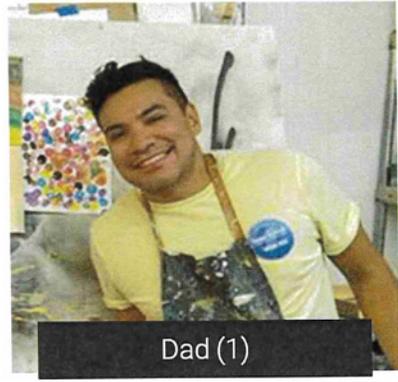
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Dad (2)



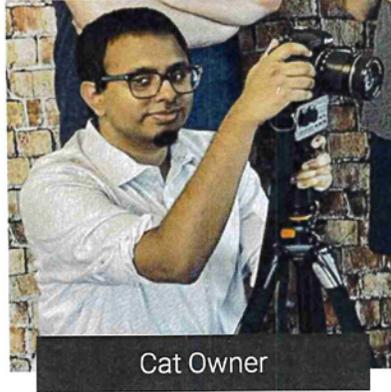
Single Dad (3)



Dad (1)



Mom (2), Caregiver (Dad)



Cat Owner



Student

A faded, light gray background image showing a person from the side, writing on a whiteboard. The person's hand is visible, holding a marker and writing on the board. The overall scene is out of focus and serves as a backdrop for the text.

Statements

STATEMENTS

**All people should be able
to afford to live close to
where they work.**

People who earn less spend more of their income on housing - which means they have less to spend on education or healthcare.

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**When our essential
service workers cannot
afford to live near their
work, it hurts Houston's
economy.**

Building affordable homes benefits my neighborhood's economy by creating jobs and opportunity.

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**The lack of quality,
affordable homes can
worsen social issues such as
homelessness, poor
educational attainment and
mental and physical health.**

We shouldn't have to bail people out who make less out of their poor decisions.

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**Building affordable
homes allows people to
get up on their feet and
succeed.**

Building affordable homes will lower the value of my own home.

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By opposing affordable homes we are ultimately pricing ourselves out of our own neighborhoods.

**Those who cannot afford
to live in Houston should
live somewhere else.**

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**Houstonians spend too much
time commuting to and from
work - we should be able to
live where we work,
regardless of how much we
make.**



Exit Survey

EXIT SURVEY

Q1 Please your first name, and only the initial of your last name (for example, Ruth, B.)

Q2 Please read and then rank the following arguments you think are most effective/compelling to you, with the MOST effective placed at the top, and the LEAST effective at the bottom.

_____ Houston's economy is changing, and the workers we rely on are having a harder time finding housing they can afford close to the places they work. If we want a diverse and healthy economy, we should build more quality, affordable homes to make it easier for workers to get to and from work.

_____ Many people come to Houston because they see it as a place of opportunity. This is putting pressure on housing prices and forcing people out of their homes. Affordable options will preserve neighborhoods, and keep our economy going.

_____ As Houston changes, we need to protect communities from becoming too expensive for everyday people. Investing in affordable homes will preserve neighborhoods and keep the city affordable for workers and retirees.

_____ If we build more affordable homes in our neighborhoods, the workers most essential to our local economy, teachers, police officers, firefighters, and service workers, will be able to live closer to their work - this will decrease traffic and job turnover, and ultimately benefit our neighborhoods.

_____ Houston has few homes available to the essential workers making minimum wage inside the loop. This has pushed many of those who work in our communities further outside the city and further from their jobs.

_____ We cannot adequately tackle the dual crises of climate change and housing affordability separately. When we work together across intersecting issues, we can take on complex challenges in ways that ensure complementing policies rather than competition. This begins with developing higher-density affordable homes in areas closest to job opportunities and public transit lines.

_____ When affordable housing is built to achieve higher population density near mass transit; the environmental and climate benefits significantly increase through reduced vehicle use, lower carbon emissions, and improved air quality.

_____ Houston is becoming more expensive and it is forcing those who make less to commute farther. This means parents have less time at home with their children and have to spend more on childcare and transportation. Developing affordable homes near economic centers would alleviate family and financial stress.

_____ Building more affordable homes will allow seniors on a fixed income to remain in the neighborhoods where they have spent most of their lives and close to the services and networks they need.

Q3 Click to write the question text

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
All people should be able to afford to live close to where they work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In Houston, people can largely pick where they want to live.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our homes provide the foundation for our success in life. Having a stable home makes it possible to pursue opportunities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People's opportunities in life shouldn't be determined by their ZIP Code.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing is an individual problem that requires individual agency.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe in the government's ability to improve housing affordability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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