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Key Contacts:

Mark Obrinsky
VP of Research and Chief Economist
mobrinsky@nmhc.org

Other NMHC Staff Contacts:

Douglas M. Bibby
President
dbibby@nmhc.org

James N. Arbury
Senior VP of Government Affairs
jarbury@nmhc.org

Lisa E. Blackwell
VP of Housing Policy
lblackwell@nmhc.org

David Cardwell
VP of Capital Markets
and Technology
dcardwell@nmhc.org

Kimberly D. Duty
VP of Communications
kduty@nmhc.org

Jeanne McGlynn Delgado
VP of Operations and Risk
Management Policy
jdelgado@nmhc.org

Eileen C. Lee
VP of Environment
elee@nmhc.org

Howard Menell
Tax Advisor
hmenell@nmhc.org

Ronald G. Nickson
VP of Building Codes
rnickson@nmhc.org

OVERCOMING OPPOSITION TO MULTIFAMILY RENTAL HOUSING

Mark Obrinsky, Ph.D. and Debra Stein

- Multifamily rental housing can, and should, play an important role in housing our growing population, but there is opposition both to higher-density housing (compact development) and to rental housing among: (a) some residents in communities in or around proposed development sites; (b) local officials (including planning agency and zoning officials); and (c) the public at large.
- This white paper identifies and examines the nature of local resistance to apartments, the reasons behind it and how it can be overcome. It is organized in two sections.
 - The first identifies, and then offers evidence to refute, the most common arguments against apartments, including misplaced notions that apartments lower nearby property values, overburden schools, produce less revenue for local governments, exacerbate traffic congestion and increase crime rates.
 - The second section offers tactics and strategies to mobilize support for specific apartment properties. It outlines the five essential components of a successful outreach campaign, examining ways to improve the public information process, to constructively engage neighbors, to identify and recruit potential sponsors and how to manage the public hearing process.
- The document was originally produced for the National Policy Summit on Rental Housing sponsored by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

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Based in Washington, D.C., NMHC represents the interests of the nation's largest and most prominent firms in the apartment industry. NMHC members are engaged in all aspects of developing and operating apartments, including ownership, construction, management and financing. The Council was established in 1978 as a national association to advocate for rental housing and to provide a source of vital information for the leadership of the multifamily industry. Since then, NMHC has evolved into the industry's leading national voice. The association concentrates on public policies that are of strategic importance to participants in multifamily housing, including finance, tax, property management, environmental issues and building codes. NMHC benefits from a focused agenda and membership that includes the principal officers of the most distinguished real estate organizations in the United States. For more information on joining NMHC, contact the Council at 202-974-2300 or www.nmhc.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mark H. Obrinsky, Ph.D., is Vice President of Research and Chief Economist, with principal responsibility for housing and economic research. Mark was formerly Director of Regulatory Policy at Fannie Mae. Previous positions at Fannie Mae included Director of Applied Portfolio Research and Senior Economist. Prior to joining Fannie Mae, Mark was Deputy Director of the Economics Department at the U.S. League of Savings Institutions. His academic experience includes seven years teaching Economics at the University of Delaware and Bradley University. His work on housing, mortgage finance, and economic theory has appeared in leading professional and industry publications. Mark holds a Bachelor of Arts degree (with honors) in Mathematics from the University of Wisconsin and a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Pennsylvania.

Debra Stein, is President of GCA Strategies and the author of *Winning Community Support for Land Use Projects* and *Making Community Meetings Work*, both published by the Urban Land Institute, and of *Managing Community Meetings*, published by the International City/County Managers Association. She is a member of the International Association of Participation Professionals, the Association for Conflict Resolution, the Urban Land Institute, and the California Bar Association. She has a B.A. in Political Management from the University of California at Berkeley and a law degree from the University of San Francisco.

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Please understand that the information discussed in this guidance is general in nature and is not intended to be legal advice. It is intended to assist owners and managers in understanding this issue area, but it may not apply to the specific fact circumstances or business situations of all owners and managers. For specific legal advice, consult your attorney.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Resistance to multifamily rental housing is a growing phenomenon in communities around the country. Indeed, opposition to any type of new housing development has become so pervasive that the area of community resistance has spawned its own vocabulary. Multifamily housing is characterized by some citizens as a “NIMBY” project (Not in My Backyard). Apartments are condemned as “LU-LUs” (“Locally Unwanted Land Uses”). We even have “CAVEs” (Citizens Against Virtually Everything) and they want “BANANAs” (to Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone).

Putting whimsical acronyms aside, citizen resistance to multifamily rental housing is not a humorous issue. In fact, community opposition to these development projects runs smack up against powerful demographic trends. Population growth in the U.S. continues at a high level – certainly in comparison with other developed countries – and will require considerable new residential construction.¹ Even a brief examination makes this clear.

The U.S. population is expected to increase over the next 20 years at an average annual rate of 0.83 percent – which would result in a cumulative increase of 23 percent, or 68 million people. This figure is twice the size of today’s most populous state, California, which has almost 34 million people. In fact, the projected number of new residents in the next two decades is larger than the number of people who currently live in the Northeast (54 million), Midwest (64 million), or West (64 million). Clearly, population growth is an issue of critical importance for the U.S.

What’s more, the growth in households will be even greater than population growth itself. The average size of a household has been dropping for more than a century. In 1900, an average of 4.6 people lived in each household. By 2004, there was an average of only 2.6 people per household. While this decline is partly the result of families having fewer children, it is mainly the result of changing household composition. In 1960, single-person households made up 13 percent of all households, while married couples with children made up another 44 percent. The share of single-person households has doubled since then while the number of married couples with children has fallen to only 23 percent. Married couples without children remain the most common type of household, as they have been since 1982, even though their share of the total has waned a bit over that time. The Joint Center for Housing Studies projects that average household size will decline a bit more before stabilizing.²

The upshot is that the demand for new housing units is likely to increase faster than the population itself is projected to grow. Extending the Joint Center for Housing Studies’ projections for 2020 another decade suggests that between 2005 and 2030, the number of households will rise by almost 30 percent – that is, 33 million new households.

The number of additional housing units needed by 2030 is actually greater than 33 million, however, because an estimated 17 million existing housing units will fall out of the housing stock due to deterioration or destruction.³ Thus, some 50 million new housing units will have to be added to the stock between 2005-2030. This is both a daunting challenge and a ray of hope – we have an opportunity

¹ Of the nine countries that will account for half the world’s population growth from 2005-2050, the only developed nation is the U.S. See: United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision*, vol. 3, p. xv. Available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WPP2004/2004EnglishES.pdf>

² The Joint Center’s forecast is that the overall headship rate will continue to rise somewhat before stabilizing, but the overall headship rate is just the inverse of the average household size.

³ Authors’ interpolation based on Arthur C. Nelson, “Toward A New Metropolis: The Opportunity to Rebuild America,” Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, December 2004.

to shape future development and determine the character of the built environment in which we will live and work.

What is at issue is not whether these new residences will get built, but rather where they will get built and what kind of residences they will be. Put differently: what kind of communities should we build?

The traditional suburban development model features low-density housing built in cul-de-sacs, neighborhoods separated from strip malls, big box retailers, and office parks along roads with ever-increasing traffic.⁴ But compact development – especially sustainable communities that promote accessible transportation choices, higher density, mixed-use and mixed-income development, and attractive design – have attracted growing interest. The age structure and household composition of the new households will surely tilt demand further in this direction.

Multifamily rental housing has long been an important part of the constellation of housing choices for families and individuals. It plays an increasingly important role in “workforce housing,” providing homes for our nation’s teachers, firefighters, police officers, health care workers, and public employees. These vital workers contribute to the community, but their incomes are often less than what is required to support a comfortable, middle-class life.

Nonetheless, there is continuing resistance to higher density housing, to rental housing, and to low-income housing. Such resistance, if successful, may bring about a less-than-optimal result; in particular, it would mean fewer multifamily rental properties than would otherwise occur.

This paper seeks to examine the nature of that resistance, the reasons behind it, and how it can be overcome.

In general, people who support multifamily rental housing tend to want the new benefits that come from responsible development. They may be excited about the creation of new and affordable housing, new community rooms or other public amenities, or new jobs or tax revenues from associated retail. By comparison, people who oppose land use proposals tend to do so because they like their community the way it is and don’t want any change. Opponents don’t want more traffic, lower property values, more children crowding the schools, or a changed community character, and they believe that the proposed apartment project will worsen their existing lifestyles. Potential opponents and potential supporters are completely different audiences, with completely different interests. Sponsors of multifamily rental housing must therefore engage in two distinct community outreach campaigns: one aimed at minimizing neighborhood opposition, one aimed at mobilizing public support. We begin with the former.

OVERCOMING OPPOSITION TO MULTIFAMILY RENTAL HOUSING IN GENERAL

Forms of Opposition

Opposition to multifamily rental housing is expressed in many ways. Most fundamental, perhaps, are attitudes. Whether founded in facts, the expression of an underlying bias, or the mechanism for pursuing perceived self-interest, such attitudes are inevitably where opposition begins.

Attitudes lead to actions. There are two broad kinds: (1) actions in opposition to specific projects or proposals; and (2) actions against a whole class of housing. Actions against specific projects may be initiated by residents of nearby communities, and can include such things as private calls to local officials, speaking out at public hearings, writing letters to the editor, organizing among community groups, and even picketing the proposed site. Local officials may also act to prevent or restrict multi-

⁴ This view is proposed by Bruce Katz and Andy Altman, “An Urban Age in a Suburban Nation?” Presentation to Urban Age Conference, New York City, February 25, 2005.

family housing – for example, there are jurisdictions in which multifamily housing is nominally permitted, but every actual application for a building permit gets denied.

Opposition can also be woven into the fabric of regulations, ordinances, and planning documents. Overcoming such opposition typically requires far greater effort, as it requires overturning such statutes.

To be effective, proponents of multifamily housing need to address all areas. Analyzing the extent and effect of the bias against apartments in the local regulations around the country is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, we offer some comments on this aspect of the problem at the end of this section.

In any case, the starting point is dealing with misperceptions about multifamily rental housing.

Setting the Record Straight

Resistance to multifamily rental housing comes from a variety of sources, including planning or zoning officials, local politicians, civic leaders in communities in which the housing is to be located, proximate neighbors who live or work near the apartment buildings, and other members of the general public. This section focuses on the facts behind the most common arguments made by opponents of new apartment developments, while the following section examines the underlying concerns behind anti-housing claims and how stakeholder claims can be addressed.

Anti-apartment stakeholders tend to rely on similar arguments to keep multifamily rental housing out of their communities. These claims include:

- Multifamily apartments lower the value of single-family homes in the neighborhood.
- People who live in apartments are less desirable neighbors and more likely to engage in crime or other anti-social behavior.
- Apartments overburden schools, produce less revenue for local governments, and require more infrastructure support.
- Higher-density housing creates traffic congestion and parking problems.

We will examine each of these, and also offer broader general comments about residential development and the environment.

Fiscal burden

Opponents of multifamily housing often claim that apartment residents impose higher expenditures for local government services. The point is most commonly voiced with reference to schools, although other local government infrastructure services are mentioned as well. Opponents assume that apartments contain more school-age children than single-family houses do, and therefore put greater strain on local school districts. In an era of tight school budgets, this is an understandable concern. Let's begin by reviewing the data.

On average, 100 single-family owner-occupied houses include 51 school-age children. By contrast, apartments are attractive to single people, couples without children, and empty nesters, which is why 100 apartment units average just 31 children. The disparity is even greater when considering only new construction: 64 children per 100 new single-family houses vs. 29 children per 100 new apartment units. Wealthier apartment dwellers have even fewer children (12 children per 100 households for residents earning more than 120 percent of the area median income, AMI), while

less wealthy residents earning less than 80 percent of AMI still have fewer children (37 per household) than single-family homes.⁵

Opponents often ignore how much revenue apartments bring into the local government.⁶ In fact, apartment owners often pay more in property taxes than owners of single-family houses.⁷ That's because in most jurisdictions, apartments are treated as commercial real estate, which is taxed at higher rates than single-family houses in most states. Although there are many complications in such comparisons, one simple approach is to look at the "effective tax rate," defined as the ratio of property tax to property value. For apartments in urban areas the effective tax rate averages 48-54 basis points more than single-family houses: 1.91 percent for apartments, compared with 1.37-1.43 percent for single-family houses.⁸

Thus, apartments actually pay more in taxes and have fewer school children on average than single-family houses. In other words, it may be more accurate to say that apartment residents are subsidizing the public education of the children of homeowners than the reverse.

Two contrary points need to be addressed. First, some might argue that the fact that apartments contain fewer school-aged children than single-family houses has more to do with location than with the nature of apartments. That is, apartments built in jurisdictions with first-rate schools might be designed to be more attractive to families (e.g., by having more bedrooms) and therefore house more children. Second, opponents of multifamily housing may point to the fact that 100 apartment units will probably still have more school-aged children than 10 single-family homes built at the same site.

Additional research would be helpful in clarifying the first point. A recent study made a related point. It agreed that newly built multifamily properties "have not contributed significantly to the rise in school enrollments" and that "it is very unlikely that new multi-family housing has produced a negative fiscal impact on cities and towns."⁹ It argues, however, that the reason for this is that these properties were never designed to house families with children. That is, these apartments and condos consist mainly of one- and two-bedroom residences, for the express purpose of meeting the fiscal impact challenge developers often face, namely ensuring that their developments won't hurt local fiscal matters. The researchers rightly note that this approach ends up pitting fiscal policy against housing policy – that is, the kind of residential developments that are approved are not what might be required by local households, but rather what the local budget is willing to bear.

We conclude from this that at least some of the opposition to multifamily housing actually has nothing to do with housing *per se*, but rather with limiting the number of school-aged children who would otherwise "burden" local finances.

⁵ All figures are NMHC tabulations of data from the American Housing Survey. See Research Notes, "Apartments and Schools," NMHC, August 24, 2001, available at:

www.nmhc.org/Content/ServeContent.cfm?ContentItemID=2620&IssueID=80. A recent study using data from the 2001 Residential Finance Survey suggests a smaller differential, though one that has grown over time. See Jack Goodman, "Houses, Apartments, and the Incidence of Property Taxes," *Housing Policy Debate*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2006.

⁶ Apartment residents also contribute to the general economy by buying local goods and services. See *Research Notes*, "Apartment Residents and the Local Economy," NMHC, May 3, 2002.

⁷ See Jack Goodman, "Houses, Apartments, and the Incidence of Property Taxes," *Housing Policy Debate* Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2006.

⁸ Authors' calculations based on Minnesota Taxpayers Association, *50-State Property Tax Comparison Study*, St. Paul, MN, April 2006, p. vii. See also Alan Mallach, "Housing and Suburbs: Fiscal and Social Impact of Multifamily Development." Department of Housing and Urban Development: Washington DC, 1974.

⁹ Judith Barrett and John Connery, *Housing the Commonwealth's School-Age Children*. Citizens' Housing and Planning Association Research Study, August 2003, p. 2.1.
www.chapa.org/pdf/HousingSchoolAgeChildren.pdf.

Even in areas with high quality schools, we suspect that the mix of apartment units the market would offer (absent any pressure, in either direction, from local officials) would still feature fewer units with three or more bedrooms than would be provided by single-family housing. With few, if any, exceptions, the market for conventional apartments with three or more bedrooms historically has been much thinner than the market for one- and two-bedroom units; for this reason, three-bedroom floor plans tend to be a small portion of the total unit count. With average household size not expected to increase, it's hard to see why this would change.

Regarding the second point, without the apartment building in the neighborhood, the other 90 households will presumably have to move to some other local area, thereby burdening some other school district. This is a classic NIMBY point of view, and leads inexorably to the idea that the best development is actually no development, as this wouldn't "burden" the school district at all. Such an argument might hold sway among some local residents, but it offers no help to local and regional planners who are trying to manage current and projected growth in the most beneficial ways.

The issue needs to be framed more broadly. The total number of schoolchildren in any large region (or for the U.S. as a whole) is surely not determined by the number and type of housing units available. The question, then, is: where will they be housed and educated? Whether a jurisdiction chooses to permit multifamily rental housing or not, that question must still be answered.

Beyond that, the latest household projections from the Joint Center show that households with children under 18 years of age will make up only a small fraction of the total increase. Specifically, more than 80 percent of the increase in the number of households from 2005-2015 will come from married couples with no children plus single-person households.¹⁰ To some extent, therefore, the key issue may not be whether new housing developments impose a burden on local schools, but rather whether communities will develop the kind of housing that would attract households without children.

With other types of infrastructure, high-density development actually is more efficient than low-density development. By their very nature, longer sewer lines and sprawling utility (water, gas, and electric) supply systems are more costly; traditional development patterns also dictate expensive road construction. In addition, local governments must provide fire and police protection (as well as other services) over a larger area. By contrast, compact development benefits from economies of scale and geographic scope – and these benefits are large, potentially saving more than \$125 billion in the 2000-2025 time frame.¹¹

Thus, rather than imposing a greater burden on local governments, higher density developments like apartments are actually more fiscally prudent than traditional suburban sprawl.

Traffic

Does compact development really cause an increase in traffic congestion and parking problems, as opponents often claim? To residents of the neighborhood where such development might take place, an increase in congestion seems self-evident – but only by comparing an apartment development to the status quo (i.e., no development). The proper comparison, however, is to the impact on congestion of an equal number of new single-family units.

¹⁰ Authors' calculations based on George S. Masnick and Eric S. Belsky, "Revised Interim Joint Center Household Projections," Cambridge, MA, 2006, pp. 31-32.

¹¹ Mark Muro and Robert Puentes, "Investing In A Better Future: A Review of the Fiscal and Competitive Advantages of Smarter Growth Development Patterns." Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, March 2004. The authors take note of possible countervailing costs, such as the higher load placed on roads and sewer lines in more densely populated areas. See also Richard M. Haughey, *Higher-Density Development: Myth and Fact*. Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2005.

On average, apartment residents own fewer cars than single-family homeowners: the latter average two cars per household compared with only one for the former.¹² Beyond that, single-family housing generates more automobile trips per household, as evidenced in the table below.

Automobile Trips Per Housing Unit			
	<i>Single-family detached</i>	<i>Apartment</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Weekday	9.57	6.72	42%
peak AM hour	0.77	0.55	40%
peak PM hour	1.02	0.67	52%
Saturday	10.10	6.39	58%
peak hour	0.94	0.52	81%
Sunday	8.78	5.86	50%
peak hour	0.86	0.51	69%
Source: Institute of Transportation Engineers, <i>Trip Generation, 7th Edition</i> (Washington, DC: 2003), Volume 2, pp. 268-332.			

On weekdays, a single-family detached house generates 42 percent more trips than does a unit in an apartment. The difference is even greater on the weekend: 58 percent more trips on Saturdays, and 50 percent more trips on Sundays. This large difference is seen not only in the totals, but also at the peak hours, morning and afternoon, weekdays and weekends. By any measure, it is clear that single-family houses generate more automobile traffic than apartments – or any other type of housing. In explaining why single-family houses produce the most traffic, the Institute of Transportation Engineers noted that they are the largest units in size, with the most residents, but also pointed out that they had “more vehicles per unit than other residential land uses; they were generally located farther away from shopping centers, employment areas and other trip attractors than other residential land uses; and they generally have fewer alternate modes of transportation available, because they were typically not as concentrated as other residential land uses.”¹³ Though written not as a policy document, but rather simply a straightforward, quantitative analysis, this is a good summary of the reasons why compact development engenders less traffic than sprawl.

Interestingly, single-family owners use their cars more often than apartment residents use theirs. On average, cars in single-family houses make 18 percent more trips during the week, 31 percent more trips on Saturday, and 41 percent more trips on Sunday than cars owned by apartment residents.¹⁴

Thus, not only are there more cars per household in single-family houses than apartments, each of those cars generate more traffic – and a higher demand for parking spaces at retail stores, offices, schools, and other facilities.

It could be argued that the difference in automobile ownership and use is determined less by property type than by geography. For example, residents of garden apartments near major highways in suburban areas lacking much public transportation are far more likely to own and use cars than are residents of apartments located near high-speed rail lines and subways. Although we know of no

¹² Jack Goodman, “Apartments and Parking,” *Research Notes*. NMHC: Washington, DC, January 28, 2000.

¹³ Institute of Transportation Engineers, *Trip Generation, 7th Edition* (Washington, DC: 2003), Volume 2, p. 268.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 287-295 and pp. 324-332.

studies that have tried to quantify the impact of geography on this, it seems evident that there is an important property-type effect. Consider the reverse situation, namely residential development near a transportation node such as a subway station. The number of single-family detached houses that can be built within walking distance of the station is clearly much less than the number of multifamily residences – whether for-rent or for-sale – that can be built there. To take advantage of the transit nodes, it simply makes sense to take advantage of the fact that compact, higher-density housing is inherently better suited to such development.

Property Values

Concerns that multifamily rental housing will lower the value of their single-family houses has driven many residents to oppose new apartment developments in or near their neighborhoods. Proposals for low-income apartments are especially likely to trigger property value concerns, but even market rate rental housing can give rise to arguments that apartments lower property values and damage the community's reputation. Local officials often echo these property value claims, either because they believe lower property values will injure their community's tax base or reputation or because they want to sound responsive to constituent concerns.

The fear that housing density will hurt property values seems to be primarily based on anecdotes. By contrast, most research has come to a different conclusion: in general, neither multifamily rental housing, nor low-income housing, causes neighboring property values to decline.

Two studies have taken a macro look at home values and house appreciation near multifamily housing properties. One study focused on “working communities” throughout the nation – neighborhoods of predominantly low- and moderate-income working households. The study looked at data from the 2000 US Census and compared house values in those communities with the share of multifamily housing in those communities. The conclusion: working communities with multifamily dwellings actually have *higher* property values than other types of working communities. In other words, the average value of owner-occupied houses was highest in working communities with the most multifamily units. In fact, among working communities, “the high multifamily areas had the highest home values, the mixed-stock areas the next highest, and the single-family areas had the lowest.”¹⁵ The study also noted a similar phenomenon with respect to income: among working communities, higher household income was positively associated with the share of multifamily housing.¹⁶

The other macro analysis compared the rate of property value appreciation for houses with multifamily housing nearby with the appreciation rate for houses with no multifamily housing nearby. Houses with apartments nearby actually enjoy a slightly higher appreciation rate than houses that don't have apartments nearby. Homes that are not located in multifamily areas appreciated at an average annual rate of 3.59 percent between 1987 and 1997, compared with a higher appreciation rate of 3.96 percent for houses near multifamily buildings. For the 1997–1999 period, the figures were 2.66 percent and 2.90 percent, respectively.¹⁷

Case studies examining individual sites and metro areas have been used in six recent research works to get a more detailed picture of the effects of multifamily and/or subsidized single-family properties. These studies measured the possible impact of a range of property types on surrounding property values, including the potential impacts of conventional apartments, mixed-income multifamily rentals, low-income housing tax credit developments, and federally-assisted rental housing projects. Researchers measured a variety of relevant characteristics, including house price, price per

¹⁵ Alexander von Hoffman, Eric Belsky, James DeNormandi, and Rachel Bratt, “America's Working Communities and the Impact of Multifamily Housing,” Cambridge, MA: Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2004, p. 17.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁷ National Association of Home Builders, “Multifamily Market Outlook,” Washington, DC, November 2001, pp. 3-4.

square foot, house price appreciation, time on the market, and the ratio of sales price to asking price in order to assess "the worst-case scenarios of multi-family intrusion into a single-family neighborhood." Their conclusions:

"We find that large, dense, multi-family rental developments...do not negatively impact the sales price of nearby single-family homes."¹⁸

"We find that if located properly with attractive landscaping and entranceways, adverse price effects can be minimized and sometimes can add value. In the long term, such apartment complexes probably raise the overall value of detached homes relative to their absence."¹⁹

"To this point, our results for Wisconsin are generally consistent with results in other studies: we have not been able to find evidence that Section 42 developments cause property values to deteriorate. The exception is Milwaukee County, where properties that are distant from the developments seem to appreciate more rapidly, although the magnitude of the effect is small. We have found no evidence of an impact in Waukesha and Ozaukee, and find evidence that properties in Madison near Section 42 developments appreciate *more* rapidly."²⁰

There is "little or no evidence to support the claim that tax-credit rental housing for families has a negative impact on the market for owner-occupied housing in the surrounding area...Rather than negative impact, the evidence suggests to us that the various housing submarkets surrounding the tax-credit properties in our study performed normally, exhibiting similar levels of variability before and after tax-credit construction, and responding to supply and demand forces in similar fashion as the larger market."²¹

"In sum, assisted housing of various types: (i) had positive or insignificant effects on residential property values nearby in higher-value, less vulnerable neighborhoods, unless it exceeded thresholds of spatial concentration or facility scale; (ii) evinced more modest prospects for positive property value impacts in lower-value, more vulnerable neighborhoods, and strength of frequently negative impacts was directly related to the concentration of sites and scale of the facilities."²²

"In sum, the presence or proximity of subsidized housing made no difference in housing values as measured by relative price behavior in a dynamic market."²³

Some of these studies find examples where single-family houses located near apartments either experienced lower prices or lower appreciation rates than houses located further away. But for residents in neighborhoods near proposed apartment developments – and for local officials who represent them – it is important to understand that multifamily housing rental developments do not generally lower property values in surrounding areas.

¹⁸ Henry O. Pollakowski, David Ritchay, and Zoe Weinrobe, "Effects of Mixed-Income, Multi-family Housing Developments on Single-family Housing Values," Cambridge, MA: MIT Center For Real Estate, April 2005, p. xiii.

¹⁹ Arthur C. Nelson and Mitch Moody, "Apartments and Detached Home Values," *On Common Ground*, National Association of Realtors, 2003. See also: Nelson and Moody, "Price Effects of Apartments on Nearby Single-family Detached Residential Homes," Virginia Tech University, 2003.

²⁰ Richard K. Green, Stephen Malpezzi, and Kiat-Ying Seah, "Low Income Housing Tax Credit Housing Developments and Property Values," Madison, WI: The Center for Urban Land Economics Research: 2002, p. 4.

²¹ Maxfield Research Inc., "A Study of the Relationship Between Affordable Family Rental Housing and Home Values in the Twin Cities," Minneapolis, MN: Family Housing Fund, September 2000, p. 102.

²² George Galster, "A Review of Existing Research On the Effects of Federally Assisted Housing Programs on Neighboring Residential Property Values," Detroit, MI: Wayne State University: September 2002, p. 26.

²³ Joyce Siegel, *The House Next Door*, Innovative Housing Institute, 1999. www.inhousing.org/house1.htm.

Social Interaction and Crime

Opponents of rental housing often argue that while people who own their homes are invested in the long-term success and safety of a community, people who rent apartments are merely short-term transients and therefore less desirable neighbors. That view has a long history and probably seems so unremarkable, so obvious, that proof is unnecessary. Nonetheless, some researchers have tried to discover whether homeownership creates a positive social benefit compared to rental housing. While the scope of their research is rather broad, for present purposes we focus on two aspects: (i) renters vs. owners as neighbors (citizens); and (ii) renters and crime.²⁴

The view that renters are not as engaged in their communities as owners seems to arise from the two apparent characteristics of renters: (i) by definition, they don't own their own residence, hence are thought to have less of a "stake" in the community; and (ii) they tend to move more often. These characteristics are seen as making them transitory residents, perhaps more akin to visitors than to long-term residents.

But there are also countervailing forces. For example, single-family renters do not tear down old houses and replace them with "McMansions," a phenomenon that can greatly alter neighborhoods, in ways that are not always desired by the existing residents.

In addition, it is important to recognize that housing tenure is different from residential stability. Housing tenure refers to how long an individual has lived in one place, while neighborhood stability reflects the quality, cohesion and safety of a community. It is the latter that may be the key factor: "Between 4 and 92 percent of the effect of homeownership and citizenship is operating primarily because homeownership is associated with lower mobility rates."²⁵ Stability itself is relative: in Western Europe, for example, many renters have lower turnover rates than U.S. homeowners. To the degree that there may be positive benefits from lower turnover, then the focus ought to be on increasing residential stability rather than trying to restrict choice of tenure.²⁶

Neighborhood residents may be less interested in distinguishing the exact cause than in ensuring the best outcome, and for many, promoting homeownership rather than renting seems an effective way to do so. In fact, that turns out not to be the case:

- Apartment residents are almost twice as likely to socialize with their neighbors as owners of single-family houses (33 percent vs. 17 percent).
- Apartment residents are just as likely as house owners to be involved in structured social groups like sports teams, book clubs, and the like (22 percent for sports groups, 10-11 percent for other groups).
- Apartment residents are only slightly less likely to attend religious services at least once a month (44 percent vs. 55 percent).
- Just like single-family owners, apartment residents identify closely with the town or city they live in (60 percent for apartment residents vs. 64 percent for single-family owners).

²⁴ For a good, critical summary of the scope of such research, see William M. Rohe, Shannon Van Zandt, and George McCarthy, "The Social Benefits and Costs of Home Ownership: A Critical Assessment of the Research," in Nicolas P. Retsinas and Eric S. Belsky, eds., *Low-Income Homeownership: Examining the Unexamined Goal* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

²⁵ Denise DiPasquale and Edward L. Glaeser, "Incentives and Social Capital: Are Homeowners Better Citizens?" *Journal of Urban Economics*, Vol. 45, Nr. 2 (March 1999).

²⁶ Apgar notes that disentangling the many factors that influence behavior in order to isolate the impact of tenure alone is exceedingly complex. See: William Apgar, "Rethinking Rental Housing: Expanding the Ability of Rental Housing to Serve as a Pathway to Economic and Social Opportunity," Joint Center for Housing Studies Working Paper W04-11, December 2004.

- Almost half (46 percent) of apartment residents feel close to the neighborhood they live in. This is not as high a share as for single-family owners (65 percent), but still sizable.
- Apartment residents are virtually as interested in politics and national affairs as house owners are (66 percent vs. 70 percent).

The one area in which apartment residents noticeably lag house owners is in local elections: 47 percent of apartment residents say they “always vote” or “sometimes miss one,” compared with 78 percent of single-family owners.²⁷

Put simply, these objective measures undermine the notion that apartment residents somehow don’t care much about, and don’t involve themselves in, the communities in which they live. On the contrary, they tend to be at least as socially engaged as other Americans.

As important as these things are in helping to shape the character of a neighborhood, it stands to reason that they can easily be negated by an increase in criminal activity. Is there any truth to the idea that crime follows in the wake of apartment development?

It turns out that there have been very few studies that address this issue. A study conducted for the Arizona Multihousing Association concluded that the perception of higher crime associated with multifamily housing results from counting police calls by address. Hence an apartment property with 100 or more units at the same address may be wrongly compared to one single-family residence. “In actuality, when police data is analyzed on a per unit basis, the rate of police activity in apartment communities is no worse than in single family subdivisions, and in many cases, is lower than in single family areas.”²⁸

In a similar vein, studies of Irving, Texas, and Anchorage, Alaska, found no connection between crime and housing density. The former used geographic information systems (GIS) analysis to supplement more conventional approaches, and determined that “high density and multi-family development are not necessarily associated with high crime rate, but socioeconomic status is.”²⁹ The latter study reached a similar conclusion: “These data show no relationship between housing density and delinquency....The observed correlation coefficients between housing density and the six criminological measures were all small in magnitude (very close to “0”), statistically significant...and in some cases in the opposite direction predicted by the hypothesis of a direct relationship between housing density and crime.”³⁰

The Multifamily Record: Conclusion

Further research would certainly be welcome. Even so, we think the available research is fairly strong that multifamily rental housing: (1) does not impose greater costs on local governments; (2) does not increase traffic and parking problems; (3) when well-designed and appropriate to the neighborhood, does not reduce (and may even enhance) property values; and (4) does not inherently attract residents who are less neighborly or more apt to engage in (or attract) criminal activity.

²⁷ NMHC tabulations of microdata from the General Social Survey. See: Jack Goodman, “Apartment Residents As Neighbors and Citizens,” *Research Notes*, Washington, DC: National Multi Housing Council, June 1999.

²⁸ Elliott D. Pollack and Company, “Economic & Fiscal Impact of Multi-family Housing,” Phoenix: Arizona Multihousing Association, 1996, Part II.

²⁹ Jianling Li and Jack Rainwater, “The Real Picture of Land-Use Density and Crime: A GIS Application,” available at: <http://gis.esri.com/library/userconf/proc00/professional/papers/PAP508/p508.htm>

³⁰ University of Alaska Justice Center, “The Strength of Association: Housing Density and Delinquency,” *Anchorage Community Indicators*, series 3A, No. 1, available at: <http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/indicators/series03/aci03a1.housing.pdf>

This evidence may be sufficient for planners and many public officials – particularly those who have already come to understand the benefits of greater housing choice, mixed-use and mixed-income residences, transit-oriented development, and pedestrian-friendly communities. Two obstacles remain: codified restrictions on multifamily developments and individual opposition to specific multifamily projects.

Experience suggests that opponents who live near apartment developments are often hard to convince. For some, opposition to apartments may be more emotional than analytical. As one opponent put it: “We don’t want renters. We just don’t want them...”³¹ For many, anecdotes trump statistics. For this reason, marshalling statistics is a necessary step, but not usually a sufficient one. Instead, proponents need to overcome opposition to individual proposed developments. Before turning to this, we take a brief look at how opposition to multifamily rental housing in general has been codified, thereby adding another hurdle for proponents.

REGULATORY RESTRICTION ON MULTIFAMILY HOUSING IN GENERAL

Opposition to multifamily rental housing has a long history. More than a century ago, the notoriously poor living conditions associated with tenement houses led not only to a movement to reform and improve such dwellings, it also led to a movement to prevent further apartment construction. Opponents drew on two key tools to block new multifamily buildings: restrictive building codes that made multifamily construction uneconomic; and zoning – in particular, the creation of single-family-only districts.³²

These and other tools are still being used.³³ The most common regulations involve zoning and/or comprehensive land use planning. More recently, policies to restrict, manage, or even prevent further growth – from impact fees to “urban containment” to outright moratoria – have been added to the mix. Given the sheer number of local land use areas, even collecting comprehensive data on residential development restrictions is difficult. Assessing the impact of these regulations is even more difficult for at least two reasons. First, the devil may indeed be in the details, so that any overview or summary analysis is likely to be flawed. Second, some jurisdictions may, on a fairly routine basis, grant waivers or exemptions for certain kinds of developments, with the result that the regulation on the books is not the *de facto* regulation.

Recent research analyzing density restrictions in local jurisdictions making up the 50 largest metropolitan areas concluded that a hypothetical 2-story, 40-unit apartment property on five acres of land would be prohibited outright in about 30 percent of such jurisdictions. Residential developments with densities of more than 30 units per acre are prohibited in all but 12 percent of local jurisdictions. To be sure, these jurisdictions encompass 48 percent of the population of these metro areas. Even so, it is clearly a significant restriction.³⁴ Such restrictions not only reduce the range of housing options available to local residents – in particular, most restrictions tend to favor lower-density over higher-density developments – they also make housing more expensive.³⁵

³¹ See “From Parking to Mixed-Use,” *Montgomery Gazette*, September, 28, 2005, at: www.gazette.net/stories/092805/bethnew205622_31894.shtml

³² Kenneth Baar, “The National Movement to Halt the Spread of Multifamily Housing, 1890-1926” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Chicago: Winter 1992.

³³ A good compendium of such restrictions is contained in: “Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing,” *Cityscape*, Vol. 8, Nr. 1 (2005).

³⁴ Rolf Pendall, Robert Puentes, and Jonathan Martin, “From Traditional to Reformed: A Review of the Land Use Regulations in the Nation’s 50 Largest Metropolitan Areas.” Metropolitan Policy Program, The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC: August 2006. http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20060802_Pendall.pdf

³⁵ See for example: John M. Quigley and Larry A. Rosenthal, “The Effects of Land Use Regulation on the Price of Housing: What Do We Know? What Can We Learn?”, *Cityscape*, Vol. 8, Nr. 1 (2005) and Edward L. Glaes-

How can regulations that inhibit development of multifamily rental housing be reduced or eliminated? This is an area which could greatly benefit by further investigation.³⁶ For now, we offer two assessments. First, to change the regulations, we must first change the attitudes of either local officials, the public at large, or both. In this respect, efforts to change regulations parallel other efforts to overcome resistance to apartments. Second, while the comprehensive land use plan can be used to restrict multifamily housing, it can also be a valuable tool in promoting such housing. For example, Arlington County, Virginia, has been successful in implementing high-density, transit-oriented development. In addition to far-sighted planners, the Arlington approach has been to foster extensive public debate about policy impacts and benefits (hence also public “buy-in” of the results of the process), maintaining continuity of policy through both election and market cycles, and clearly formulating implementation tools at the same time as policy enactment.³⁷

OPPOSITION TO SPECIFIC MULTIFAMILY PROJECTS

Reducing or eliminating regulatory impediments may hold the greatest promise for increasing the acceptance of multifamily rental housing. But it also is likely to take the longest time to accomplish. In the meantime, it is important to counter opposition to individual apartment projects, to win support for proposed multifamily rental developments, and to turn pro-apartment attitudes into pro-apartment action.³⁸

Public Information

A significant amount of resistance to multifamily rental housing is based on lack of information, misperceptions, or exaggerated fears of project impacts.³⁹ Providing clear, accurate information about a proposed housing project is a critical part of a successful outreach campaign.⁴⁰

- **Misperceptions about the project.** Citizens may misunderstand the fundamental nature of the housing proposal. For instance, neighbors may erroneously believe a sponsor is building “Section 8 apartments” rather than “eight apartments.” The project definition must be carefully spelled out so that neighbors understand what type of project is proposed in their backyard.
- **Misperceptions about residents.** Many citizens have misperceptions or stereotypical expectations about the kinds of people who live in rental housing. They also have negative misperceptions about the type of behavior that rental residents are likely to engage in.

ser and Joseph Gyourko, “The Impact of Building Restrictions on Housing Affordability;” *Economic Policy Review*, Federal Reserve Bank of NY, New York, NY: June 2003.

³⁶ Indeed, some research is currently underway. The Urban Land Institute and the National Multi Housing Council are collaborating to produce a compact development “toolkit” for localities.

³⁷ Michael Pawlukiewicz and Deborah L. Myerson, “ULI/NMHC/AIA Joint Forum on Housing Density,” *ULI Land Use Policy Forum Report*, Urban Land Institute: Washington, DC, 2002. <http://tinyurl.com/rd5y9>.

³⁸ Debra Stein, “Creating a Community Outreach Plan,” *Developments Magazine*, March 2006.

³⁹ See *Creating Successful Communities: A New Housing Paradigm*, National Multi Housing Council/National Apartment Association: Washington, D.C., 2002, and Richard Haughey, *High-Density Housing: Myths and Facts*, Urban Land Institute: Washington, D.C., 2005, for rebuttals to common misperceptions about multifamily and rental housing. For a free downloadable PowerPoint presentation on rental housing, see “Rethinking Density to Create Stronger, Healthier Communities” from the National Multi Housing Council: www.nmhc.org/Content/ServeContent.cfm?contentItemID=3423.

⁴⁰ Providing data is most likely to change opinions when the audience is willing to engage in rational evaluation of objective facts. Where respondents do not have the time, interest, or ability to engage in systematic evaluation of the facts, then subjective simple rules of thumb such as “everyone hates the project” and “lawyers always lie” become more important. For a discussion of rational, emotional and peripheral persuasion, see Debra Stein, “Garnering Support for Homebuilding,” *Builder and Developer Magazine*, June 2006, Vol. 16, No. 6.

Many Americans, for instance, consider wealth to be an indication of responsible hard work, self-discipline, and moral worth. The flip side of this perspective is the belief that people who earn less money or who reside in less lavish homes must be lazy and irresponsible.⁴¹ Citizens often expect rental residents to be bad neighbors likely to engage in anti-social behavior such as crime, graffiti, loud parties, non-maintenance of property, and so on.⁴²

Neighbors are much more likely to support a multifamily rental housing project when they understand that rental residents are people very similar to themselves. Many sponsors point to examples of pro-social workers likely to become apartment residents: local police officers, firefighters or teachers whose salaries make rental housing an attractive option. Responsible management of rental housing, including on-site management and resident rules, can also ensure that residents behave in appropriate ways.⁴³

- **Misperceptions about the sponsor.** Lack of information about the project sponsor and the sponsor's track record of building and operating safe, similar projects can lead to NIMBY resistance to multifamily housing. The message that "the sponsor has a history of managing safe, similar projects" is highly effective to win support for controversial, dense housing.
- **Misperception about other people's opinions.** One of the most influential causes of resistance to multifamily rental housing is the misperception that "everyone hates the project." No one likes to be criticized by their peers, so even pro-housing neighbors will repress their enthusiasm if they are under the mistaken impression that "everyone else" opposes the proposed rental housing project.⁴⁴ That is why it is critical to get the message out that the proposed housing project is supported by some portion of the community. You don't need majority support for the planned housing project, but you do need pro-housing neighbors to know that they are not alone in their support for the apartment project.⁴⁵

There are several factors involved in providing the public with information that reduces anti-housing attitudes and promotes pro-housing attitudes. The *source* of information must be deemed sufficiently expert, trustworthy, and likeable.⁴⁶ *Message factors* such as the number and order of arguments impact the effectiveness of information. *Audience factors* such as an individual's attention or percep-

⁴¹ Conservatives tend to rate individualistic causes of poverty such as laziness as 50 percent more important than social causes such as the unavailability of affordable housing. Bernard Weiner, *Human Motivation: Metaphors, Theories and Research*, Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 1992.

⁴² A multifamily for-sale project in California's Silicon Valley provided an interesting reminder that poverty is a relative, not an absolute concept. The proposed units would be sold at one-third the median sales price of the surrounding single-family neighborhood, and existing residents loudly protested that their new neighbors were likely to be bad neighbors. These condos actually sold for \$900,000 apiece, while the average home within the super-luxury enclave was valued at \$3.2 million. While multifamily residents were not "poor" by any absolute economic standard, they were relatively "poor-er" than existing mansionaires, and therefore presumed to be less acceptable as neighbors.

⁴³ Debra Stein, "The Ethics of Housing and NIMBYism," *Affordable Housing Finance*, February 2006.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the contagious "bandwagon" effect of repressed opinion, see Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1993. For an excellent overview of the relationship between public opinion and private opinion or behavior, see Theodore L. Glasser and Charles T. Salmon, eds., *Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent*, Guilford Press: New York, 1995.

⁴⁵ In a series of conformity tests conducted in the 1950s by Solomon Asch, 94 percent of respondents were willing to express an unpopular minority viewpoint when there was at least one other person publicly agreeing with them. By comparison, only 70 percent of participants were willing to express a minority opinion in the absence of social support. See Philip Zimbardo and Michael Leippe, *The Psychology of Attitude Change and Social Influence*, McGraw Hill: Boston, 1991.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of credibility, see Debra Stein, "The Truth About Credibility," *Public Management Magazine*, June 2001.

tion of what “everybody else” thinks clearly affect whether information alone will resolve opposition to multifamily rental housing. Finally, there is a wide range of *communication channels* to choose from to disseminate information to the public, including briefings, presentations, advertising, direct mail, and media interviews.⁴⁷

Providing clear, accurate information about a proposed multifamily rental housing project is a crucial part of a community outreach campaign. However, public information can also be seen as very condescending. When a sponsor sends out a letter inviting residents to, “Come to a meeting so we can tell you what we’re doing in the neighborhood,” citizens may interpret the invitation as actually saying, “We unilaterally made decisions that affect you but we only have a patronizing obligation to tell you about those decisions after the fact.” As important as it is to give information *to* the public, it is usually more sensitive to focus on how you want to elicit feedback, ideas and suggestions *from* the public.

Public Participation

Too much resistance to multifamily rental housing arises because sponsors fail to demonstrate the real respect they feel for neighbors. An insensitive project sponsor may implicitly hear, “I am important and you didn’t treat me with respect. I therefore have to oppose your proposal in order to discredit you and to discredit your disrespectful opinion of me.”⁴⁸

While it is always important to treat neighbors with respect, it is especially important to do so when dealing with controversial housing projects. There are several specific measures you can take to demonstrate respect and reduce anti-housing attitudes and action.⁴⁹

- **Empower citizens.** Citizens will often “just say no” to a housing proposal simply because they feel it was developed without their input. Involving citizens early in the planning process can help avoid this unnecessary resistance. The conventional scenario involves merely *informing* neighbors of plans made or being made by other people. *Consulting* with residents involves eliciting their ideas and making it clear how that input will affect the projects sponsor’s final plans. When housing sponsors and residents engage in *joint decision-making*, all stakeholders collectively evaluate different alternatives to mutually identify the best scenario.⁵⁰
- **Respect each individual’s unique needs.** Everyone likes to feel that they stand out from the crowd, and everyone wants to know that their unique needs are respected. Recognize that each neighbor has distinct concerns: “Since you live right next to the site, the new apartment building will be more visible to you than to your neighbors.”
- **Use personal names.** Name tags, sign-in sheets and self-introductions help personalize each neighbor and make it easier to learn and use each person’s name. When neighbors are treated as respected individuals, they are less likely to engage in hostile mob conduct such as booing or hissing at meetings.

⁴⁷ Carl Hovland’s “Yale Chain of Response Model” describes the many variables involved in effective persuasion. See Roxane Lulofs, *Persuasion: Context, People, and Messages*, Gorusch Scarisbrick Publishers: Scottsdale, Arizona, 1991.

⁴⁸ Someone who sees themselves as an important community leader will “lose face” if ignored or disrespected. D.B. Bromley, *Reputation, Image and Impression Management*, John Wiley & Sons: Chichester, England, 1993.

⁴⁹ Debra Stein, “Credibility, Respect and Power: Sending the Right Non-Verbal Signals,” *The Commissioner Magazine*, American Planning Association, Fall 2006.

⁵⁰ See Deborah Myerson, *Involving the Community in Neighborhood Planning*, Urban Land Institute: Washington, D.C., 2005.

- **Make a lot of eye contact**, especially when listening. When you're talking to a large audience, don't engage in "machine gun" head-turning where your eyes barely sweep over the audience's heads in a mechanical way. Instead, make personal eye contact with one individual at a time, creating a respectful, personal relationship with each person you look at before you establish eye contact with another audience member.⁵¹
- **Engage in active listening**. Once a citizen has made a statement, use your own words to reflect back what you have heard before responding or offering an advocacy message ("It sounds like you are afraid that rental residents may not maintain their gardens"). You don't have to agree with what you have heard, but demonstrating that you have understood a neighbor's arguments shows that you have listened respectfully.

Outreach Tools

There are several outreach tools available to help sponsors communicate information to and elicit public input from citizens:⁵²

- *Unilateral materials* such as flyers, advertising and websites are used to convey information to the public in a one-way stream.
- *Bilateral outreach* such as one-on-one phone calls and briefings allow the housing sponsor to target messages to each listener and to simultaneously get feedback and elicit a commitment of support for the project.
- *Invitational events* such as task forces, citizen advisory committees (CAC), and coffee-and-donut living room events are limited to a clearly-defined list of participants.
- *Multiparty events* such as community meetings or public workshops tend to focus on the exchange of opinion rather than public education or conflict resolution. Sponsors who need to meet with several dozen or even several hundred citizens should consider invitational events, roundtables, open houses, or other events with smaller, more manageable audiences.
- *Press relations* are important to avoid inaccurate press that could make misperceptions even more credible.

Building Support for Multifamily Rental Housing

It often isn't enough to simply keep a cap on opposition. Public expressions of support are often required to turn a proposal for multifamily rental housing into an approved project. Where rules against *ex parte* contact with public officials prevent a sponsor from directly lobbying a politician for a vote, citizen-lobbyists are needed to persuade officials to adopt favorable opinions about the housing proposal. Even when public officials already have pro-housing attitudes, pro-housing attitudes don't necessarily guarantee pro-housing action, so nervous politicians often need visible voter support before actually voting "yes" for a controversial multifamily housing proposal.⁵³

⁵¹ For detailed instructions on the direction, duration and frequency of effective eye contact, see www.gcastrategies.com/books_articles/tips.php.

⁵² See James L. Creighton, *The Public Participation Handbook: Making Better Decisions Through Citizen Involvement*, Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2005 and Douglas Porter, *Breaking the Development Logjam: New Strategies for Building Community Support*, Urban Land Institute: Washington, D.C., 2006 for excellent outreach strategies and resources.

⁵³ Debra Stein, "Preparing Your Lobbying Plan," *Land Development Magazine*, Fall 2005.

There are four steps to build support that works: identification of potential supporters; attitude recruitment; action mobilization; and hearing management.⁵⁴

Identifying Potential Supporters

There are several different audiences of potential supporters, and the first step of any supporter development campaign is to identify who can be tapped for assistance:

- *Direct beneficiaries* are people who will make money on the project: the developer, the contractor, consultants, construction workers, and so on. While these supporters do not make credible witnesses at the microphone, they can sign petitions, send letters of support, make phone calls, and so on.
- *Indirect beneficiaries* gain from general improvements in the local economy arising from the project. Local merchants, for example, can benefit from increased pedestrian activity from new rental residents, while major employers seeking affordable housing for their workers can also benefit from multifamily housing in the community.
- *Project users* are another major audience of potential supporters. Whether it is potential renters or residents of future commercial or retail space, users make highly credible witnesses.
- Many people have already made a *public commitment* to help create housing for those in need. Getting people to think about themselves in terms of their religious or charitable affiliations is more likely to result in a project endorsement than allowing citizens to think about themselves only as property owners likely to be impacted by a housing development.
- *Special interest groups* either tend to generally support any kind of development or to support one particular component of the project. Many groups, for instance, support higher-density housing, including county farm bureaus, open space advocates, and transit advocates.
- Finally, support can be drawn from people who will suffer *relational consequences* if they don't step up and support the rental housing proposal: friends or relatives of future residents; the builder's employees or vendors; and others people whose continued personal relationship with a committed supporter tomorrow depends upon helping out today.

Recruiting Supporters

Within a housing context, a community member who signs a petition, fills out an endorsement card, or even attends a neighborhood coffee is substantially more likely to testify in favor of a project than someone who never makes an initial commitment. Before asking potential supporters to attend a public hearing or to make some other big pro-housing commitment, get your foot in the door with a much smaller request. Let's assume Mrs. Lee agrees to a minor, painless request such as signing a petition that says, "We need more housing in the community." When the housing sponsor later asks Mrs. Lee to endorse a particular housing proposal, she will feel pressured to comply with the later request or else look shamefully inconsistent. Having once agreed to the initial request, Mrs. Lee will start seeing herself as a cooperative and civic-minded ally, and as someone who actually cares about housing concerns and takes action to address them.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Debra Stein, "Community Support – A Strategic Plan to Turn Out the Troops," *Urban Land Magazine*, December 1997. See also Debra Stein, "Turning Pro-Project Attitudes to Pro-Project Action," *The NIMBY Advisor*, January 2006, www.nimbyadvisor.com.

⁵⁵ See Robert Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, 2000, for a discussion of foot-in-the-door recruitment and door-in-the-face mobilization.

Mobilizing for and Managing the Public Hearing

The “foot-in-the-door” technique worked to get an initial commitment of support for a proposed apartment project. When hearing time rolls around, however, it’s time for the “door-in-the-face” approach. The door-in-the-face technique is initiated with a large request that may be rejected (“Will you come to a Planning Commission hearing on Tuesday afternoon and testify in support of the proposed apartment complex?”). If the large request is accepted, then congratulations. If your first request is refused, then retreat to the smaller request you had in your back pocket all along (“Then will you call the chair of the Planning Commission and let her know you support the project?”). Compared to the first request, the second request will seem much smaller, more reasonable, and easier to agree to.

There are several things you can do to maximize the impact supporters can make during a public hearing for a multifamily housing project:⁵⁶

- **Provide key messages.** Your allies need to know what to say before they stand up to testify. Providing a one-page fact sheet or list of bulleted talking points helps ensure that witnesses emphasize the key messages you want decision-makers to focus on. Reassure citizen-witnesses that it is OK to sound nervous; politicians are more impressed by sincere-sounding citizens than by the slickest professional mouthpiece.
- **Arrange the order of your speakers.** Ideally, pro-housing witnesses should be alternated or interspersed between anti-housing speakers. Interrupting a stream of hostile testimony with positive messages and clear rebuttals breaks the momentum of anti-rental neighbors and avoids the impression of overwhelming opposition to the project. You also want to ask a few of the most compelling, golden-tongued speakers to testify first so they can inspire later witnesses and guide subsequent testimony. Reporters who must leave the hearing early to meet their deadlines can also pick up quotable comments from the most persuasive advocates when those witnesses speak at the beginning of the hearing.
- **Encourage supporters to look supportive.** Your allies (including your own team members) can express pro-housing enthusiasm even when sitting still. Encourage project allies to smile and nod at appropriate moments. If there is an impressive crowd of supporters in the room, ask them to raise their hands or wear buttons to identify themselves as project advocates.
- **Try to speak last.** You want to be the last voice the decision-makers hear before they cast their votes. By speaking last, you can rebut attacks made by earlier speakers and ensure that pro-housing messages are fresh in the officials’ minds when it comes time to make a decision. If necessary, reserve some of your originally allocated speaking time to provide a summary of your views after all citizens have testified. If you cannot secure rebuttal time for yourself, try to hold at least one persuasive supporter in reserve to speak at the end of the hearing who can summarize pro-project messages.

CONCLUSION

The bias against multifamily rental housing must be overcome if America is to meet its housing needs in an environmentally sustainable and economically realistic manner. Misperceptions, exaggerations and unfounded beliefs contaminate civic discussions about apartment development, yet anti-housing resistance can be rationally addressed by providing evidence about rental housing and its real, not imagined, impacts. Attitudes about apartments aren’t solely derived from objective facts,

⁵⁶ Debra Stein, “Managing the Public Hearing for Maximum Impact,” *Land Development Magazine*, Fall 1999.

however. Emotions, values, and even peripheral factors such as what “everybody else thinks” play important parts in the development of pro-housing and anti-housing attitudes, and must play a part in any developer’s community outreach activities.

It will take more than mere opinions to create enough housing to meet the nation’s growing population demands. Pro-housing attitudes need to be translated into pro-housing action. That means persuading planners and politicians to support policies and regulations to encourage the construction of new apartments. Since public officials are responsive to the demands of their constituents and community members, this also involves mobilizing citizens to support pro-apartment policies and actual apartment buildings in their own backyards. Perhaps, in the future, acronyms like RAMBY (Rental Apartments in My Backyard) will replace NIMBY in discussions about the creation of multi-family rental housing.