

What Works in Affordable Housing Education?

I. USEFUL GOALS TO CONSIDER

- Neutralize opposition and build active support (where possible);
- Motivate/enable people to visit existing developments in or near their community;
- Provide factual information on a limited set of issues (e.g. design, density, crime, traffic, parking); acknowledge controversy and present available facts on contested issues;
- Provide a new perspective (e.g. mortgage interest deduction subsidizes most housing);
- Build credibility and trust; create relationships for follow-up;
- Multiply impacts of presentation (e.g. generate good media attention when possible).

II. EFFECTIVE CONTENT

Themes: Speak to particular audience's interests:

- Show particular successful examples of affordable housing;
- Demonstrate how the development is a local community asset (eliminates blight, provides local jobs, brings federal and state subsidies, addresses jobs/housing balance, generates sales tax revenues, reduces traffic/pollution, provides community amenities, cost-efficient solution to community problem, etc.);
- Show that other nearby communities are “doing their share” (if true);
- Explain how professional property management (including tenant screening and lease provisions) prevents crime and protects neighboring property values;
- Demonstrate successful results for residents of affordable housing developments (e.g. educational and employment achievements);
- Show the broad range of types of qualifying residents; express need by typical jobs;
- Emphasize the common experience that feared impacts do not actually occur.

Images: As localized as possible:

- Before and after shots of developments;
- Older buildings that are well-maintained;
- People living in buildings as their home;
- Graphs and other visual relief.

Voices: Testimony of trusted/non-interested parties on local impacts:

- Neighbors, police, business, former opponents, good press, and other “authorities”

III. STYLE

- Acknowledge/address real concerns; do not “oversell”;
- Interesting/fun/creative presentation (e.g. Guess which is affordable housing?);
- Acknowledge mistakes in part; explain lessons learned and how used;
- Language: “development/complex/apartment house/home” instead of “project.”

IV. FOLLOW-UP

- Get them to go on a housing tour;
- Get back to them on unanswered questions;
- Link them to local/regional resources;
- Repeat themes and facts as often and in as many different contexts as possible.