

Housing Myths....DeBunked

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Myth 1

Affordable housing negatively affects property values.

Truth

The California Department of Housing and Community has developed a paper, "Documents and Websites on Affordable Housing and The Relationship to Property Values" which links readers to many studies conducted across the United States that show that affordable housing does not negatively affect property values. Dick Fenton, McCann Daech Fenton Realty, recently noted in an interview for our documentary film "The new face of affordable housing" researched the price patterns of the market rate units in the Fields and concluded they were not negatively affected by the presence of a substantial number of affordable housing units. One has only to look at other Mountain Resort Communities such as Aspen and Park City Utah, who have aggressively addressed this issue to observe that housing prices there have only continued to go up.

Aspen, Colorado in Pitkin County, with a geographic setting and population equivalent to Blaine County, has over 2000 affordable workforce housing units in the city limits of Aspen . They have continued to experience escalating home prices. City Council members attribute their economic success to having an adequate workforce to provide services to their high end part and full time residents and tourist industry.

Myth 2

Affordable housing is unattractive

Truth

Most citizens could not recognize affordable housing in their communities. Both public and private financial investors have worked with developers and architects to ensure that the design of affordable housing fits within the community. A 2002 report, "Joint Forum on Housing Density," by the National Multi Housing Council, American Institute of Architects and the Urban Land Institute, concluded that good design is "one of the most effective ways to overcome community opposition to affordable properties"

Local examples of good design of integrated (Inclusionary) housing are The Fields, The Pine Ridge, Frenchman's Gulch, River Bend, and Copper Ridge. Even with a variety of densities the face of today's affordable housing does not match the image in most people's heads.

Myth 3

Affordable housing increases traffic

Truth

When affordable housing is sufficient in each community, people can choose to live closer to work instead of tolerating long commutes, this reduces traffic congestion and pollution. In addition, mixed-use developments that incorporate high-density housing, commercial and retail involve less traffic due to the ease of walking. The National Personal Transportation Survey found that households below the median income (in our case \$74,800 per 4 person household) make approximately 40 percent fewer trips per household than those above. With the rising price of gas this survey is likely to show an even wider disparity if taken today.

Myth 4

Affordable housing negatively affects a municipality's infrastructure

Truth

Whether discussing a city's utility infrastructure, such as its water pipelines or electrical power lines, or its social infrastructure, such as its effect on schools, high-density housing causes LESS strain than urban/suburban sprawl. As reported in the recent "Myths and Facts About Affordable and High Density Housing" by the California Planning Roundtable, high density housing provides economies of scale for utility infrastructure both in trunk lines and treatment plants. Additionally, infill developments can take advantage of community services that are already paid for but under utilized. When discussing the social infrastructure, the American Housing Survey reports that single-family housing can have two to three times the number of school-aged children per household than those residing in apartments.

Myth 5

Affordable housing increases crime

Truth

There is no correlation between housing and crime. What does lead to crime is a lack of control of one's environment and a host of social-economic factors. Crime can be higher if a neighborhood lacks jobs, community services. What helps combat crime is a population that feels vested in the community they live in and pride in their neighborhood and homes.

Myth 6

Community housing is a free-ride to those who don't or won't earn their own way.

Truth

The people who qualify for this type of opportunity are hard working members of our community who have jobs and who want a stable affordable place to raise their families. They pay their own down payments and pay their own mortgages. They pay property tax on their improvements and fees to ensure the maintenance and upkeep of their property.

The only thing they are "getting" is a chance to buy into the system at a level that is relative to their income. Since the housing can't appreciate in value beyond a fixed amount per year, the buyers won't reap a windfall, but that is the quid pro quo for being able to buy into the community at a fair value.

Myth 7

These kinds of housing turn into slums and will ruin the neighborhood.

Truth

The people own or rent community housing will be carefully qualified before they can be part of the program. They are the people who teach our children, staff our hospitals and emergency services, work for our cities and county, manage and own our businesses, etc.

Community housing costs to the owners will include fees for maintenance and upkeep of the housing to ensure it will remain a welcome part of each neighborhood. All the community housing we saw in Jackson Hole , Aspen , Vail, etc. was attractive, well-maintained, and showed the same pride of ownership that all of us have in our own homes.

Myth 8

The private sector can provide this housing.

Truth

We have had a shortage of community housing for 20 years. Woodside and other areas have tried to meet the demand for realistically-priced housing in the past, but even these developments are now priced above the level of affordability for most of our workforce. The private sector prefers to build for the higher-cost market demand in our community. The only way we will get community housing is to do a private-public participation program that ensures the creation of community housing. With the high cost of land and the limit of available density, the private sector has no economic interest in providing community housing.

Myth 9

Almost all of the out-of-county people who work in Blaine County want to live elsewhere anyway.

Truth

Some people do prefer to live in other counties and work here. They get our higher wages, spend the money in their own communities, and accept the long drive each way that affects our local traffic and parking. Providing community housing here won't prevent people who want to live outside the county to do so.

When employers interview people for jobs here in Blaine County, most of the prospective employees want to live here and become vested in the community. For some types of employment, especially hospital and emergency service positions, proximity to the job is critical. When well-qualified people apply here for jobs and find out they can't afford housing, they go elsewhere. That limits our pool of qualified applicants and affects our ability to serve the public.

Myth 10

The business employers are capable of supplying housing for their workers. The government should stay out of this process.

Truth

It is true that the business employers should do more to meet the needs of community housing. In fact, some of them are already buying housing for their employees, but not enough of them can afford to do so. Moreover, there are many non-business employers who need employees and housing for those employees.

Contributors: Homes for Working Families, Len Harlig, and ARCH Community Housing Trust