



ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

LESSONS FROM A REGIONAL COALITION FOR HOUSING (ARCH)

THE PROGRAM

A regional Coalition for Housing, or ARCH, is a partnership between King County, WA and the higher-income cities in east King County, whereby each partner contributes funds from their general operating funds to a housing trust for the purpose of increasing the supply housing for lower-income households in the region. ARCH was a by-product (indirectly) of the passage of the regional growth management ordinance, which preserved open space by limiting the areas in which development could occur.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS?

The lessons from the A Regional Coalition for Housing experience can be helpful for

- Suburban communities considering how to generate commitment to producing and preserving affordable housing;
- Advocates concerned about the lack of access to opportunity in more affluent and suburban communities; and
- Affordable housing developers seeking support for building and preserving affordable housing in affluent and suburban communities.

THE RESEARCH

The research sought to understand what caused suburban communities to continue to support the production and preservation of local affordable housing. Researchers conducted a historical analysis of ARCH's origins and interviewed current and former ARCH and political leadership.



LESSONS LEARNED & PRACTITIONER TAKEAWAYS

LESSON 1. EMPHASIZE AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS ABOUT RESPECT FOR EXISTING RESIDENTS

The impetus for the creation of ARCH was the fear that the new growth management requirements were going to make it difficult for local residents to afford to live in the region, and ARCH never wavered from this initial rationale. This prevented discussions from devolving into an “us versus them” narrative, and has helped ARCH avoid having to convince jurisdictions of the value of affordable housing anew.

Recommendation for practice.

Couch affordable housing in the context of people locals already are familiar with and value. An emphasis on personal respect for people that the community relies upon can be a powerful unifier.

LESSON 2. QUALITY DESIGN AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT ARE ESSENTIAL

Local leaders repeatedly highlighted the design of ARCH-supported projects, particularly how well their designs complemented the surrounding streetscape. Moreover, they characterized ARCH-supported projects as scandal-free and well-run. These realities helped dissipate community fears once the housing was put in service. They also became important examples to be referenced during advocacy for subsequent projects.

Recommendation for practice.

All projects must be built to a high standard, and then managed to a similarly high standard. An affordable housing project that adds chaos to a neighborhood does irreparable harm, particularly for future projects that are contemplated. In addition, affordable housing providers should consider a post-completion effort that shows everyone, including initial skeptics and possible future partners, the fruits of the work. Lived experience and awareness can change the degree of opposition this proposed projects will generate.



LESSON 3. BE WILLING TO BE INCREMENTAL

ARCH initially was a partnership between only King County and the City of Bellevue. The experiences in Bellevue and other early partners, including Kirkland and Redmond, became selling points for other jurisdictions, who could see the process and success. ARCH has grown to now include 15 east King County cities.

Recommendation for practice.

Work initially with willing cities that understand the affordable housing challenge and are willing to devote funds toward addressing it. Do not wait until every city is on board.

LESSON 4. THE DUAL FUNDING MODEL INCREASES LOCAL COMFORT WITH PARTICIPATION

ARCH members provide funding through two channels. One channel provides money to support ARCH staff. The second channel provides capital funding new development or the preservation of existing units. Funding for this capital channel is not transferred to ARCH until the projects for a given period are agreed upon, though, so local jurisdictions are not asked to provide funds before they know what projects are going to be developed. This avoids the possibility that a city might fund a project it subsequently objects to.

Recommendation for practice.

Set up a governance structure that preserves some degree of local control.

RESEARCHERS

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