

Cathy Bennett, Housing Initiative, Urban Land Institute (ULI) Minnesota

Mindy Greiling & Kathy Juenemann

Nov. 15, 2016

1. What role does the Urban Land Institute play in affordable housing?

The Urban Land Institute is an international organization with a long history of providing unbiased, market-based solutions and best practice advice on land use and building resilient and competitive communities. One current priority in the ULI MN district is housing.

They did “deep dive” work in eight cities and developed specific tools to help communities, based on what they learned. One is an online portal, housingcounts.org, a one-stop for housing resources (e.g., financial, land use, helping residents succeed). The tools show communities such things as how to:

- a) Be more development ready.
- b) Use a process to set a clear community vision upfront.
- c) Align the Council and Mayor with staff. Set clear policies.
- d) Identify areas where the city would be willing to commit to financial participation.
- e) Work with the private sector, including real estate partners.

They offer technical assistance workshops and panels, e.g., real estate professionals addressing a specific project, development or policy issue. In every conversation with cities, housing comes up. They were part of Minnesota Challenge with CURA. (see Ed Goetz interview) They have held workshops in Roseville and Maplewood and have another Roseville one scheduled for December.

2. Tell us about the Regional Council of Suburban Mayors and your role.

ULI MN founded (2004) and supports the Regional Council of Mayors (RCM), where mayors meet monthly to learn from experts and each other about issues of regional significance, e.g., housing, in terms of economic competitiveness and quality of life.

In 2008, the Family Housing Fund invited ULI Minnesota and the RCM to partner and expand the Fund's regional capacity. They shape and develop tools, strategies and policies to support a full range of housing choices in connected, livable communities. Evidence of positive results are:

- a) Cities are more accepting and intentional in supporting affordable housing as part of offering a full range of housing choices to ensure their competitive ability by accommodating income diversity in their communities.
- b) Communities are adopting housing policies and modifying zoning codes to support mixed use, mixed income and walkable places.
- c) 51% of affordable housing units in suburban areas were built or preserved in RCM cities that participated in ULI MN services from 2008 – 2014.

3. What role do they play in affordable housing?

Our role is to connect the need for a full range of housing choices in order for a community to be economically competitive. We share knowledge and connect public and private conversations. ULI nationally has done much deep research on real estate, trends, financing and housing.

4. What are best practices for cities that are open to affordable housing?

The housing counts tool includes information tied to local case studies of best practices that have worked. (See Question 1) We give cities the opportunity to drill down into reports that give best practices.

5. What could cities do better?

Cities should stay engaged in all the work others are doing. They don't need to do everything on their own. They should set the table for development and constantly work to improve doing what they do best, e.g., infrastructure that allows for development, even if they can't provide financial assistance.

6. What can be done to increase housing for 0 – 30 AMI?

This is the most difficult question because it's costly and hard to do. City staff and elected officials do care, but they can't do it alone. They need access to resources and can look in the ULI tool box for them.

7. What can be done at the city level to engage landlords to be more welcoming of this population that often have rental barriers, e.g., poor credit ratings or criminal records?

The Family Housing Fund has worked on this issue by connecting owners and managers in conversations with the city, so both sides understand and build trusted relationships. (She will send us their draft report) In general, landlords see cities as regulators rather than helpers. The star city example is St. Louis Park. Their elected officials and city staff use many best practices and are consistent in their messages to landlords. They have a long history of good relationships, so were able to successfully ask Meadowbrook to continue taking housing vouchers. Richfield didn't use all these best practices so didn't fare as well.

8. How are cities working together and what could they do to improve?

Some cities do better than others. Minnetonka and Hopkins is a good example of innovative collaboration. Over several years, they developed a joint-powers agreement for development around their shared light rail station.

Hennepin County's Community Works model is another good example where they bring together different neighborhoods or cities to collaborate and fund projects, e.g., the Midtown Greenway and the Southwest Corridor.

9. How can cities (elected and staff) present and explain plans for affordable housing to the public to help remove the stigma?

It takes leadership. Get the right information and help. As Minnesota Challenge suggests, talk about the importance of providing a full range of housing choices to remain economically competitive. 0-30 AMI can be argued for in this way as well, because they are for people who need to live near their low-wage jobs in the community, e.g., child care or restaurants.

Minnesota Challenge has talking points similar to ULI's. The Family Housing Fund contracted with a previous mayor of Shakopee who gives presentations on this.

It was very painful for the community of Carver, but they exercised strong leadership when they worked on a mixed income project. There was a negative resident campaign, including social media. They had to be leaders to dispel the myths and the project was ultimately approved.

10. What do you recommend that the League of Women Voters do to help cities in their work to improve affordable housing and its availability?

The League should learn and use the same language as the people doing this work. Talk about the full range of housing choices and how it helps with community economic competitiveness. Help make human connections, connect people to other people on a personal level, including new immigrants, e.g., sharing meals or park projects. Do these things before housing projects even come up.

She will send us the University of Minnesota School of Architecture's eight principles for culturally accepting communities, e.g., more inclusive parks.