

City of Mission Viejo Affordable Housing Education Program



❖ Myths & Truths about Affordable Housing

Source: "Myths and Facts about Affordable & High-Density Housing" by the California Department of Housing and Community Development

MYTH #1: People who live in affordable housing are on welfare or won't fit into my neighborhood.

The Faces of Affordable Housing in Northern Colorado

Fire Fighter \$22.01/hour
Teacher \$12.15/hour
Auto Repair \$13.72/hour
Server \$7.60/hour
Administrative Support \$10.64/hour

It takes over \$14.00/hour to afford the average 2-bedroom apartment here.
It takes almost \$27.00/hour to afford the average home here.

**These people benefit our communities.
Let's keep them here.**

Support affordable housing.

For more information contact:
FirstCall at 970-627-7066 in Larimer County or
HELPLINE at 970-363-6606 in Weld County.

This outreach is funded by the City of Fort Collins and The Group, Inc. It is endorsed by the Northern Front Range Consortium of Care and the Affordable Housing Coalition of Larimer County.

Reality: People who need affordable housing already live and work in your community.

The word “affordable” simply means that a household should devote no more than 30% of their income to rent or mortgage payments and utilities. Most residents of modern affordable housing developments work full-time at low or moderate-income jobs. A rent increase, divorce, job loss or other adverse circumstance may cause others to need affordable housing. Many people who need this housing are already working in our towns. The question is whether they can afford to remain here.

Households earning lower incomes can have a variety of occupational and educational backgrounds. Families earning less than four-fifths (80%) of the area's median income are officially lower income households; families earning less

than half of the median are known as very low-income households. For example, a starting elementary or high-school teacher in Mountain View (Santa Clara County), with a gross monthly income of around \$3,200, can afford to pay \$960 a month in rent, which qualifies as low-income if the teacher lives alone; if the salary must support a spouse and a child, the family would be a very low-income household. A starting air-traffic controller in San Diego County, with income

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barely higher than \$31,000 a year, would also qualify for affordable housing. Librarians, sheriffs' deputies, nurses, fire fighters, and many other vital members of our communities all need affordable housing.

MYTH #2: "Affordable housing" means large, uninviting projects and will undermine community character.

Reality: New affordable and high-density housing can always be designed to fit into existing communities.

That may have been the case 25 years ago, but the new generation of affordable housing is based on good design and minimal impact. Smaller, mixed-income developments are distributed throughout a town. Buildings in suburban settings are clustered to leave areas of open space. Compared to unplanned sprawl, such land use is much more efficient and attractive.

When BRIDGE Housing opened its affordable Pickleweed housing development in upscale Mill Valley, potential buyers for neighboring condominiums mistook Pickleweed for the market-rate project. And when Habitat for Humanity built its self-help project in Rancho Santa Margarita, local developers and subcontractors contributed materials identical to those used in nearby market-rate homes. Thanks to sensitive work by experienced architects, the new townhomes fit in perfectly. These developments are proof that affordable housing doesn't mean high-rise slums. For more information, see section on "*What does Affordable Housing look like?*"

MYTH #3: Affordable housing will reduce property values.

Reality: No study in California has ever shown that affordable housing developments reduce property values.

Many studies have been done, and the truth is the single most significant factor affecting property values is the preexisting value of the land in a given community or area. This in-turn is based on supply and demand, proximity to major urban centers, nearby attractions (beachfront property, panoramic views), any negative factors such as environmental contaminants, and availability of adequate infrastructure and services. Architectural standards and adequate maintenance also strongly influence property values, particularly as they apply to affordable rental properties. Properly maintained affordable housing developments, designed and built with sensitivity to the architectural and aesthetic standards desired by the community, may even increase property values.

MYTH #4: Affordable housing will raise taxes.

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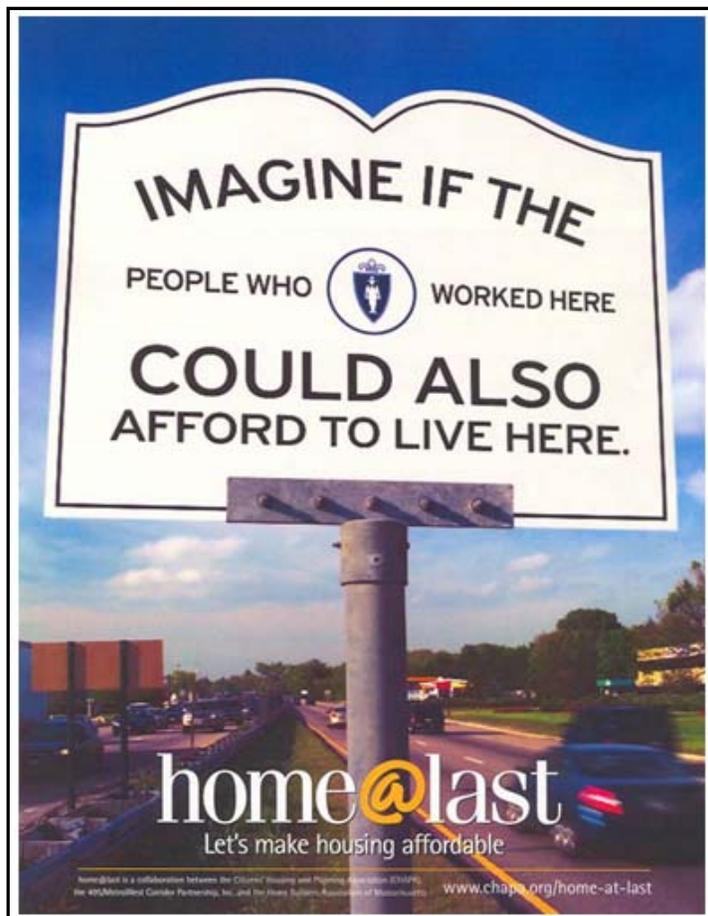


Reality: Affordable housing frequently has a neutral or negligible effect on the local tax rate. In a study comparing taxes in towns that had minimum, moderate and high residential growth, the property taxes per household increased the most in slow-growing communities. And where better to invest our money? After all, our children are the future of our communities.

MYTH #5: High-density and affordable housing will increase crime.

Reality: The design and use of public spaces has a far more significant affect on crime than density or income levels.

Density does not cause crime. For many years social scientists have asked whether high-density housing causes crime. Not one study has shown any relationship between population or housing density and violent crime rates; once residents' incomes are taken into account, the effect of density on non-violent crime decreases to non-significance. After studying housing and neighborhoods throughout the country, Oscar Newman concluded that the design and use of public spaces, and particularly the sense of ownership and control that residents have over these areas, has far more significant affect on crime than density or income levels. In neighborhoods suffering from disinvestment, particularly those areas lacking jobs and community services, crime can be higher. Local governments can help address legitimate concerns about crime by working with existing residents and law enforcement to develop community-based strategies to reduce crime.



MYTH #6: High-density and affordable housing will cause too much traffic.

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Reality: People who live in affordable housing own fewer cars and drive less.

In California's six largest metropolitan areas, two-thirds of renters and over three-fourths of the households living below the poverty line own no vehicles or only one car, compared to 54% of all households and 44% of homeowner households. With lower car ownership rates come fewer trips, and fewer single occupant auto commutes. According to the National Personal Transportation Survey in 1995, low-income households make 40 percent fewer trips per household than other households. Recent traffic growth owes much to existing development. In many high-density neighborhoods, and in most neighborhoods with a mix of housing types, traffic isn't a big problem. Fewer auto trips occur in higher-density areas. In a neighborhood of 15 homes to the acre, one-third fewer auto trips occur, compared to a standard suburban tract. A 1990 survey by the Sierra Club's Transportation Committee found that for every doubling of neighborhood density, vehicle miles traveled are reduced by 20 to 30 percent. Car ownership rates are less in higher density areas. According to recent American Housing Survey data, multifamily developments have lower car ownership rates than single-family home tracts.

MYTH #7: Affordable housing is not fair; only the very poor benefit.

Reality: A lack of affordable housing negatively affects employers, seniors, poor people, immigrants, entry-level and service sector workers, and public sector professionals such as teachers, firefighters, and police officers. It also impinges on broader quality of life issues such as the economic development of the region, traffic congestion, commute times, and air quality. In short, it affects us all. Effectively solving the affordable housing crisis does not mean addressing the needs of just the poor; it also means addressing the needs of the business community, working- and middle-class families, and the broader population.