

## **Chicago Area Mayors Stress Need for Regional Support of Criteria for Housing Projects**

by Joseph Poduska

The Chicago Metropolitan Mayors Caucus has adopted a housing action agenda for 2002 promoting regional support for a set of endorsement criteria for the types of affordable housing projects that should be part of a plan for growth.

The 273-member caucus was formed about five years ago as a way to deal with metropolitan growth issues, but only recently have the mayors created a task force to grapple with affordable housing issues that face the region.

Mayors typically are familiar with real estate issues at the local level, but Robin Snyderman, housing director for the Metropolitan Planning Council, said the mayors have spent a lot of time during the past 18 months educating themselves about affordable housing issues, attending seminars and taking tours of affordable housing projects.

### ***Regional Market***

A catalyst for this action, said Snyderman, is a 1999 regional market analysis which showed that the number of available apartments shrunk by 52,000 units during the 1990s while the population grew by 500,000 people. The report showed an average vacancy rate in the metropolitan area of 4.2 percent.

The report said that rents had increased by about 19 percent since 1995, compared with an 11 percent increase in the consumer price index (CPI).

The report also provided evidence that many lower-income workers were driving from the central city to jobs in the suburbs because they can't afford housing in high-growth areas like DuPage, Lake, and north suburban Cook counties.

### ***Endorsement Criteria***

Snyderman said the housing endorsement criteria are a reminder for everyone involved in the development process of what types of housing need to be built in the region. She said this tool can be useful during debates about whether an affordable housing project should be built in a particular neighborhood.

The general principles adopted by the mayors back projects that promote economic development and sustainability through the building of housing near jobs, encourage housing for a wide range of income levels, and support innovative community development and design.

The mayors backed the concept of mixed-use development within a neighborhood to decrease dependence on automobile transportation. The criteria also call for minimizing the cost of municipal services by clustering housing near existing infrastructure and building housing within walking distance of existing or planned transit service.

Specifically, the criteria provide that housing should be located within one mile of major transit service, a job hub, or town center, or that it must provide a future market for transit. The project could be within two miles of rail transit if provisions are made to provide shuttle service.

Concerning land use, priority will be given to housing that is clustered in an efficient manner to preserve natural resources and open space. Higher densities and mixed uses are especially appropriate near mass transit stations, the criteria state.

### ***Action Agenda***

In their housing action agenda, the mayors said that local governments need to focus on the physical preservation of affordable housing and the preservation of existing subsidies. The agenda says the focus should be on resources for rehabilitation, code enforcement, building codes, property management training, and training for landlords in the Section 8 voucher program.

Local leaders can promote legislation at the state and federal level to increase gap financing and preserve expiring subsidies through the mark-to-market and mark-up-to-market programs, the mayors said. The action agenda also calls for officials to push for waivers of program rules to make federal dollars more practical to use and attractive to developers.

*(For more information, contact Robin Snyderman, Chicago Metropolitan Planning Council, 312-863-6007.)*

Copyright (c) by West Group