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# Minnesota Public Radio

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LEONARD WITT  
*Executive Director*

CIVIC JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

February 24, 1997

Mr. Dick Little  
Education & Housing Equity Project  
122 West Franklin Avenue #320  
Minneapolis, MN 55404

Dear Mr. Little:

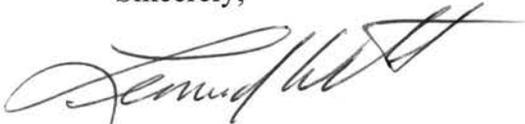
A while back we talked about Minnesota Public Radio's Civic Journalism Initiative plan to have forums in several affluent communities to discuss their responsibility when it comes to providing low income housing.

The forums went extremely well, and I thought you might be interested in seeing the final report. As mentioned in the report we are now moving on to phase two of the discussion in partnership with the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAH) and some 20 other community organizations. Some of that discussion will be heard on MPR. As planned, the phase two discussions will include a wide spectrum of people from many socio-economic backgrounds.

Of course, you are invited to attend, participate in, send people from your organization or even sponsor a phase two study circle. For more information call Dick Little, the project coordinator, at 871-8980.

Thanks for your help in making this project a success. If you have any questions or comments about the enclosed report, please call me at 290-1262 or e-mail me at [lwitt@mpr.org](mailto:lwitt@mpr.org).

Sincerely,



Leonard Witt  
Executive Director  
Civic Journalism Initiative

# **Citizen Forums on Affordable Housing in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro Area**

*A discussion with five affluent Twin Cities communities on the role they play in helping to provide affordable housing for low-income families.*

A project developed by the  
Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative  
with grants from the Community Action Funds of The Minneapolis Foundation  
and the  
Springhill Center General Endowment Funds of The Minneapolis Foundation

*Project director:* Leonard Witt, Executive Director  
Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative

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*Report written by:* Leonard Lee and Leonard Witt

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# Introduction

The Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative organized a series of five citizens forums, or community meetings, to engage the public in discussions of the role that affluent Twin Cities communities can play in helping low-income families find affordable housing. The project developed after the Hollman Decree declared that the minority families living in Minneapolis's Sumner/Olson and Glenwood/Lyndale projects were purposely kept segregated from the rest of the community. In the settlement, HUD was to pay \$100 million to find adequate housing throughout the Twin Cities for low income people. A primary goal was to get more low income minority residents integrated into the general populace. The Civic Journalism Initiative, with funding from The Minneapolis Foundation, set out to learn what relatively affluent communities with few low income minorities thought their responsibility might be in providing affordable housing open to all people.

The goals of the project were to:

1. Begin a public dialogue on the issue.
2. Learn what the residents of affluent communities feel is their level of responsibility to address the issue.
3. Learn what concerns and objections exist in affluent communities to relocating low-income residents in those areas.
4. Begin a discussion of action steps that could be taken in affluent communities to address residents' concerns and objections.
5. Gauge the willingness of community residents to participate in further discussions or activities addressing the issue, or both.

The forums discussions of suburbanites' level of responsibility in dealing with low-income housing were spirited, stimulating, and emotional. The willingness of many residents to help deal with the problem often was offset by the concerns and objections raised by other residents. Some of the discussion will be offensive to minority groups, but the idea was to pinpoint what the obstacles are to providing more low income housing. Our goal was to understand the thought process of those attending the forums, and not, in this phase one discussion, discern where those discussions were based on fact or myth. The second stage likely will challenge some of the assumptions from phase one.

A majority of the forum participants expressed a willingness to attend further discussions or participate in activities addressing the issue, or both. Given the participants' willingness to keep the discussion alive, the MPR Civic Journalism Initiative will participate as a media partner in a metro wide series of study circles during the spring of 1997. The study circles will be led by the Community Circles Collaborative, an organization of some 20 community groups under the leadership of the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing. The central question in those discussions will be: How do racial and economic housing segregation affect educational achievement and life opportunities? The study circles, composed of Minnesotans of all ethnic, economic,

and geographic backgrounds, will expand on many of the issues addressed in the five forums covered in this report.

Several themes emerged consistently from the forums:

- **Crime**

Suburban residents worry that an increase in the number of low-income families living in their communities could lead to increased crime. The level of concern varied from opposition to low-income housing to a desire for more information to a feeling that crime was a non-issue.

- **Siting/Concentration**

The forum participants generally said they preferred scattered-site low-income housing, in which numerous small living units are dispersed throughout a community, to housing projects, in which a large number of residents are concentrated in a single location. They said this would help prevent crime and protect property values.

- **Pride of ownership**

Many of the forum attendees expressed great pride in the appearance of their homes and said they worked hard to maintain them. They were concerned that transplanted low-income families might not take similar care of their dwellings. They said that such a lack of responsibility could lead to crime problems and reduced property values.

- **Transportation**

Public transportation in Twin Cities suburbs is not available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Some forum attendees said it was not geared to serve the needs of working low-income families.

- **Racism**

Some of the participants said that the concerns and objections raised by others to providing low-income housing were racist.

- **Community Values**

Some were concerned that transplanted low-income families might not share a host community's values, which generally were described as including work ethic, sense of neighborhood and community, providing activities for children, and aspirations for material goods and comfort.

- **Assimilation**

Would transplanted families fit into and become part of the community? This question was approached from two very different perspectives. Some participants seemed concerned that transplanted low-income families would not feel they were welcome in the community and would feel alienated unless ways could be found for them to participate in community activities and organizations. Other participants discussed the need for assimilation in order to prevent problems such as crime.

- **Interconnection of Issues**

Many said that housing is only one of the issues that need to be addressed in attempting to help low-income families in the inner city. One cannot look at housing, they said, without also considering issues such as crime, siting of housing, neighborhood assimilation, transportation, jobs, education, and day care and other community services. **The issues are inextricably linked. The participants said that because the problems are multifaceted, the solutions also must be multifaceted.**

Other concerns were raised at some, but not all, forums:

- **Property Values**

Some said that moving low-income families into their communities would lower property values. This concern was expressed repeatedly at the Edina meeting, but only briefly at the Fulton and Eagan meetings.

- **Value of Diversity**

Some welcomed the idea of bringing greater ethnic and socioeconomic diversity to their communities. These participants said they wanted to raise their children in an environment where they could come into contact with people of different socioeconomic strata. They also said they wanted to prevent their communities from becoming too homogeneously middle-upper class.

- **Elderly housing and life-cycle alternatives**

It's often overlooked that a large percentage of low-income residents are elderly. Some forum participants responded favorably to the **concept of life-cycle housing**, which is designed to meet the needs of people as they age; of those people's children, who might want to relocate in their community; and of people whose life situation changes. So rather than just concentrate on building expensive single family homes there might be modest homes for community's young, townhouses and apartments for the community's elderly or for families whose changing economic situation dictates more modest living arrangements. This area of discussion was not well probed because much of the talk centered on low-income people, who would be unlikely, participants said, to have familial connections to those currently living in these relatively affluent communities.

- **Appropriateness of subsidies/Role of government**

Several participants were opposed to the government providing subsidies for low-income housing. **They stressed that they had worked hard--some coming from disadvantaged backgrounds themselves--to earn their way into suburban living, and that others should do the same. Others said it was inappropriate for government to interfere in an issue that should be worked out through natural market forces. Still others countered that suburban zoning itself interfered with "natural market forces."**

Each forum differed from the others in tone and substance. Each community had unique concerns and unique solutions. The priority given to the issues that came up in more than one forum varied from community to community. The Edina participants, for example, spent a considerable amount of time discussing crime and property values. The Fulton attendees, on the other hand, largely discussed neighborhood assimilation.

## Structure

1. At the beginning of each meeting the participants were asked a series of demographic questions, including age, income, family status, length of residence in the Twin Cities area, length of residence in their neighborhood, and political affiliation.
2. A general discussion was held on the following questions: *Does the Twin Cities metropolitan region have a responsibility to provide affordable low-income housing?* And, *Does your community have a responsibility to provide affordable low-income housing?* The participants cited and discussed their concerns about low-income residents being moved into their communities. They responded to questions posed by the moderator by entering their answers into handheld electronic key pads distributed before the meetings.
3. The large group was then broken into small groups, each of which was asked to talk about an issue raised in the general discussion and come up with action steps the community could take to address that issue. In addition, one group at most meetings was asked to address the question, *"How can your community help inner-city residents who wish to remain in their neighborhoods and improve their community?"*

# Observations

*By Project Director*

*Leonard Witt*

*Executive Director*

*Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative*

After our discussions in five affluent Twin Cities communities, one thing was abundantly clear. There is no single, simple answer to our question: *What responsibility does your community have when it comes to providing affordable low-income housing?* Each person and each community had a different point of view. The Edina participants, like Edina itself, were older and more established in their community than were the participants from the other communities. The very stability of the city allowed the participants to look at the question more objectively than the other groups did, and that was especially evident when they were asked about action steps their community might take when it came to providing low-income housing. Even those adamantly opposed to subsidized low-income housing rolled up their sleeves and got busy with the task at hand.

Woodbury on the other hand is a community in flux. Two-thirds of the residents at the forum had lived in the community for less than five years. It is quickly evolving from a rural community to a suburban town. The group was so preoccupied with the idea of the community's rapid changes, that even considering the possibility of addressing yet one more community issue, such as low-income housing, was almost enough to send them into a minor frenzy. Yet, it is in emerging communities like Woodbury where creative solutions to low-income housing problems could be folded into the other rapid changes taking place. Once the community is established, change will be far more difficult than it is now.

Fulton is a Minneapolis neighborhood whose western edge runs along the boundary between the city and Edina. The residents of Fulton have some fifteen scattered-site low-income houses in their midst. At least one of those houses has been a problem, but the other sites and their occupants seem to blend into the neighborhood, bringing a diversity that pleased some of the forum attendees.

Because Fulton is a city neighborhood, the forum members were much more attuned than suburban participants to the fact that if the inner city is allowed to deteriorate, their "little neighborhood," as one resident referred to it, would be doomed too. They also want to make the neighborhood more people-friendly, not just for the low-income people, but for all of the residents, themselves included. A poignant moment occurred when a white middle-class woman recalled how, when she moved into the neighborhood five years ago, she waited for neighbors to come by and greet her, maybe with a batch of cookies. Alas, no one ever came. That still troubles her, and even now she doesn't feel integrated in the neighborhood. Her group decided it would be a good

idea if there was some kind of outreach for all new residents, no matter what their social status, so they had a feeling of being wanted.

All of the Fulton attendees said that neighborhood bonding seems to happen most often among people who have kids. They network more quickly through their kids' activities, their kids' friends, and the concerns they share with other parents.

Two memorable scenes occurred in the Eagan forum, and both of them centered on the minorities in attendance. Two Laotian high school students attended the meeting together, and one said it would be nice to see more minority faces at school. Hers was almost a plea; but her voice was not alone. Several participants in the other meetings said they wished their communities were more diverse economically and ethnically than they are now. Those voices, unfortunately, were in the minority.

The other defining moment in Eagan occurred when the meeting's one black participant, a woman, turned to the group and said, "I've traveled all over the world, and Minnesota is the most racist place I have ever been." Her words seemed to have the force of a small explosion, as the 30 or so others in the room thrust back in their seats. Except for her statement, race was not discussed much, just as it is not often discussed in any group made up mainly of white middle-class people. And yet, *A House Divided*, the video produced expressly for the forums by MPR's Civic Journalism Initiative, quite vividly showed the contrast between the Twin Cities' poor neighborhoods of color and the mostly white, relatively affluent suburbs we were visiting.

Just days after our meeting in Eagan, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* ran a story about a new rental apartment complex built in Eagan exclusively for low-income working-class residents. Although its construction met with stiff opposition, it was built in the end, and, one year after the tenants had moved in, the *Pioneer Press* was writing about how well they were assimilating into their new community. Yet, there was a telling line, a caveat, in the story. It read, "No welfare people allowed." That was the underlying message heard again and again at our forums. Relatively affluent communities might--and we'd have to underscore the word might--be willing to open their communities to low-income residents who work; but there was much resistance to opening them to the non-working poor. That message was no louder than in Maple Grove.

The Maple Grove forum started with people saying how terribly they had been treated in the press, especially in the Minneapolis-based *Star Tribune*. "Maple Grove has been severely misrepresented," one man said. "It's put a bad cloud over our head. We've seen the issue come up in other suburbs, and nobody's been portrayed as badly as we have."

But when it came to opening their community to low-income housing, they were far and away more vocally resistant than the other communities we visited. The key phrase was, "We worked hard for what we got, let them work hard for what they get." Responsibility was the theme hammered home again and again, and there was even strong resistance to rental housing. Few participants called for diversity; but plenty said that the best way for people to get into Maple Grove was to work their way into it, just as they said they had done.

Although our samples were small--there were 30 to 40 people at each of the forums--we used a professional recruiter to try to ensure that the makeup of each meeting would be representative of the population of the surrounding community. In the end, it was apparent that each community's "personality" was unique, which reflects the Metropolitan Council's contention that there is no cookie-cutter approach that will work in all Twin Cities communities. Each community must devise its own plan for providing low-income housing. But it is difficult to believe that in communities like Maple Grove, where resistance seems to be ingrained, significant action will be taken to address low-income housing, especially for those at the lowest end of the income scale, if the community is left to its own devices. Some would argue, of course, that all communities should be left to make their own decisions. We live in a democracy, after all.

It is difficult, though, to dispute the facts represented by the MPR video. **The Twin Cities metro area is a house divided.** The cities have a rapidly growing ghetto, and segregation here is as intense as it is in almost any metropolitan area in the country. Do we just go on with business as usual, or do we--citizens and policymakers alike--say no, we are going to make changes? Change conceivably can come from the top, but that is unlikely in the present political atmosphere. On paper, the state's **Livable Communities Act** puts the responsibility of providing low-income housing on local communities; it allows the residents of those areas to come up with plans that fit their unique needs and wishes. But there was enough resistance to change in the communities we visited that a laissez-faire attitude on the part of politicians would seem unlikely to achieve results. Policymakers need to have courage. No matter what kind of project comes to a community, there will be resistance. People don't like change.

Mark Ulfers, executive director of the Dakota County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, says that years ago when the county's commissioners built their first low-income housing project, they took a risk. But the development was built, and it is a success that has stood the test of time. Every success story makes each new development easier to place, but none is built without some resistance.

People are suspicious, perhaps rightfully so, of government-touted successes. Many forum participants had stories of subsidized housing projects gone wrong. One of those stories--about a housing project nicknamed "Little Chicago" and located in a community near Woodbury--expressed the fears of many who live in the suburbs: that urban planners want to cut off pieces of their worst neighborhoods and transport them out of the cities.

**L**ow-income housing initiatives will work best, of course, if the subsidized housing built in the suburbs is seen as an asset, rather than a liability. Our forum members said that **scattered-site housing**, in which a small number of residents live in duplexes or fourplexes located in existing residential neighborhoods, had the most appeal, but only if there was **stringent screening** to ensure that the occupants of the houses would be responsible neighbors. Most people living in subsidized scattered-site housing already go through stringent screening, but for some forum participants even that was not enough. Who, they asked, was going to screen the friends and relatives who come to visit the low-

income residents. A few vocal forum attendees said this kind of talk was abhorrent, and the idea of screening low-income residents at all was countered, at least partially, during the Woodbury meeting. A woman who had lived in the community for 20 years stood up and said to all of the recent Woodbury arrivals, "You know, if I had the power I would have screened out every one of you."

## Forum Data

Minneapolis-based Marecek & Cairns conducted the five citizen forums and provided all participants with a handheld electronic key pad into which they could enter their responses to questions posed by the forum moderator. The responses were projected onto an overhead screen, allowing the participants both immediate feedback and anonymity. The key-pad technology is an efficient way to gather information and get a sense of a group's feeling on key questions. Because no forum constituted a perfect sample of the host community, however, the numbers in this report should not be viewed as statistical evidence of the way all Twin Citians feel about low-income housing. They simply represent what we learned from the roughly 150 people who attended our meetings. In some cases, the numbers don't add up to 100 percent because not everyone voted on every question.

**Here is who attended our meetings and how they responded to our questions:**

<i>Question</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Under 20	3	1.88
	2. 21-35	21	13.13
	3. 35-50	74	46.25
	4. 51-65	36	22.5
	5. Over 65	26	16.25

<i>Question</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Male	65	41.40
	2. Female	92	58.60

		<i>Votes</i>	
<i>Question</i>	<i>Which best describes your immediate family?</i>	<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Single	32	19.75
	2. Single, with kids	5	3.09
	3. Couple	46	28.40
	4. Couple, with kids	79	48.77

		<i>Votes</i>	
<i>Question</i>	<i>How long have you lived in your community?</i>	<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Less than 1 year	3	1.83
	2. 1-5 years	43	26.22
	3. 6-10 years	45	27.44
	4. 11-15 years	20	12.20
	5. 16 - 20 years	17	10.37
	6. More than 20 years	36	21.95

		<i>Votes</i>	
<i>Question</i>	<i>Annual Family Income</i>	<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Less than \$15,000	2	1.27
	2. \$15,000 - \$30,000	10	6.33
	3. \$30,000 - 50,000	39	24.68
	4. 50,000 - 75,000	47	29.75
	5. 75,000 - 125,000	44	27.85
	6. Over \$125,000	16	10.13

		<i>Votes</i>	
<i>Question</i>	<i>Political Affiliation</i>	<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Democrat	75	45.73
	2. Republican	56	34.15
	3. Independent	33	20.12

<i>Question</i>	<i>In the last three years, the quality of life in your community has:</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Increased dramatically	9	5.81
	2. Increased, but not dramatically	45	29.03
	3. Stayed about the same	68	43.87
	4. Decreased, but not dramatically	27	17.42
	5. Decreased dramatically	6	3.87

<i>Question</i>	<i>In the last three years, the quality of life in the Twin Cities region overall has:</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Increased dramatically	1	0.65
	2. Increased, but not dramatically	14	9.03
	3. Stayed about the same	41	26.45
	4. Decreased, but not dramatically	62	40.00
	5. Decreased dramatically	37	23.87

<i>Question</i>	<i>Citizens of the Twin Cities region have a responsibility to provide adequate housing for low-income people.</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Strongly agree	45	30.20
	2. Agree, but not strongly	49	32.89
	3. Disagree, but not strongly	28	18.79
	4. Strongly disagree	27	18.12

<i>Question</i>	<i>The Twin Cities is "A House Divided"</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Strongly agree	55	34.38
	2. Agree, but not strongly	61	38.13
	3. Disagree, but not strongly	33	20.63
	4. Strongly disagree	11	6.88

<i>Question</i>	<i>How do you feel about locating more low income people in your community?</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. I'd work to make it happen	27	18.37
	2. I'd support it, but not actively	55	37.41
	3. I'd oppose it, but not actively	37	25.17
	4. I'd work against it	28	19.05

<i>Question</i>	<i>Does your community have a responsibility to help rebuild inner city communities?</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Strongly agree	42	25.93
	2. Agree, but not strongly	51	31.48
	3. Disagree, but not strongly	34	20.99
	4. Strongly disagree	35	21.60

<i>Question</i>	<i>We will have made significant progress in rebuilding inner city communities in the next five years</i>	<i>Votes</i>	
		<i>Voting Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Answers Totals</i>	1. Strongly agree	5	5.49
	2. Agree, but not strongly	24	26.37
	3. Disagree, but not strongly	38	41.76
	4. Strongly disagree	24	26.37

## A few key findings

It should be no surprise that in the five affluent Twin Cities communities we visited, the majority of the forum participants said that in recent years their quality of life has remained the same or improved. On the other hand, the majority also said that the quality of life for the Twin Cities metro area as a whole has declined in the same period.

When we asked whether the citizens of the Twin Cities area have a responsibility to provide adequate housing for low-income residents, 64 percent agreed that they do have a responsibility. About half said they would support or participate in an effort to relocate low-income people in their communities. About an equal number said they would not support such an effort or would work against it.

The response was about the same when we asked whether people had a responsibility to help rebuild the inner cities. The important lesson in these numbers, perhaps, is that no matter what side of the issue you are on, there are people in every metro-area community who will either actively or passively support you. Conversely, there are people who will actively or passively work against you. The future of the low-income housing might simply be a question of which side is best at mustering its forces.

In the spirit of civil discourse, however, it might not be a question of taking sides. There might be enough of a bell curve of opinion regarding low-income housing that savvy citizens and community leaders can find common ground and solutions that benefit all area residents, no matter what their socioeconomic status might be. Indeed, our hope is that the upcoming round of metrowide discussions led by the ad hoc Community Circles Collaborative--including MICAH, the Civic Journalism Initiative, and some 20 other organizations--will lead to that common ground and to innovative approaches to use in solving housing problems.

As the forum's key-pad polling numbers indicate, some metro-area residents appear to be open to allowing low-income housing to be built in their communities. The discussions that follow in this report, however, tend to center on obstacles. The reason, in part, is that we wanted to discover what problems were preventing low-income housing from being built in affluent Twin Cities communities.

In the Community Circles-led second phase of these citizens forums, the discussion groups will go beyond obstacles toward community-building solutions.

## **Edina**

### **October 16, 1996**

### **Edina Community Center**

#### **Overview**

**E**dina was the first in our series of meetings in which we asked the residents of affluent communities what their responsibilities are when it comes to providing affordable low-income housing. Although we extended some 600 invitations, about 40 Edina residents showed up for the forum. The effort was worth it, though, because the 40 who attended were *very* interested in the issue.

In the meeting's brief two-hour time frame, it was impossible to tell what each resident felt about low-income housing. But what was apparent was that a significant number thought it was important to preserve the Twin Cities' quality of life, which they said has been slipping. Perhaps more important, a core group said that they were willing to help open doors of opportunity for low-income people of color who wanted to move

into their community and to look for ways they could help in rebuilding inner-city neighborhoods.

This does not mean, however, that everyone in Edina wants to open the community to low-income people. That feeling was expressed in such remarks as:

Qt *"I would prefer not to have homes of that sort in our immediate neighborhood, because of the impact on property values. It's not appropriate in my neighborhood, although I would support building a fair share of affordable housing in Edina generally."*

Qt *"I'm not opposed to these people moving in, but I do object to the idea of the government subsidizing them."*

*"We're not snobs, but I'm afraid that if they moved here these people, regardless of their culture, would have a feeling of not being able to have a lot of what their affluent neighbors would have."*

Low-income families often were referred to as "they," "them," or "those people," suggesting that they are viewed as being of another class, or "different," and that they might not be seen by current residents as being part of the community. It is unclear whether the use of these terms reflected opposition based on the fact that many low-income families--families who could become Edina residents--are people of color.

Qt. Although it rarely came up, race was discussed openly at one point. One participant said, *"Blacks, Hispanics--these are not kinds of motivated people. They have a 'help yourself' mentality, and if they get put into a nice area, I think there'll be problems.* This sentiment was countered, however, by statements such as:

*"We have a diverse population in my apartment complex, and there haven't been any problems."*

*"This [exclusion] is an excuse for bigotry."*

## Concerns/Issues

### Property Values/Siting

A frequently expressed concern was the impact low-income housing could have on the value of nearby property. That concern was reflected in such remarks as:

QT *"We have to be careful not to concentrate areas of low-income housing and create pockets or ghettos. That's what happened in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center, and that's how a lot of their problems got started."*

QT *"A concern to provide housing is fine--low-income people should get housing. But if the government wants it so bad [and] there's a major loss to property owners, they [owners] should be protected."*

*"There are already three low-income senior facilities on my street in a classy area. They're low-key and they haven't really affected anything."*

### **Community Values**

Some participants were concerned about the potential impact of low-income housing on the community's culture and values, and how well low-income residents would fit in if there were moved into the community.

*"There's a difference in values and behaviors. Many of them are single mothers."*

Some participants resented the idea that low-income people should receive government subsidies. They also questioned the appropriateness of government funding to support housing.

QT *"Letting low-income people buy their own property is outrageous. I worked hard to buy my house. Now these people would live as good as me without having to work for it."*

QT *"They're not paying enough in taxes to cover the services--education, city services, etc."*

*"Other people have had to leave [Edina] because they couldn't afford the property taxes. Is that fair to them?"*

The refrain, heard first in Edina and repeated at every forum, was:

QT *"I worked hard to get where I am. I didn't get any government assistance."*

Another common sentiment was:

*"They would be more accepted if they were working, as opposed to just being on welfare. Although we recognize sometimes it's not possible for them to work, they should have to work if possible."*

## Crime

Many said that higher crime rates could result from the locating of low-income families in Edina.

Qt *"These people are victims of their surroundings, and they become criminals."*

*"You bring people in from an area where drugs are used daily, you're going to have problems."*

*"Screening for criminal backgrounds doesn't always work."*

*"We think the impact is going to be minimal. Edina has a population of 41,000. You're talking about bringing in a relatively small number of people."*

## Public Transportation

Some questioned whether Edina's public transportation system was set up to meet the needs of the low-income families who might be moved into the area.

Qt *"Many of these people don't have cars. How are they going to get to their jobs?"*

*"Current [public] transportation in Edina is focused on people working traditional eight-hour shifts. It's not meant to meet the needs of people who work second shifts, split shifts, part-time jobs, and so on."*

*"If people are sited too far from transportation, you need to bring in the MTC and that means hidden costs."*

## Helping Inner Cities

Helping inner-city residents who wish to stay in their neighborhoods, and working to improve those communities, did not generate much discussion.

Qt. *"I think people would be happier if you improved their income, rather than moving them to the suburbs."*

*"You can't rebuild inner-city neighborhoods until you create jobs."*

## Proposed Action Steps

At the end of the meeting we asked people to confront some of their concerns and discuss **actions steps** that might be taken to solve those problems. It is likely that some of these action steps would be seen as offensive to minority communities. Indeed, the one-sided nature of the conversations that took place in the forums might have the same effect. As stated in the introduction, a second phase, in which groups from all socioeconomic backgrounds join the discussions, was planned from the start. Phase two will be led by the Community Circles Collaborative, which includes MICAH, the Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative, and some 20 other organizations.

### Property Values

- Build smaller units, perhaps four-plexes or eight-plexes, and scatter them throughout the community, avoiding concentrations of low-income housing.
- Educate low-income tenants on how to be responsible for, and properly care for, their properties.
- Establish clear accountability for tenants in the care and maintaining of their properties, and set penalties for failure to meet standards.

### Community Values

- Establish mentor programs, perhaps in churches and community centers, to teach new residents community values and norms.
- Find ways to keep children in school.
- Institute welfare reforms to provide work incentives, health benefits, child care, etc.

### Crime

- Lead by example: Be open and welcoming to newcomers.
- Expect the best: Remember, many inner-city residents want to leave their neighborhoods, and many share suburban residents' desire to live in a low-crime area.

### Transportation

- Develop a matrix flow chart showing how each change would interact with other community factors. Public transportation cannot be looked at in isolation from housing and job creation, for example. A matrix should be developed to examine the community's resources, strengths and weaknesses, and range of solutions.

## Helping Inner Cities

- Form working groups of community leaders. Go into inner-city neighborhoods and identify community leaders. Bring them together, ask them what needs to be done, and work with them to develop solutions.
- Instill desire in people to improve their neighborhoods. Help them to develop goals and focus on them. Encourage residents to invest in the communities where they live.
- Establish enterprise zones to encourage business development without direct government assistance or subsidies.
- SCORE has successfully used retired executives to help businesses in need. Why not provide SCORE-type assistance in which suburban residents with special expertise volunteer to help in inner-city neighborhoods.

## Eagan Dakota County Library October 22, 1996

### Overview

About half of the Eagan residents who attended the forum were open to doing what they can to provide low-income housing in the community, but the other half said it was not their problem. The greatest fear associated with low-income residents moving into the area--even among those who said they might be willing to help make it happen--was increased crime. Perhaps the most interesting lesson of the night was revealed on the evaluation forms handed out after the meeting. Twenty-five of the 30 attendees said they would be interested in attending later forums to further discuss low-income housing. They were not turning their backs on the issue, no matter what their point of view. The self-selected group that attended the forum, however, might be more activist-oriented than other Eagan residents.

After watching *A House Divided*, the video produced by the Minnesota Public Radio Civic Journalism Initiative, and learning of the stringent screening of potential troublemakers, some residents expressed interest in scattered-site, or low-density, housing projects. But the residents wanted assurance that the projects would not be crime- and drug-ridden, and that the housing would be maintained over the long haul. The public-housing authorities and church groups now providing housing throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area do a good job of screening and maintaining the property.

Some people in the group wanted a more diverse population in Eagan and saw low-income families moving in as a benefit, not a liability. "It would be nice if more

people of color were in our schools," said high school student Nourn Nou. Another woman said she would like her kids to grow up in a more diverse environment. Eighty-five percent voted in favor of giving landlords incentives to accept more low-income tenants, an idea generated at this forum. It would seem that screening and proof from other communities that low-income housing can work could go a long way toward encouraging Eagan to open more avenues to public housing. It was also clear that well-defined descriptions of what is meant by affordable housing are important. The term affordable housing is relative, some felt, depending on each family's income. Examples of what is meant by low-income housing also will help to alleviate some people's fears of the unknown.

## What is the responsibility of Eagan to provide affordable low-income housing?

Several participants supported the idea that their community has a responsibility to address the issue of affordable housing.

*"Are we our brother's keeper? You do have to help people."*

*"They should have a chance to live like we do."*

*"I feel sorry for today's young people. They have to work two jobs sometimes to make ends meet. We have a responsibility to help them so they can have the same chance we did."*

*"If people have to travel to Eagan to work, that's a travesty. We should be able to provide a wide variety of housing to meet people's needs."*

QT *"Many of us lived in a one-bedroom apartment when we were just starting out. We want to keep them [low-income families] in a certain place, rather than giving them the opportunities we had."*

*"I know a lot of people in the inner city who want to move their kids out, others who want to stay. We should help whoever wants to come."*

*"It comes down to choice. Let them have a choice."*

Other participants said that living in Eagan is a privilege to be earned, not a right to be handed out by the government.

*"I worked my way out of the East Side to get to Eagan. I worked hard, and I've earned everything I've gotten."*

*"We're not responsible for them being able to buy homes."*

*"You don't give them anything. You make them work for it."*

Some participants said it was not clear to them how they were being asked to define the problem and how to approach it.

*"What does it mean to 'provide' more low-income housing? Government rent subsidies? Building affordable structures? How accessible does it need to be? How broadly do you define 'community'?"*

## Concerns/Issues

### Crime

Crime was a frequent topic of discussion, though the discussion was low-key and largely devoid of the strong emotional arguments heard at other forums.

Qt *"If you bring these people, the crime will follow them out here."*

*"They wouldn't act that way [criminal behavior] if they were in different surroundings. We know children behave differently in different environments. Bad environments lead to more poverty, more crime. We need a strong commitment to get children out of there."*

*"Maybe it's just a label, but with low-income people, one always thinks of crime coming along with it. That's kind of the way I perceive it too, but I may be wrong."*

*"Crime is caused by a lack of jobs."*

Qt *"Moving people from the city to the suburbs is just transplanting the problem. They need jobs."*

*"Is it because they're poor, their location, or who they are? If we move them, will the problem follow?"*

*"Will crime go up? People have a lot of misperceptions about crime. Maybe it's just what we see on TV. The news only reports the bad stuff."*

*"Education will cut crime."*

## Siting/Concentration

Many participants said they were more favorably inclined toward scattered-site housing rather than large housing projects.

*"I don't want to see large concentrations of poor people. I favor Section 8-style housing. I favor assistance, not housing projects."*

*"I don't think there should be projects. They should be spread out."*

*"Instead of a project, scatter it."*

*"When you have a concentration, a large group of low-income people, then you have a problem with crime."*

## Fear of the Unknown/Racism/Diversity

Several participants discussed whether Eagan as a community has racist inclinations. Although other forums discussed the virtues of diversity, and racism was mentioned briefly at some of the other forums, the Eagan forum was the only one to spend significant time discussing race.

Qt *"How much does race play [in concerns over low-income housing]? I think it plays a big part. Fear of the unknown plays a big role."*

Qt *"People [at the Eagan meeting] used the terms 'them' and 'those people.' This shows some underlying racism."*

Racism was also brought up by the only African-American participant at the meeting.

*"I've traveled around the world, and Minnesota is the most racist place I've ever found."*

The other participants seemed surprised by the remark, though it went largely unchallenged.

Some mentioned the positive aspects of increasing diversity in the community.

*"Our responsibility is to provide opportunities so Eagan doesn't become a place for the richest, whitest elite. That's not the kind of community we want."*

*"It would be nice to have more people of color in our schools."*

## Pride of Ownership

The Eagan residents expressed a high degree of pride in the appearance and upkeep of their homes.

*"Houses here are well kept up. People seem to have pride of ownership in their houses. This [issue] isn't necessarily about property values, though."*

Qt *"That's the problem with public housing--the people don't own it."*

Qt *"The people coming out here--are they going to be responsible?"*

## Property Values

The impact of low-income housing on property values was mentioned by only one participant.

Qt *"I'm worried about property values. I worked my way out of the East Side. I worked hard. I earned everything I got."*

## Interconnection of Issues/Transportation

Some attendees wondered whether public transportation in Eagan could meet the needs of low-income workers. They said that providing housing is connected to other factors, such as transportation and the availability of jobs.

Qt *"It's way bigger than just putting houses up. You could put housing in, but they [low-income people] couldn't get to their jobs. It's more than housing, we don't have a transportation system that's adequate."*

*"We don't have a transportation system that functions 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They can't go somewhere to get a job. Most of the people in Eagan are part of a bedroom community. We don't work here."*

## Taxes/Infrastructure

One resident was concerned that moving more low-income people into the community could mean higher taxes for current residents due to lack of infrastructure.

Qt *"We don't have the social services other areas do. This might cost us more money."*

## **Helping Inner Cities**

The participants by and large seemed willing to consider assisting inner-city residents who want to remain in and better their communities.

*"Why can't we help them where they're at?"*

*"If we don't want them to come here, we should work to help them where they are. We owe it to the people living there. We can't expect them to do it by themselves, they're already down so low."*

*"We need to do both. We need to create more of a mix in the city. We have low-income people and low-paying jobs. Let's get a complete mix."*

*"We should pay taxes to support housing in the poorer areas."*

## **Proposed Action Steps**

### **Crime**

- Scatter low-income housing throughout the community to avoid concentrated pockets of poverty.
- Encourage community involvement in the issue.
- Gather statistics and educate the community on what, if any, impact could be realistically expected.
- Involve parents and youth in community activities and organizations.

### **Siting/Concentration**

- Provide incentives for landlords to offer additional Section 8 housing.

### **Fear of the Unknown/Racism**

- Residents have an individual responsibility to avoid racist thinking and actions, and to point out possible racist actions, whether intentional or unintentional.

## Transportation

The members of the group addressing transportation said they did not have enough information on the current system to know whether it might work for low-income families.

*"We need more facts--what are the locations of housing, jobs, etc. . How many people have cars?"*

## Helping Inner Cities

- **Education**

Provide more open enrollment, transportation, and other opportunities for inner-city children to attend suburban schools.

- **Job creation**

Encourage companies to create more jobs in inner cities.

- **Reverse commuting**

Provide transportation for workers living in the inner cities to reach jobs in the suburbs.

# Fulton

October 23, 1996

Pershing Field Community Center

## Overview

Because the people of Minneapolis's Fulton neighborhood live in the city, they understand that every neighborhood counts. As one woman put it, if living conditions in the city deteriorate, "our little neighborhood will go under too." Also they have connections with other parts of the city--often more so than suburban residents do. One man said, "I grew up in north Minneapolis. My mother still lives up there and it is terrible. It is awful."

Such comments might seem reactionary, but one man told the group about how he moved his family into north Minneapolis because he wanted them to live in a diverse neighborhood. Their moving there was an intentional decision. But in the end they left. "It was a safety issue," he said. "I wanted to stay. It was a safety issue; we were forced to move."

As with their counterparts in Eagan and Edina, the Fulton attendees preferred scattered-site housing to large projects. Policymakers today are also more predisposed to building scattered-site projects. And, like the Edina and Eagan residents, the Fulton residents had concerns about crime and long-term housing maintenance; but unlike those communities, this relatively compact neighborhood already has fifteen scattered-site housing projects, and most residents are familiar with the concept from personal experience. The verdict was that the people living in the houses were fine, but that sometimes there were problems with visitors and that one house had been a trouble spot in the past year. But Fulton is a neighborhood that has a long history of mixed-income housing, from the million-dollar homes near the city's Chain of Lakes to the two-bedroom cottages on the area's western side. And, though they were concerned about the future of the city, the Fulton attendees were largely an optimistic group.

## What is the responsibility of the Fulton neighborhood to provide affordable low-income housing?

Eighty-one percent of participants said they agreed or strongly agreed that it is their responsibility to help provide low-income housing; of that group, 61 percent said they strongly agreed.

*Qt.* "If we don't care about the condition of the inner city, we lose too."

*"I feel that we have more to lose [than the suburbs]. We have to support the city being better. The suburbs don't care, they're out there away from it all."*

Some participants said they were uncomfortable labeling people.

*"I have concern when we talk about 'us' and 'them.' Forty-one percent of people in poverty are elderly. A lot of us will be elderly very soon. A lot of us are women who are not that far away from poverty. I think we have to remember, we could be 'them' pretty soon."*

## Concerns/Issues

### Crime

Opinions were divided on whether there was cause for concern over increased crime. Some participants said it was not a concern, partly based on their experience with the

neighborhood's existing scattered-site housing. Others felt strongly that an increase in the number of low-income residents could create a serious crime problem.

*"I'm angry because I'm learning to be afraid."*

Qt. *"Am I concerned about crime? Not at all. I understand these people are screened carefully. The reason they're here [Fulton] is that they want a better life. That's what we all want."*

*"If crime does go up, we don't presently have an adequate judicial and penal system to address it—we're not equipped."*

Qt. *"I'm uncomfortable with always equating low income with crime. There are a lot of low-income people who are not criminals."*

Some participants were concerned that residents' fear of a crime increase could cause households to purchase firearms, creating an additional hazard.

Many participants cited their experience with existing scattered-site housing and other **halfway houses** to try to minimize crime concerns.

Qt *"We had a halfway house move into my neighborhood, and people were up in arms. They said, 'There'll be nothing but trouble.' Well, we've never had any trouble from the house. The only trouble we've had has been from people who came in as visitors."*

Qt *"Once it happened [scattered-site housing], they [neighborhood residents] found out things actually went better than they thought they would."*

Several people said that crime or behavior problems were caused by visitors, not the residents of the neighborhood's scattered-site housing.

Qt *"We have scattered-site housing on my block. The problems are not with the people living there, but with the people visiting--family, friends, and so forth. The people living there are committed, they're happy to be there. But we've had 90 police calls in three months."*

**Whether low-income residents become properly assimilated into their new communities, and how a community can help make that happen,** was the focal point of much discussion on ways to mitigate crime concerns.

*"You have to get to know people. Maybe you could partner people with newcomers and do a neighborhood indoctrination. They have to get used to their neighbors. You have to give people an idea what they can expect."*

*"Communication and participation are the keys. 'We' is all of us. It's up to all of us to welcome people to the community. Where's the welcome wagon of today?"*

Others said that crime problems could be mitigated through siting.

*"There's one scattered-site house on my block. I don't know of any problems with it. I wouldn't have a problem with locating more in the neighborhood as long as it's single-family units. I have a problem with large complexes. When you concentrate a lot of units together, I think you start having problems."*

### **Accelerated Family Flight**

Some of the participants were concerned that **fear of crime, whether the threat was real or imagined, could result in people moving out of the neighborhood.**

*Qt. "My concern would be people deciding to move out because of that [crime]. Fear would cause them to leave, because they'd be concerned about raising a family in a spot they consider to be less safe than before. I've seen it happen. That to me is the most dangerous thing."*

*"How do we maintain a strong community? We want to stay and make sure it's safe, so we don't have to leave."*

### **Maintaining Properties**

Several participants **wondered whether relocated low-income residents could properly maintain and care for their properties.**

*Qt. "I'm concerned that although the people are screened, we may have people who don't know how to take care of a house. My 25-year-old daughter doesn't know what to do to take care of her place. It should not be assumed they know what to do. It's important they have resources to help them."*

*Qt. "The problem with having a house is maintenance, maintenance, maintenance. If I didn't have a spouse, my house would be a wreck. The cost and time of maintaining a property could be overwhelming for people who don't have family, resources, time, etc."*

*"When they come in, how are they helped to keep the property up? Because there is a terrible expense involved."*

## Appropriateness of Government Subsidies

One elderly participant asked whether the government should be assisting people in obtaining housing in the neighborhood.

Qt *"My concern is bringing people into the neighborhood whose only reason for having a house here is welfare--they should earn it on their own. How long are we supposed to wet nurse these people? I'm living as good as I can afford, that's why I moved here. I can't live out on a golf terrace next to those doctors in Edina."*

## Disorientation/Neighborhood Assimilation/Diversity

Many participants were concerned that incoming low-income residents might not be accepted into the community. While there was some opposition to bringing low-income people into the neighborhood, many residents seemed empathetic toward low-income people of color and the difficulties they often face when moving into new, mainly white socioeconomic environments.

*"There are self-esteem issues--you don't know what to do, and all of a sudden you're here. What does that do to your self-esteem?"*

One participant said that locating more low-income people in the neighborhood could create unwelcome socioeconomic diversity.

Qt *"I want to be here in the general group of people earning about I do and I feel comfortable with, not with someone making half of what I make."*

Other participants expressed opposition to what they perceived as exclusionary viewpoints.

*"We're all a part of this melting pot. This might be naive, but it bothers me when I hear that we're gatekeepers [to the community]. We can't say to people, 'You're not good enough to live here.'"*

Concerns about assimilation were also expressed in terms of how the Fulton community itself has changed over the years. The attendees said that what was once an open, close-knit community of neighbors who cared for one another was now less so.

*"When I first moved here in 1965, we knew everybody. We were a real community. Over the years, people lived in their homes until they died, and then new people moved in. I now know very few of my neighbors--we don't know each other."*

*"When I moved in here, neighbors and other people told me where to go, what to do. Neighbors said, 'Come over and see my house, look at my yard.' Even with scattered-site housing, you have to try and give support, give them the tools to adjust."*

The participants discussed the **impact that bringing in a more diverse population would have on the community.**

Qt *"The diversity of people creates problems, because they don't understand each other."*

*"Our whole country is diverse, but we seem to want to divide ourselves up into political or cultural groups."*

Qt *"You can view diversity as an opportunity. My children play with children of other nationalities that they meet in school."*

*"Diversity is a positive thing. We need it."*

*"There's a lot of diversity here already. You can measure diversity a lot of different ways. Economically, this is a very diverse neighborhood. You have everything from million-dollar homes to starter homes. I live just three blocks from Al Checchi."*

*"People fail to see that racially we're very segregated. Fulton is 95 percent white, and very cohesive."*

Qt *"Up to now, the pressure has been put on our schools to achieve desegregation. It hasn't worked. We need to desegregate our communities if we're to achieve a desegregated society."*

Some participants said that assimilation would occur naturally.

*"People adjust to other people's different values. If they don't like someone's values, they'll avoid them. But it's an opportunity to learn from other people."*

*"If people move into the neighborhood, they will start to get together, their kids will be walking to school together, and so on."*

Other participants said that **community resources, such as community schools, need to be drawn together to ensure assimilation.** They said programs need to be developed to help **current residents and newcomers learn to deal with one another.**

*"We need help, they need help--it works both ways."*

## Helping Inner Cities

The participants said it was unclear to them what their responsibility is to help inner-city neighborhoods. How is "responsibility" to be defined, they asked. Is it financial? Is it to volunteer their time? Is it to set a good example?

*"As good citizens, we feel a responsibility to help other people who live in Minneapolis, because we're neighbors to them."*

*"What can we specifically do ourselves to help? That's a hard question. Do we raise our taxes?"*

*Q.t. "Education and helping schools is critical. [Education is an important part of giving an area a sense of community." ]*

## Proposed Action Steps

### Crime

- Encourage current residents to meet the neighborhood's new residents.
- Establish McGruff crime-watch houses.
- Establish neighborhood policing.
- Have block parties.
- Control the density of the low-income population through scattered-site housing.
- Teach current residents how they assist new residents.
- Involve the community in planning before new low-income residents arrive.

### Differing Values

- Provide community-outreach projects, including block parties, community education, neighborhood festivals (like the Fulton Festival), and mentoring programs. The participants stressed that these efforts must be community-based.

*"It has to be a community effort, perhaps done through community schools. It cannot be an imposed program or something dictated by the government."*

### Maintaining Properties

- Encourage residents to help new low-income neighbors with their problems.

- Encourage newcomers to assist existing residents as a way for them to learn about property upkeep and what kinds of issues residents/property owners face.
- Expand existing home-improvement training programs to make them available to new residents.
- Provide low-income families an opportunity to own their properties, or at least give them a sense of ownership. Perhaps a homesteading aspect could be built into Section 8 policies.

### **Helping Inner Cities**

- Volunteer: Help new residents through churches, schools, and programs such as Habitat for Humanity.

## **Woodbury**

**August 29, 1996**

**Washington County Library, Woodbury Branch**

### **Overview**

**W**oodbury is a community in transition that is, depending on your point of view, prospering or suffering from extremely fast growth. Indeed, the community's rapid growth and "newness" were reflected in our group of 28 attendees.

About two-thirds of them had lived in Woodbury for less than five years. One 20-year resident remembered it when it was a truly rural community. Even people who had lived there less than ten years lamented the creeping suburbanization of the community. About half of the Woodbury attendees thought that the quality of life in the community had declined over the last five years. One man put it this way, "If you want to live in the country, it has gotten worse. If you want to live in the city, it has gotten better."

Amenities such as shopping malls and restaurants built to serve the growing population have heightened the community's traffic problems. "The city has more than doubled in population since I moved here in 1991," one participant said. "The quality of life has decreased here in recent years. There's traffic, congestion. "Some said that the quality of life in the metropolitan region as a whole had declined. As one participant put it, the quality of life had "decreased dramatically because of ... crime."

Sixty percent agreed with the statement, "Citizens of the Twin Cities region have a responsibility to provide adequate housing for low-income people." Seventy-five percent agreed with the statement, "The Twin Cities is a house divided." Sixty-six

percent said they would support the locating of more low-income people in Woodbury, or would actively work to make it happen.

Generally, however, the group as a whole was preoccupied with problems resulting from Woodbury's rapid growth. "I turned down the last school referendum because I couldn't afford it," said a woman who had a child in school.

## What is the responsibility of Woodbury to provide affordable low-income housing?

Fifty-two percent of the participants said that Woodbury has a responsibility to provide affordable low-income housing.

Qt *"Disparity exists in the Twin Cities because of the concentration of poverty. I think this is a harm to the entire metro area. I think it is an issue for us. We need to be cooperative for the sake of the entire metro area."*

*"Crime has gotten worse in Minneapolis. Now is the time--collectively, the [metro] community has to work to solve it."*

*"What if you were someone who couldn't find a job? What about people who are willing to work, but can't find it [a job] for whatever reason?"*

*"You always have to have a safety net for the truly needy."*

*"I look at it from the standpoint of the kids. Do you want to create people who will contribute to the community? You've got to spread out the responsibility. Give them the opportunities to get what they need--an education, the right jobs."*

*"It's good that we should do this sort of thing. We all think we have to do something about it, but not in my backyard."*

Some participants questioned the appropriateness of the government providing subsidies to enable low-income families to live in Woodbury.

*"It's the person's responsibility for getting where they want to go. They have to work for it."*

*"You school yourself, discipline yourself so you can afford it."*

*"We all made sacrifices to come to Woodbury. We lived in a mobile home for a few years [and] gradually worked our way up."*

None of the participants, however, stated outright opposition to moving low-income families into Woodbury.

*"What's affordable? People are buying houses here, they must be affordable."*

*"I think the whole issue is a hoax. If you let market forces take over, and it isn't affordable, prices will drop."*

One participant countered that market forces can be relied on to provide solutions.

*"We tamper with market forces all the time. If you listen to the [Woodbury] City Council discussions, it's all about zoning, taxes, improvements. So we tamper with market forces all the time, and usually it's to keep low-income people out. I wonder what it would be like if we relaxed some of those restrictions a little bit, like zoning and so forth."*

Some participants questioned whether affordable low-income housing is really the solution to any of the problems we were attempting to address.

*"The problem is, you're paying for subsidized housing. This doesn't really hit the problem audience. If you could educate children so they could get good jobs, we wouldn't need public housing. I grew up in the bad part of St. Paul. I didn't want to stay there. I worked hard to get out of there. We shouldn't spend money on the back end of the problem."*

One participant had a different take on the issue of diversity, combining it with the issue of neighborhood preservation.

*"We shouldn't automatically see single-race neighborhoods as an evil. We assume 'this area is all black, so we have to do something about it.' Like they said in the tape [A House Divided], many Hmong people like to live in a concentration of their own people. We don't have to break up neighborhoods just because they're all of one race."*

qt *"Affordable housing also relates to the elderly. As we age, our incomes will change. So affordable housing affects all of us."*

## Concerns/Issues

### Property Values/Siting

Many participants said they would be more in favor of scattered-site housing, as opposed to large housing projects.

Qt *"I do think it makes sense that concentrating that poverty in one area may not be in the best interest of those people and the entire community."*

*"I would favor scattered-site housing more than any other."*

*"If you do scattered-site housing, is it done so that no one can see it's there, or is there a subsidized section? We need to avoid having a subsidized section."*

Qt *"There's a stigma to low income that causes a problem of being poor [to feed] on itself. You depend on the system and develop a network around it. If you have people of color in their own areas by choice, that's OK. But because they can't get out, that's when you have more problems, more crime, more concentrations of things that bring neighborhoods down."*

One participant said that a multiple-unit project was preferable to scattered-site housing.

*"Scattered-site housing doesn't solve any problems. You have a few isolated success stories, you can put it on video and make everybody feel good. Multiple units is a solution provided it's managed better."*

Qt *"I would be concerned about moving concentrations of poverty, that it would pull the whole community down."*

## **Responsibility**

*"There has to be responsibility within the neighborhood."*

## **Resources/Infrastructure**

Several participants said they were concerned about the strain that could be placed on community infrastructure, particularly on the schools.

Qt *"Our schools are already too crowded. No teachers, no room. We can't afford to pay more taxes. It's expensive enough already to live here."*

Qt *"Is the city of Minneapolis going to provide us money for education? If the people come here, the money should come with them."*

Some participants were worried about other public services as well.

*"How much will the taxpayers have to provide? Woodbury's grown so fast, the City Council has all it can do to pay for police and fire."*

## **Crime/Community Values**

Some participants cited the experience of nearby communities that experienced increased crime with the introduction of low-income housing.

*"There was a group of apartments in Cottage Grove that very quickly became known as Little Chicago. If you read the county reports, half of the police calls were to this one group of apartments."*

*"There was another complex on McKnight [Road]. The Montessori school next to it had to be closed because of crime. It wasn't the residents--it was all their friends and relatives. It [the complex] was unmanaged--it became a ghetto."*

*"We have a big community of [low-income] townhouses here. We haven't had any problems."*

One participant objected to the screening of potential low-income residents and expressed concern about the politics of exclusion.

*"I am appalled by this idea. I really find it objectionable to think that we can tell people. 'You can't live here.'"*

But several other participants objected to that view.

*"We all need to be screened, and we're screened all the time. Anytime you apply for a mortgage or to rent a property, they check your credit record, references."*

By a wide margin (75 percent in favor, 25 percent opposed), the participants voted in favor of screening.

Qt *"If we are subsidizing the housing, then we need some accountability to that subsidy."*

Several participants were concerned about how well the transplanted low-income families would fit into the Woodbury community.

Qt *"It would almost be a culture shock for people to move from a poor area. They can't be happy here--all they have is the house. They would feel out of place."*

Qt *"It would be an artificial situation for them to come to Woodbury. We need to have a way for the community to maintain its health."*

*"You have to be able to provide better-paying jobs. They'll want to live up to the standards of the community. The kids will want to look the same way as all the other kids."*

*"With subsidized housing, they don't bond with the community, although some will. They are transient."*

## **Transportation**

The participants questioned the adequacy of Woodbury's public transportation, saying that an effective system is essential to the success of any plans for scattered-site housing.

QT *"Scattered is the best way to do it. But then more issues become involved. They don't have transportation. Woodbury has no public transportation to speak of."*

*"If people have jobs at McDonald's, how can they get there if they only make \$7,500 a year and live in scattered-site housing?"*

*"Say someone lived at the Rottlund townhomes and had to get to Rivertown Trading [the Woodbury distribution center] to work. It would be hard to get there. When they built Tamarack Center, I thought, 'Who's going to work there?' We don't have that many high schoolers here. It would make perfect sense to bring workers in. That way, someone who would otherwise work at a McDonald's in downtown Minneapolis might rather have that."*

*"You can't live in Woodbury without a car, practically speaking."*

*"Maybe scattered-site housing doesn't work. Maybe there's no transportation solution for people living in scattered-site housing."*

*"Maybe the MTC could provide a couple of extra runs."*

*"It's a catch-22. You can't get people to live here without transportation, and you can't get transportation without [enough] people living here. Our current population is not low-income or elderly, so we don't use public transportation. Heck, you can't even get kids to ride the bus to school. There's a stigma attached to that."*

*"Maybe we could use community block grants to subsidize transportation."*

*"Most of Woodbury is young families with two incomes. People moved here because they didn't want to live next to office towers, so they all have cars."*

Possible alternative forms of public transportation were discussed:

*"I lived in Maplewood, and we had a neighborhood combination bus/taxi service. You call them and they pick you up at your door. Kids could use it to get from school to home to work. It was a fifteen- to 20-passenger bus and cost a dollar a ride."*

*"Hutchinson also has a shuttle. Many children are transported that way to after-school activities. It is subsidized, and it works slick as a whistle."*

*"I think you should make businesses pay for transporting workers. When I worked at 3M, the company provided a shuttle for us. It cost us \$30 a month. It was not subsidized, it was self-supporting. The company provided the van. The driver was not paid, but got his \$30 fee waived."*

Zoning came up again during the discussion of transportation.

*"We've zoned ourselves right into this problem. You place houses here, offices here, shopping here. We've been making people live here and work there. Towns used to have natural zoning."*

*"It's just shortsighted for transportation not to be part of city planning. When they site shopping centers, etc., they do demographic surveys to decide where to put them. They should do the same and take into account transportation needs when planning housing."*

## Helping Inner Cities

Qt *"Helping people within their communities, strengthening what they believe in, is better."*

*"They need to decide for themselves what they need. We should not control it."*

*"We are [currently] providing them housing. The question is whether it should be in the inner city or in Woodbury."*

Qt *"The solution is to invest where the people already are."*

*"Programs like Habitat for Humanity build a sense of community, by requiring that recipients of homes help others build their home."*

Qt *"The people who are going to get in [to Woodbury] are the upper-crust of the inner city. When you take these people out, what do you leave behind? The inner city gets*

*worse than before. You need to reinvest in the inner city and rebuild it, building on the resources there."*

*We aren't investing enough in our cities. We let them die out. We say, 'OK, we'll just move you out.' There are a lot of positive things, positive people in the [inner] city."*

*"We have a lot of people here, a lot of intelligence. We could go in there, contribute ideas, help raise money, show people what they can do."*

*"We have jobs here—that's our resource that we can contribute. These people love to work, they work hard. I see them carpooling, six to eight in a car, to their jobs down here."*

## **Proposed Action Steps**

### **Transportation**

- Door-to-door shuttle services.
- Transportation needs to be a part of city planning.

### **Crime/Community Values**

- **Screening**  
Check criminal records, rental history, personal references.  
Helps in building a successful community.  
The discussion group was unanimous that there should be screening.
- Require a maintenance component to the housing.
- Ensure community involvement in setting up the program.
- Follow-up program:  
*"They should talk with tenants: How are they connecting with the community? Are their needs being met? Are social services being provided?"*
- Encourage or require community involvement among new low-income residents.  
*"There should be some accountability to be involved in the community."*
  
- **Infrastructure**
- Extra funding needs to be provided to help meet the community's infrastructure needs.
- Participate in programs, such as Habitat for Humanity, that assist low-income families in the neighborhoods where they live.

# Maple Grove

## October 30, 1996

### Maple Grove Library

## Overview

Maple Grove is somewhat unique in the metro area in that low-income housing has already become a major issue. In 1995, there was extensive debate in Maple Grove over a proposal to locate low-income housing in the community. The Maple Grove forum began with people saying that during that debate they were treated poorly and misrepresented by the press on the issue of low-income housing. "Maple Grove is grossly misrepresented by the press," said one man who expressed what many of the others seemed to be feeling. Others added:

*"Maple Grove has been severely misrepresented. It's put a bad cloud over our head. We've seen the issue come up in other suburbs, and nobody's been portrayed as badly as we have."*

*"Absolutely. We got a bad rap. What people heard in the paper isn't true. If you look at real estate transactions in the paper, there are a lot of low-income homes, a lot more than high-priced ones."*

Alas, of the five forums, this group was the most outwardly opposed to low-income housing. When asked whether they felt they had a responsibility to provide low-income housing, the group split down the middle, half saying yes and half saying no. But during the open discussion, it was apparent that Maple Grove's resistance to low-income housing was very real, and not something invented by the press. In the other forums, there were always a few who argued in favor of providing housing for the poor, and presented reasons why it should be done. In Maple Grove, those voices never really were heard, at least not as they had been at the other forums. Sixty-three percent of the Maple Grove attendees voted that it was not their responsibility to help the inner cities, and they expressed that vote with blunt phrases. "It is not my responsibility to get them out of poverty," one said.

If they were open to any low-income housing, it would be for working people who bought homes in scattered sites throughout the community. Rental units were also frowned upon. Ownership, they said, gave people a stake in the community, and they would be more responsible.

Indeed, responsibility (and screening) was a theme that came up again and again in all of the forums. It was expressed in many ways. "We want responsible families rather than singles," said one, for example. "If they want to live in this community in subsidized housing, they have to live up to this communities standards," said another.

By and large, the forum participants were happy with life in Maple Grove. More than 85 percent said the quality of life had improved or stayed the same over the last few years. Only 13 percent said it had declined and that, they said, was mainly because of traffic congestion. Their overall assessment of the quality of life in the Twin Cities metro area was that it has improved in the suburbs and declined in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Several participants were concerned about what they saw as a deteriorating situation in Minneapolis.

Qt *"I think the quality of life has decreased in Minneapolis and increased in the suburbs. The reasons? Crime rate, education."*

*"Overall, everything has kind of decreased. Crime has gone sky high. Drugs, teenagers, all sort of problems."*

Qt *"We're starting to follow the eastern cities 'run-down pattern'-- it rots at the core. That's what's happening in Minneapolis."*

*"We've seen a slow eroding over the last ten years. There are some places I won't drive after a certain time of day."*

Qt If there was a key phrase at this forum, it was, "We worked hard for what we have. Let them work hard too." We heard that sentiment from at least one person in each forum, of course, but in Maple Grove it seemed to be by far the overriding sentiment. And it reinforced how different the five communities are from one another. The day before the Maple Grove forum we were in Woodbury, and, although the residents there were not exactly opening their arms to house the poor, there was not as much outright resistance to the idea. Woodbury is in such tremendous flux that the community's transition from exurbia to suburbia seems to be taking its toll on the community financially and psychologically. For them, low-income housing was just one more problem added to an already plate full. The word that might best sum up the emotional sense of the Woodbury meeting is befuddlement. In Maple Grove, however, the key word would have to be resistance.

An interesting exchange occurred when a real estate agent stood up to say how well Maple Grove is doing. He touted its growth and said it was especially proud of its new downtown. At that point, a long-time resident asked, "Just where is Maple Grove's downtown?"

"Right here," was the agent's answer. "You are in it." "Oh," was the woman's reply. And no one could fault her for her misunderstanding: Few would see this series of small strip malls located near a busy intersection just off the interstate as adding up to a downtown--at least not in the traditional sense. The strip malls all house chain stores and

fast-food restaurants and are surrounded by parking lots. Little or no thought, it seems, was given to pedestrian scale.

## Does Maple Grove have a responsibility to provide affordable low-income housing?

Fifty-nine percent of the participants said they would oppose or actively work against the locating of more low-income housing in their community. One-third of the total said they would actively work against it.

Sixty-seven percent said their community did not have a responsibility to help rebuild inner-city communities.

Some participants said that low-income housing would not solve core problems.

*Qt "Subsidized housing is a Band-Aid. You need a comprehensive program to get them better education, better jobs."*

*"Where's the onus on the inner cities? Didn't they create the problem? They had opportunities to deal with the problem in its infancy. They created clusters--high-density opportunities for boiling pots for crime. Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park are in the process of taking down some of these same structures, modeled and developed after the inner city."*

*Qt "Nobody's against low-income housing. It's a question of how much, when, and how do you support and finance it."*

*"Change is going to be hard. We have to set the tone and move on it."*

*"We're a diverse society trying to integrate people from different backgrounds and economic situations."*

*Qt "Housing isn't the issue. It's a lack of jobs and proper education so they can get better-paying jobs."*

*Qt "Certain types of people, not by race, ruined their opportunities. We shouldn't give them opportunities to interface with us until they earn it."*

*"We are expected to accept these people by law, rather than them proving themselves."*

*Qt "It's individual responsibility. You better take care of yourself."*

Qt. *"It's up to personal responsibility. It's the life I chose. I worked hard for it."*

Qt. *"They said, 'I could be here, so I have a right to everything you have.' They think the world owes them a living."*

*"I don't know why it's becoming a racial issue. For every black person that's poor, there's three or four poor white folks. Why is it every time this issue's presented, it's poor black folks being kept in by white folks. The film showed only poor black people moving out."*

*"We all worked hard to get here. You can put them in any kind of home you want. It's what's inside the house that counts."*

Some participants were unclear about terms.

*"What's 'affordable'? How you define 'low income'?"*

Some said they had a responsibility to deal with the issue because of their community's proximity to Minneapolis.

Qt *"If we say, 'It's your problem, you fix it,' we're going to lose the city. We won't be able to use it, because we won't feel safe there."*

Qt *"Many of us live here and work in Minneapolis. We have an obligation to keep the city from going bankrupt."*

Only 20 percent of the participants said that they work in the city of Maple Grove.

*"[In order to help,] the community has to be such that those jobs are available. We have a nice community but the majority of us work outside it. There aren't enough jobs in our community for our teens. We can't even take care of our own needs."*

One participant questioned the level of involvement of inner-city residents in putting these programs together.

Qt *"[I'm angry when things like this are government-imposed.] Do they go to the low-income neighborhoods and ask them for ideas, or is it imposed on them? Are they involved in the planning of these programs?"*

## Concerns

### Crime

Several participants were concerned about the possibility of increased crime if low-income residents moved to the area.

Qt *"If you have a low-income area in Minneapolis and you move them into Maple Grove, what's the difference? You still have the low income, the poverty, the concentration."*

*"To think moving them here is going to take care of it is crazy."*

*"You create transience in an area where you're trying to create stability. People come, cause trouble, leave."*

*"They don't even have the gumption to discipline their kids."*

*"Crime is bred by disrespect for authority and is not necessarily poverty-based."*

Qt *"Poor people may be more likely to commit crimes. They see affluent people who have more and want it too."*

Qt *"They may often be single parents, with less structure, less discipline, and no role models."*

*"We don't trust the ability of the police to control it. Not that they're not good, but they don't have capability."*

### Schools/Infrastructure

Several residents doubted that the Maple Grove school system could cope with an increase in the number of low-income residents.

SCHOOLS

Qt *"There's a definite economic impact on the school system. If you have a large group of low-income people move in, it impacts on services. We're just creating a problem for ourselves and the people moving in."*

Qt *"You flood in more children with special needs. My child is smart, so I get punished. That's reverse discrimination."*

Qt *"If you add children who aren't doing well, how can they not be another burden on the system."*

"We're stressing an already stressed system"

"There's no involvement in student/teacher conferences. They have a different level of responsibility to the community. There's no parent involvement, no responsibility."

Qt "If you're going to move low-income families [into the area], what do we get? What do our kids get in return?"

Qt "We work very hard for what we have. We checked the schools beforehand. This is my reward? We earned this."

Other infrastructure needs were discussed, as well.

"We have a need for more affordable daycare."

"We need more jobs [and] better transportation in the suburbs if we're going to offer better opportunities to people coming to this community."

Qt "I'm concerned about their isolation in the community. Providing transportation and other infrastructure, who will this fall on?"

## Siting

The participants discussed whether scattered-site housing would be preferable to housing projects.

"Large housing projects have high density. Scattered-site housing is not as threatening."

"We have a responsibility to take on more low-income people in this community, but maybe not in a large project."

Qt "Large projects bring gangs and could be a magnet for drugs. If we scattered them, it would be better. It would lessen peer pressure, and maybe provide more opportunities for mentoring."

One participant suggested that scattered-site housing could help prevent problems with assimilation.

Qt "Scattered site housing does seem to be a lot better solution. We can adopt a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy. No one in the neighborhood has to know [they are low-

income]. We can make judgments on those people not on the basis of whether they qualify. This gives them a better chance to assimilate into the community."

## Community Values

Some of the participants said that locating low-income families in Maple Grove could erode community values.

*"You can't grow a community from the outside. You have to build it from the inside. You share values and work together."*

Qt *"We share certain values, we have behaviors that are acceptable. What we're worried about is people moving in with values that aren't close to mine."*

*"Half the time they're not working--they have a whole different set of values."*

*"Their lifestyles are different."*

*"Every family who lives near [a low-income family], we all have to nurture them. Do we have time?"*

Qt *"Are we just warehousing people or trying to integrate them into the community?"*

Qt *"With any type of low-income housing, it's the values that aren't there. You can't transplant people here and expect it to work. You can't solve the problem by moving people out here."*

## Responsibility/Property Values

The participants discussed the need to establish a sense of responsibility among low-income housing residents.

*"You need responsibility, standards."*

Qt *"They have no financial responsibility to the community."*

The participants also discussed the need for and the limitations of screening potential residents.

*"How do you measure attitude? 'Are you going to maintain your house, be a productive resident of the community?'"*

*"Screening is important. It has to be stringent, and meet some sort of community standards."*

*"You can have screening, but what about their friends, relatives?"*

Ownership was seen as a way to produce more responsible behavior among new residents.

*"There's a lot more at stake for someone purchasing property than renting. I'd be all for any kind of purchase program."*

*"People need a stake in property. Some kind of ownership interest would lead to more responsible behavior."*

*"Ownership is a real key. People take more pride in things they own."*

### **Helping Inner Cities**

QT *"It's not my responsibility to get them out of poverty. It would be better to help them where they're at."*

QT *"It's our responsibility. You can't have it both ways. If we're not going to provide affordable housing, we should provide some help so they can shore up their neighborhoods where they're at."*

## **Proposed Action Steps**

### **Crime**

- Screening

### **Schools/Infrastructure**

- Move new residents into the area slowly to give the community time to provide the services needed.
- Make sure there are extracurricular activities for children.

## Property Value/Responsibility to the Community

- Encourage ownership of property.
- Encourage scattered-site housing.
- Provide education for new residents.
- Give businesses incentives to provide jobs for people who live in low-income housing.

## Conclusions

Where to locate, and who should pay for, low-income housing are issues that stir up strong emotions on all sides of the debate. The question of whether affluent communities have a responsibility to share in the cost of providing affordable low-income housing draws support from some out of a sense of either moral obligation or self-preservation, the latter because the problems of the inner city are seen as impacting the suburbs, as well. The question also stirs up strong feelings among residents who believe that residence in the suburbs is something to be earned through merit and hard work, and should not be granted through government intervention to low-income families.

Forum participants, even those who opposed affordable low-income housing, were willing to work to develop solutions.

**Despite the many views expressed, several themes emerged consistently and clearly:**

- Scattered-site low-income housing is preferred to large housing projects.
- Crime is a major worry.
- The host communities need to be involved in the planning of any low-income housing programs.
- Adequate public transportation needs to be available if low-income housing is to succeed.
- Public housing must be looked at in conjunction with other factors, such as siting, infrastructure, and transportation, and in the context of broader issues, such as urban and suburban city planning, education, and jobs.
- There is a worry among some suburban residents that their neighbors' concerns about crime, assimilation, property values, community values, and infrastructure may be masking objections to people of color moving into their neighborhoods.
- Residents of the Twin Cities' affluent neighborhoods can quickly site examples of low-income housing projects that don't work. Not surprisingly, because low-income housing that does work is hard to distinguish from the surrounding community, those projects often go unnoticed. Low-income housing advocates would do well to take steps to make the public more aware of the success stories.