Building support for affordable housing and homelessness services

APPROACHES TO OPPOSITION IN SUBURBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Introduction

NIMBY (Not-In-My-Backyard) has been defined as "the protectionist attitudes of and the exclusionary/oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighborhood" (Dear, 1992). The term is commonly used to describe community groups' actions to prevent the development of low-income housing and homelessness services in their neighborhood. While NIMBY opposition can take diverse forms, it is often rooted in fears about the presumed negative characteristics of future residents and the potential impact of sites on property values, crime, safety, and the character of the neighborhood (Belden, Shashaty, & Zipperer, 2004; Dear, 1992; Field, 1997; Ruming, 2014; Tighe, 2010).

NIMBYism poses an immense barrier to establishing affordable housing, as successful oppositional tactics can cause costly delays and force developers to make concessions that undermine the project, including siting developments in less desirable locations and changing the residential composition of projects (Galster, Tatian, Santiago, Pettit, & Smith, 2003, Tighe, 2010). Especially in cases where developments require re-zoning or other municipal approvals, NIMBY opposition can create insurmountable barriers to development (Dear, 1991; Koebel, Lang, & Danielsen, 2004).

Suburban and rural communities have been identified as particularly challenging contexts to establish affordable housing and homelessness services (Kirp, Dwyer, & Rosenthal, 1995). Despite the known challenges to developing affordable housing in rural and suburban communities, limited research has examined NIMBY opposition in these contexts (Housing Assistance Council, 1994; Steffel JE, 1996). The distinct social, political, economic and spatial features of suburban and rural communities merit some consideration, as they undoubtedly have profound implications on residents' willingness to support new developments. Understanding contextual drivers of NIMBY opposition can provide insight into how opposition unfolds, and how support can be built for projects in these contexts.

The purpose of this report is to assist municipal officials and housing operators in gaining community acceptance for non-market affordable housing and homelessness services. Specifically, this project aims to:
1. Identify factors that drive NIMBY opposition to non-market affordable housing and homelessness services in suburban and rural communities;
2. Define tools, approaches and strategies to counter local opposition and build support for non-market affordable housing and homelessness services.

Methods

For the purposes of this study, we adopted a broad definition of rural and suburban communities as those which do not form the urban core of census metropolitan areas (CMAs). The focus of our report is on NIMBY opposition towards *homelessness services* (such as shelters and drop-in centers) and *non-market affordable housing*, which is inclusive of subsidized housing for low-income tenants, supportive housing and transitional housing. We hereafter refer to these developments as 'affordable housing'.

We conducted a literature review of peer-reviewed and grey literature on NIMBY opposition toward affordable housing and homelessness services. Searches were executed through Web of Science, EBSCO and Google Scholar using search strings containing topic terms (affordable, supportive, transitional or temporary housing; homeless shelter, emergency shelter, homelessness; NIMBY or local opposition) and location terms (suburb*; rural; municipal). Additional sources were retrieved by reviewing reference lists of sources. We considered all English articles published after 1980. We did not restrict our searches by geography, although most sources come from the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Findings from the literature review were synthesized to highlight (1) drivers of local opposition and (2) strategies to address local opposition and build support for affordable housing and homelessness services.

Informed by the literature review, we developed two semi-structured interview guides for key informants who have been involved with the planning and operation of affordable housing developments or homelessness services. The first interview guide is for non-profit housing operators and explores their role in building local support for developments, including key challenges and opportunities to addressing local opposition. The second guide is for municipal staff in planning and social development roles, and aims to understand strategies leveraged to address NIMBYism.

Convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit key informants, as interview subjects were recruited through the professional networks of our partner agency and review of municipal staff websites and housing reports. Communities were selected based on their geographic location in British Columbia and our prior knowledge of NIMBY related issues in the communities. We invited representatives from 7 housing operator agencies and 4 municipal staff working in various BC rural and suburban municipalities.

In total, four interviews were conducted with representatives of non-profit housing operator agencies (n=1) and municipal officials (n=3) working in four different suburban and rural BC communities. Interviews conducted in-person and over the phone were audio-recorded with the consent of participants and later transcribed for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify key ideas and patterns about experiences of local opposition and strategies to build support. This project received ethical approval from the University of British Columbia Research Ethics Board.

Factors shaping NIMBYism

Why do NIMBY concerns arise in some communities and not others? What roles do broader systems and processes play in escalating these conflicts?
A richer understanding of these questions will help planners, housing operators and other affordable housing advocates better tailor their strategies to local context. Our review of the literature and interviews with key informants highlighted a range of social, political, spatial and economic factors that drive and escalate local opposition to affordable housing policy in suburban and rural communities.
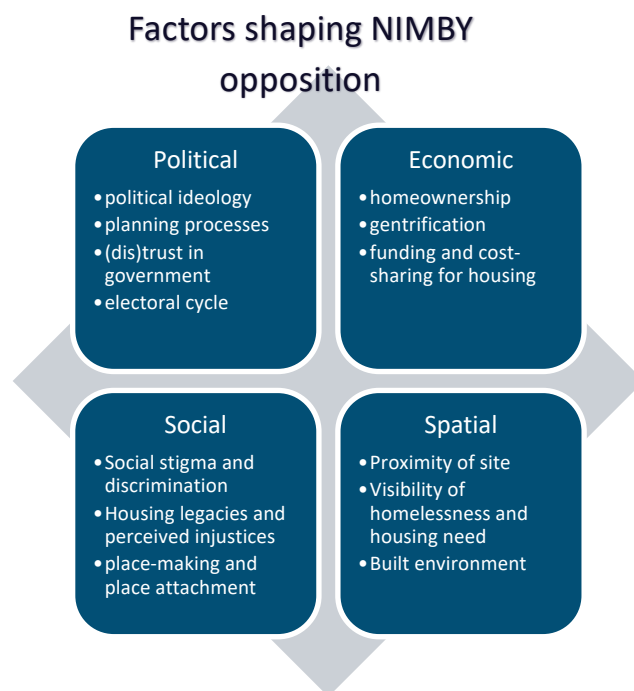
Political context

Political climate

Political climate, including the guiding ideologies of local government and residents, is a contextual factor that influences perceptions of proposed developments amongst local government actors and the public (Tighe, 2010). Developers and planners have identified suburbs as particularly challenging political environments to establish affordable housing and homelessness services (Scally & Tighe, 2015). In their research on voting practices in Toronto, Walks and colleagues find that individuals living in suburban neighborhoods were more likely to vote for candidates with ideologies emphasizing property rights, personal responsibility, individualism, and limited role of the welfare state (Walks, 2004). Local politicians elected on these platforms may be more sympathetic to concerns around property values and protection of private space, and less willing to support affordable housing projects thought to stand in tension with these values.

Planning processes

The way in which public consultation around affordable housing is structured determines what voices and concerns are heard. Local governments frequently gather public input through public hearings and open houses, methods that tend to gather opinions from self-selected individuals who have strong opinions on the project (Carr & Halvorsen, 2001). Particularly in rural and suburban communities, where public transit may be poor or non-existent, those who would most benefit from homelessness services and affordable housing may

Factors shaping NIMBY opposition

Political
- political ideology
- planning processes
- (dis)trust in government
- electoral cycle

Economic
- homeownership
- gentrification
- funding and cost-sharing for housing

Social
- Social stigma and discrimination
- Housing legacies and perceived injustices
- place-making and place attachment

Spatial
- Proximity of site
- Visibility of homelessness and housing need
- Built environment

be systematically excluded from planning process that rely on these formats (Lowry, 1997). Additional outreach approaches are often required to broaden public consultation to include those who would benefit most from the project.

(Dis)trust in government

While not unique to suburban and rural communities, sense of trust in local government can shape perceptions of developments (Hunter & Leyden, 1995; Rahn & Rudolph, 2001). Affordable housing developments and homelessness services may become lightning rods for opposition if trust in local government has been eroded. Distrust in local government was highlighted by one municipal social development coordinator as a barrier to doing outreach work within her community:

> When I came to my role there was a lot of cynicism directed towards municipalities [...] I learned very quickly that there was a lot of distrust towards the municipality, and up until my role, there has never been a person that was trying to do outreach work with the community. People were still very suspicious at first, like "who is this person working for the municipality?" So I always say when I talk to a new group: "I work for the municipality! But don't hold that against me!" You can be seen as this kind of government figure and that can work against you. (*Social Development Coordinator 3*)

Electoral Cycle

Local government support for affordable housing may ebb and flow depending on the electoral cycle. There is some evidence to suggest that local governments are more sensitive to public opinion during periods where they face re-election (Wynne-Edwards, 2003). Statistical research from Germany, for example, finds a decrease in municipal construction approvals for residential housing during election years (Thorsten, 2017). While it is true that upcoming elections heighten sensitivity to NIMBY concerns, elections may also present an opportunity for developers seeking necessary approvals for their site; it is possible that mayors and councilors elected on platforms addressing housing affordability and homelessness can be better motivated to support affordable housing developments and homelessness services when they face the extra scrutiny that comes with elections.

Economic Context

Homeownership

NIMBY opposition frequently emerges in affluent communities with a greater proportion of homeowners relative to renters, which is common in suburbs and some rural communities (Davison, Legacy, Liu, & Darcy, 2016; Dear, 1991; Galster et al., 2003; Pendall, 1999). Previous research finds that attitudes of homeowners differ from those of renters with respect to policies that are perceived to have a relationship with property values (Fischel, 2001). In analyzing data from the 1978-79 Urban Concerns Survey, McGregor and Spicer find that homeowners in Canada were less likely than renters to support

new social housing (McGregor & Spicer, 2014). Homeowners are also more likely to vote than renters or people experiencing homelessness, which can give more weight to their voice amongst local politicians (McGregor & Spicer, 2014). As evidence of this dynamic, research from Germany suggests that the effect of election year on housing approval depended on the share of homeowners in a community, with the strongest relationship in municipalities above the 90th percentile in proportion of homeowners relative to renters (Thorsten, 2017).

Gentrification

A small body of literature supports the theory that gentrification—the movement of more affluent residents into a lower-income neighborhood—may escalate NIMBY attitudes. An influx of wealthier residents into rural and suburban areas can bring a shift in preferences for land use; affluent newcomers may oppose developments which are seen to be in tension with their vision of the neighborhood (DeVerteuil, 2013). A social development coordinator observed this dynamic occurring in her community, which she linked to increasing complaints around visible homelessness and shelters:

> And then the big change is [...] we have a huge amount of people move into [our city], at least 1200 in the last 2 years part coming in with new amounts of wealth from selling properties in and around the Lower Mainland and buying houses for a much cheaper amount and then expecting the same level of community resources and schools that little [city] doesn't have compared to the big city. And that's not helping our situation when it comes to kind of compassion for those that are struggling in affordable housing. (*Social Development Coordinator 3*)

At the same time, gentrification can create new vulnerabilities to homelessness and core housing need for those who cannot afford rising rents. As another social development coordinator observes:

> [...] we have a lot of influx of people coming out from the West. From Vancouver to this way, because it is cheaper. Those people are buying the houses that other people used to buy. So the people that used to live in townhouses are getting pushed out by people that have a little bit more money[...] So you have these people that are living in lower end apartments that are paying $650, but the owner could get $900 from a working person [...]so now there isn't anything left for these people. (*Social Development Coordinator 1*)

In rural areas, growth in second homeownership may produce new pressures against affordable housing. Previous qualitative research observes that locals and second homeowners can have different interests in development, with some affluent second homeowners wanting to protect rural areas from modern activities and land uses emblematic of the urban spaces, such as high density developments and townhouses (Farstad & Rye, 2013; Jackson, 1986).

Funding and cost-sharing for housing

The cutting and devolution of housing responsibility from Federal to Provincial governments has meant that municipalities are accruing greater costs associated with homelessness and housing need. The pressures that come from this devolution were articulated by two social development coordinators interviews for this study:

A lot of people think [homelessness] is the municipality responsibility. They don't understand that the municipalities' responsibilities are road, fires, sewers, those things, but not people that are using substances or have mental health issues or that are living in the streets causing a little bit of chaos for the people around them. That is not entirely municipalities' responsibility; housing was the responsibility of the Federal Government and Provincial Government is picking up a little bit. That is where all our tax dollars go to and we only keep a small portion that is for policing and fire and those sort of things. (*Social Development Coordinator 1*)

Municipalities are constantly feeling under more and more pressure, with downloading from provincial government not only for housing but dealing with poverty reduction, and all this new language and initiatives are being put on them, and they are often throwing up their hands and saying "We do businesses in our area, we will do sewers and streets. We don't have expertise in these other things." So there is just a big level of frustration within municipalities, and they feel they are handed down responsibilities without any resources that actually help. *(Social Development Coordinator 3)*

This cost-shifting may amplify local opposition to housing developments if local governments and residents feel they are taking on an unfair burden or lack the resources to provide services. Particularly in rural and suburban areas with small tax-bases and limited funding opportunities, political arenas characterized by austerity may become hotbeds for opposition.

Social context

Social stigma and discrimination

It has been widely observed that some housing projects and policies will be subject to greater opposition due to stereotypical and stigmatizing attitudes toward the beneficiaries. Various studies from North America find that low-income tenants and those who are living with mental health and substance use issues are commonly conceptualized as undesirable and undeserving recipients of social welfare, making housing programs that serve these populations a target for NIMBYism (Lake, 1993; Palmer, Ziersch, Arthurson, & Baum, 2004; Takahashi, 1997; Tighe, 2010; Wilton, 2002).

Housing projects perceived to benefit racial minorities may be particularly vulnerable to NIMBY opposition, and there is considerable evidence that concerns regarding property values and crime are

often proxies for racial prejudice (Kirp et al., 1995; Pendall, 1999; J. Tighe, 2012; Walks, 2004; Wilton, 2002). Fiske and colleagues document this dynamic in their examination of NIMBYism directed at First Nations women who wished to locate a transitional home in a lower-income neighborhood of a small Canadian prairies city (Fiske, Belanger, & Gregory, 2010). The authors note that First Nations women were constructed in anti-development arguments as perceived threats against community stability and citizen economic well-being. These findings suggest that developments that house Indigenous tenants may be subject to extra scrutiny and opposition; this opposition may not be explicitly articulated as racially-motivated and rather couched in coded-language about public safety.

Housing legacies and perceived 'injustices'

Housing legacies within communities are also linked to local opposition to new housing developments (Scally, 2012). While NIMBYism is traditionally understood as relatively affluent communities rejecting a type of low-income development that did not previously exist in the community, opposition may also arise in communities that perceive they have assumed an 'unfair' burden of services that are thought to be undesirable (Davison, 2016). A social development coordinator made this distinction when describing opposition from residents in the downtown core of a primarily rural municipality:

> They [opponents of homelessness services] do prefer to have [the homeless] housed, but they don't want to have them housed right there. I don't call that nimbyism, and here's why I don't call that nimbyism: because [...]these people already have so much in their backyard; they are saying we can't take anymore. (Social Development Coordinator 1)

In this respect, perceptions of injustice in facility siting can become powerful motivators for collective action against affordable housing developments.

Place-making and place attachment

A newer branch of NIMBY scholarship examines the role of place-making and place-attachment in local opposition to developments (Devine-Wright, 2009; Dovey, Woodcock, & Wood, 2009). Devine-Wright proposes an alternative understanding of local opposition as a form of place-protective action, which arises when new developments disrupt pre-existing emotional attachments and threaten place-related identity processes (Devine-Wright, 2009). This view aligns with research that find developments are most likely to be opposed when the social and physical form of the project diverges from norms (Takahashi & Dear, 1997). Place-attachments can have discriminatory consequences when they are constructed around social class, such as when residents seek to preserve sense of place by excluding others on the basis of their class, housing status, mental health, substance use or ethnicity.

Spatial Context

Proximity of site

A large body of literature considers how the proximity of a site to other homeowners and businesses is an indicator for future opposition. Dear identifies geographical proximity as the single universal factor in all NIMBY conflicts, noting that the closer residents are to an unwanted facility, the more likely they are to oppose it (Dear, 1992). Various studies of public opposition find that the majority of opponents to social housing are homeowners and business owners residing in close proximity to the proposed facility (Fischel, 2001; Iglesias, 2002; Schively, 2007). In rural and suburban contexts, the physical dispersion of potential opponents may in some cases keep conflicts around affordable housing from escalating, as proximity may pose less of a concern. When developments are located in the downtown core of otherwise rural and suburban communities, opposition may be more likely from business owners.

Visibility of homelessness and housing need

People experiencing homelessness in rural and suburban contexts are more likely to be "hidden", seeking shelter in the form of couch-surfing, camping in wooded areas or living in one's car. The extent of housing need within these communities may therefore be "out of site and out of mind" to council members and the broader public (Waegemakers & Turner). As we will address in the next section of this report, efforts to raise awareness about homelessness and housing need may be required to establish affordable housing as priority for local government and the community.

Built Environment

There is some limited research that considers how the built environment of suburban communities in particular may set the stage for opposition to new land uses that are not seen to "fit" with the character of the community (Williamson, 2008). Walks (2004) finds in their Toronto based study that participants who lived in suburbs valued the privacy that comes from living in a low-density neighborhood (Walks, 2004). Community opposition to densification has indeed been a pivotal point of dispute in suburban land-use conflicts around affordable housing (Cook, Taylor, Hurley, & Colic-Peisker, 2012; Davison, 2011; Dovey *et al.*, 2009).

Strategies to build local support

Community-based strategies

NIMBYism or community opposition can be one of the main reasons for failure in developing non-market affordable housing and homelessness services. As such, developers, housing operators, governments (local, provincial or federal), and other advocates need to engage communities directly to ensure projects are built and successfully operated. Based on our literature review and interviews with housing operators and local government officials, these are some of the community-based strategies that have worked to build support for affordable housing and homelessness services.

Informal approaches

Both the literature (CHS, 2006; BC Housing, 2011) and key informants emphasized the importance of informal approaches to community engagement. It is never too early to approach some members of the community, even when there is no concrete proposal in development. These informal approaches should be conducted mainly by municipal staff and target faith-based groups, local business associations, school boards, residents and other civil society organizations and leaders. This is key, since these proactive approaches to hearing community concerns and sharing knowledge on the challenges of homelessness and affordable housing will help build long term and trusting relationships between the community, developers and local government. Additionally, it will lay the ground for comprehension of community needs for future developments.

A housing operator working in a rural community emphasized the value of engaging potential supporters prior to seeking funding or making any public announcements:

> We knew that there would be, could be, some pushback on this. So we just very carefully went about our business, and at the time that it was made public, pretty much everyone was on board: local governments, local organizations, everybody thought it was a good idea. We talked to people, you know, privately and I guess quietly if I can say that. (Housing Operator 1)

At early stages, it is important to engage potential supporters, but it is also prudent to privately and methodically engage community leaders and local organizations who may raise concerns about the project, since rumors and misinformation can jeopardize a project. By the time the public announcement is done, every (or nearly every) key actor should be on board.

Informal approaches include invitations to meet in-person with residents, community leaders and business owners. Communicating informally with business owners, and their local organizations should be carefully carried out by anticipating probable concerns, being familiar with data on the validity (or

not) of concerns, and expressing commitment to solve and mitigate any externalities raised by the development. Special attention must be given to local business owners, not only because they have invested interest, but because they can organize effective opposition.

Partnership building

We found examples in the literature and our interviews of creative ways to build partnership within communities. Some successful cases include creating council committees with credible members of community, such as the RCMP, first-responders, NGOs, developers and other local organizations. These committees can help myth-bust common misconceptions, as well as give developers the opportunity to respond to valid concerns through design and operation changes.

An innovative approach implemented recently in the District of Mission is the 'stone soup' initiative, which aims to shift public perceptions of homelessness by inviting members of the community to make a meal together and share stories.[1] The sessions bring together people with different interests and mandates (local businesses organizations, RCMP, NGOs, developers) and aim to reduce stigma about homelessness by fostering dialogue and neighbor-to-neighbor relationships with people experiencing homelessness. The goal is to "humanize" potential tenants and this approach may be well suited to communities where reactions to homelessness are growing violent and uncompassionate. Other mid- and long-term approaches to community engagement include World Café or Collaborative Mapping exercises which help define community priorities with key stakeholders that later form action groups to engage on these priorities.

While different models of partnership building exist, these initiatives share an objective of fostering long-term partnerships with community members to humanize the problems that those in need are facing. These initiatives recognize the key role that a cohesive community can play to solve systemic problems. When problems are rationalized in a broader perspective and community concerns are considered, chances are improved that a community as a whole will support affordable housing and homelessness services.

For housing operators, forging and maintaining relationships with local politicians far in advance of a development is critical to gaining support. A common thread across our interviews was the significance

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[1] The stone soup model is based on a metaphor of a group of travelers that arrive to a small town with nothing to eat. In their desperation they ask each household for something to eat, receiving only negative answers. They then go to the side of a nearby river where they start cooking a pot with water and stones. Curious, one of the villagers asks them "what are you doing?", the travelers respond "Oh, it would be much better with an onion". One by one, the villagers contribute something to the stone soup.

of informal relationships and, for one housing operator we spoke with, the importance of being readily available to local politicians throughout the process:

> Having a good relationship with your local government pays dividends well down the road. And you shouldn't wait until you have a project or you are pitching an idea. You want to have that relationship when there's nothing contentious happening. So, that's what we set out to do. Even before actually we did our [...] project. So I introduced myself, I made myself available to members of councils, did presentations. I just kind of kept it in the know. And over the years, we have worked very closely with that municipality, they are very grateful for the efforts and work we've done. (Housing Operator 1)

Particularly in rural communities, local champions for affordable housing may be found in non-traditional settings. Faith-based organization are one group that a social development coordinator we interviewed sought to engage, as these organizations often have strong networks and moral credibility within their communities. In another example, the representative of a housing operator agency found local supporters in the local community forest society—which provided some funding for services—as well as members of the business community, who saw the project as an essential project to retain low-income employees who had limited housing options in the community.

Information & Education

Common misconceptions and fears about affordable housing or homelessness services can often be easily disproved with accurate information. Concerns about the potential negative impact on home values or the rise of crime can be countered with up-to-date statistics that should be readily available for local governments and others. Just as important as providing accurate information is *who* is delivering this information. Some community members and stakeholders have more credibility than others, especially when they are presenting information related to their mandate or function. For example, a development may gain more support if a police officer presents crime statistics to addresses public safety concerns, than if this information is delivered from a developer or a planner (Iglesias, 2002; CSH, 2006).

In many cases, traditional and social media may be the primary venue through which residents learn about development, and the framing of these stories can influence perceptions. As NIMBY organizing increasingly occurs online through public and private forums, planners and housing operators alike must become adept at leveraging social media to communicate information and dispel misconceptions. A social development coordinator emphasized the value of coordinated social media plans that ensure all development partners work with the same key messages to respond to concerns as they arise online. Traditional forms of media (such as the radio and newspaper) remain relevant arenas for public debate, and strategic press releases may help frame the story of affordable housing in a positive light.

While it is critical to disapprove fears toward a specific development with data, a more robust and proactive strategy employs long term public education approaches to lay the foundation for acceptance of affordable housing and homelessness services. Opposition to homelessness services and affordable housing often rooted in deeply-held beliefs and ideologies that cannot be easily shifted with accurate data alone (Gibson, 2005; Tighe, 2010). Longer-term social marketing and educational campaigns, developed through collaboration of local and senior government, developers, housing operators and affordable housing tenants, may help promote values consistent with affordable housing.

A long-term initiative worth considering is the educational package prepared by the Regional Municipality of Peel in the 1990s, that includes a video, a vignette and a poster. The objective was to increase neighborhood acceptance of affordable housing by disproving common misconceptions about affordable housing. With this goal in mind, the initiative aimed to show diverse members of community and their housing needs. One example was a former secretary that suffered an accident and depended on a disability pension, while waiting for years for a non-profit housing opportunity. A second case presented a young couple having a difficult time affording a home. The initiative designated short term and long term target groups for this campaign. In the first group, the target was the media, government bodies, homeowner groups, the business community, the residential development industry and educational facilities. In the second group, they included local housing and community groups (Regional Municipality of Peel, 1994).

Negotiation & Incentives

Listening to valid concerns during the process is a means to mitigate possible risks, but it is also an opportunity to negotiate and offer incentives to the community. In some cases (CSH, 2006), some of the services offered by the housing operators to tenants are extended to vulnerable neighbors who, while originally opposed to the housing development, now perceive it as a benefit to the community. Among the possible services extended by operators are: including neighbors in a food shelf program, home-visitor program or a crime-watch program. These incentives are especially effective when building support from senior residents. Additional incentives may include other types of public services, such as providing a neighborhood garden, a recycling center, a small community library or simply open space available for public use.

Local government-based strategies

Local governments can do a lot to promote and facilitate affordable housing and homelessness services. Some of these initiatives are:

Facilitate procedures

Local governments can limit the potential for NIMBY opposition by facilitating and implementing streamlined procedures for approvals required to develop affordable housing. The extent of this streamlining will depend on the municipal context and provincial regulations. Bottlenecks can arise in approval processes for multiple reasons, the most common being excessive or outdated regulations, insufficient staff and low institutional priority. Whatever the case, it is important to identify which steps in the approval process are significantly slowing down implementation. This will help reduce the opportunities and timeframe for opposition (Regional Municipality of Peel, 1994).

Official policy support, zoning & tax exemptions

Local governments' main tools to support implementation of affordable housing and homelessness services are their policy frameworks. Municipal policy documents shape a narrative on social inclusivity that prove useful when opposition arises against the implementation of developments. Such was the case in Port Phillip, Australia, where a strong policy framework in support of social housing prevented local politicians and municipal staff from conceding, for political reasons, to opposition toward a development near the electoral cycle (Legacy et al., 2016). This is an important lesson that should be replicated at different levels of government: clear policy documents and tools can help minimize the impact of opposition by providing a strong policy rationale to support the project.

Additionally, zoning is an essential tool that can allow, prohibit or regulate affordable housing. Rezoning processes to permit a new affordable housing development are often used by community opposition as an opportunity to block any developments of this kind. A proactive municipality should ideally update zoning regulations in anticipation of any particular proposal of affordable housing to avoid community opposition at this stage. On this topic, the housing operator interviewed for this project highlighted the importance of prioritizing locations with zoning regulations compatible with their development to avoid public hearings that could result in refusal to rezone:

> We knew that if we had to rezone, we would have a zoning issue. We would invite challenges and problems. So we secured a piece of property ourselves, that did not require rezoning (...). I can't emphasize enough, there was no zoning, rezoning required. There was no rezoning, there was no land use issues, there was nothing like that. Nothing had to go to a public hearing. Because there weren't any arguments, but municipalities create their bylaws and their OCPs, Official Community Plans, they contemplate these developments, so (...) people are complaining because they are near a development, but at the same time, when they bought, the zoning was already in place that allowed for that kind of development. It's when you have to rezone that you get into big issues. That's my opinion anyway. (Housing Operator 1)

A common tool local governments use to promote affordable housing initiatives is property tax exemptions on properties owned or operated by non-profits, local governments or public authorities.

Nevertheless, this tax exemption poses special challenges to small suburban and rural communities that lack a large tax base to offer this property tax exemption (Community Charter, 2018). Additionally, the property tax exemption bylaw must be approved by council, which provides opportunity for NIMBY opposition to block a development. This tension for local governments and affordable housing providers was well expressed by a housing operator working in a rural community:

> [Affordable Housing provider] ran up against some obstacles with the local government who would not extend to them property tax exemptions. And that is a real challenge in small communities. That is very large because smaller communities do not have the tax base that larger ones do. So for them to absorb a 10,000 dollar a year tax bill, which in our case would be closer to 12,000 dollars, that's big for them. So, I know that in Merrit, the project didn't proceed under the leadership or the initiative of the nonprofit. BC Housing took it on itself. And the nonprofit will operate it. [Housing Operator 1]

While property tax exemptions are a challenge for small suburban and rural communities and affordable housing providers, partnerships with senior levels of government (as BC Housing in the cited case) may be critical to promote and make possible the development of affordable housing projects in small communities.

Monitoring projects in coordination with health and social services

Once a facility has been built, it will be a permanent expression of the quality of affordable housing and homelessness services in its community. The impact of community perception of these types of facilities may be even bigger in suburban and rural communities than in urban or metropolitan communities, due to the smaller population of suburban and rural communities and relative lack of anonymity. It is essential for future projects that facilities already in operation integrate well into the community and do not cause problems for neighbors so that these sites can be proudly shown by local government and organizations as successful examples. Toward this end, monitoring in coordination with health and social services will be key to solving any problems as they occur and improving the day-to-day operation of these facilities.

Location

Space is not value-free. Humans perceive it, live it and conceive it in very different and many times contradictory ways (Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, the location of a development can often generate conflict, particularly when it diverges from previous activities or interests. Previously in this report we explained the role of proximity in triggering opposition, but other elements should also be taken into consideration before selecting a specific location for development. First of all, what are the histories, interests, functionality and values of the neighboring area? As a rule of thumb, any development should be perceived as compatible with previous activities if it wants to elude community opposition (Curie & Bunting, 2006).

Literature and arguments expressed by one of our municipal staff key informants implied the importance of "scattering" affordable housing developments to avoid transforming the spatial fabric of an area (Galster, 2002; Greater Victoria Coalition To End Homelessness, 2014). This scattered approach is, to some extent, contradictory with the nature of zoning and does not guarantee automatic community support (Ellen & Voicu, 2006; Scally & Koeing, 2012). Indeed, there is no straightforward answer on the question of location. Careful site selection always requires thought for political, social and economic considerations.

Court-based strategies

Litigations are long and costly, both financially and politically. Nevertheless, a legal strategy may be considered. Most of the time, community opposition to affordable housing and homelessness services will not lead to court challenges, but if it does, organizations and governments should be prepared to defend social inclusion values. In the long run, trials establish precedent, educate other organizations on the institutional limits in place and, if successfully, will discourage future opposition groups.

In some cases, court-based strategies are advanced by civil society organizations to challenge institutionalized forms of NIMBYism, such as discriminatory 'people-based' zoning or bylaw enforcement. An example of such a court-based strategy is the legal case brought against the City of Abbotsford by the BC/Yukon Association of Drug War Survivors (with the Pivot Legal Society). The Association sued the City for its discriminatory enforcement of bylaws that prohibited the homeless population from seeking temporary refuge in parks or from using motorized vehicles to sleep overnight on public roads. The Association finally won in the Supreme Court and, as a result of the case, the City implemented a Homelessness task force that proposed the Abbotsford Homelessness Action Plan. This plan was later approved by Council, and led to the hiring of a Homelessness Coordinator.

In support of this last-resource approach, Tighe (2010) suggests: "if NIMBY opposition is based on stereotypes and perceptions as demonstrated in other social policy attitudes, it is even less likely that education and negotiation will succeed. Given these constraints, it is unlikely that planners will actually be able to ''overcome'' NIMBY opposition. Instead, planners may need to take a more aggressive stance rather than try to educate or negotiate with neighbors."

Key lessons

Based on our research, we have identified some key lessons for stakeholders seeking community approval of affordable housing developments and homelessness services.

For housing operators and developers:

1. Develop and maintain relationships with local politicians and other municipal staff far in advance of a project.
2. Identify local champions for the project, including "non-traditional" stakeholders such as faith-based groups. Involve leaders from local community groups as part of the process of framing the problem and lobbying local government.
3. Engage and informally meet with local business owners early on to identify and address concerns proactively. Where possible, engage local business owners who may support the project and serve as a liaison to other business owners on the project.
4. Educate local law-enforcement about positive impacts of affordable housing on community safety and involve them where possible in presenting public safety information to the community. Similarly, real estate agents may be well-positioned to present evidence dispelling myths around property values.
5. Identify and communicate to the public about services that may be extended to the broader community as part of the project.
6. Coordinate with all stakeholders involved in the project to identify key messages about the project to ensure a consistent media strategy.
7. Develop a social media strategy in collaboration with stakeholders so that planners, housing operators and other operators can address opposition that arises online.
8. Avoid election years if possible, as pressure from a vocal minority of constituents may be too powerful for councilors seeking re-election.
9. Particularly for supportive housing facilities, prepare a monitoring strategy in collaboration with relevant health and social services to evaluate project outcomes.

For municipal officials:

1. Develop broader educational and social marketing strategies to promote social attitudes consistent with affordable housing and homelessness services.
2. Prioritize affordable housing and homelessness services in Official Community Plans and other social policy documents.
3. Streamline municipal approval procedures to limit opportunities for NIMBY opposition to arise.

4. Take proactive measures to engage lower-income and marginalized citizens in public consultation, including arranging for transportation and childcare where these may be barriers. Similarly, hold meetings in sites located on neutral ground (ex. community centres, libraries) that are easily accessible.
5. Set up community advisory boards to be involved in project development. Invite representatives from opposing groups to sit on these boards as a way to de-escalate opposition and incorporate legitimate concerns.
6. Identify and communicate other incentives for the community to accept the project, including projects such as a neighborhood garden, a recycling center, a small community library or simply open space available for public use.
7. Update zoning regulations in anticipation of any particular proposal of affordable housing, to avoid community opposition at this stage
8. Develop a legal strategy, particularly when oppositional groups have used legal tactics in the past to halt developments.

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