

A Series of 'NIMBY' Fact Sheets



What is the Context?

In a survey conducted by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) with the support of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), municipalities across Canada have identified that a **lack of housing affordability and choice for specific groups as the key issue** related to housing challenges in their communities.¹

When municipalities were asked to identify the top regulatory barrier to affordable housing and infill development, municipalities **identified NIMBY as the not significant barrier to developing additional affordable housing** options across the country.²

Non-market housing developers across Greater Victoria are not alone in terms of the challenges faced in gaining a broader community support for proposed projects designed to address various types of community need.

Household Type	Gross Income per Year	Month Rent Affordability
1- Person	\$29,466 ⁴	\$736.65
Single on SI	\$7,960 ⁵	\$375.00

What is Household Affordability?

What is NIMBY?

NIMBY is a protectionist attitude that drives exclusionary and oppositional tactics often used by community members and/or groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighbourhood.⁶

Often, NIMBY is **rooted in the perceived conflict** between a proposed development and that of the lifestyle or investment expectations of existing residents and can range from concerns of the perceived behaviours of residents to traffic and design issues.⁷

What kind of housing are we talking about?

The key issue across the region is housing affordability.

For the purposes of this fact sheet, the types of housing will be separated into:

1. Affordable Housing

Costs **less than 30% of before-tax household income** including shelter costs such as electricity, water, and other municipal services.³

2. Affordable Housing with Support Services

This housing costs less than 30% of before-tax household income including shelter costs and **includes the provision of clinical and/or specialized support services** to ensure the ongoing health and stability of the resident.

What is the Purpose?

The intention of these documents is to **highlight the facts relating to common NIMBY concerns** that arise from public engagement through the project approval phase of development. There are typically **six common themes that emerge when talking about issues related to NIMBY** and each will be explored in this series of Fact Sheets.

This information is designed to better inform the ongoing conversations between project proponents, elected officials, community members and the media to encourage collaboration and dialogue between stakeholders in support of the development of additional housing options throughout the region.

What are the 6 Themes?

1. Property Values

Often residents are concerned that the introduction of affordable housing into the neighbourhood will have a negative impact on the surrounding property values.

2. Crime and Safety

Often residents are concerned that affordable housing will host unsavory characters that could increase the threat of property and/or person crime, thus undermining the feeling of safety.

3. Density: Congestion and Infrastructure Strain

Residents often comment that more affordable development will increase density, make the streets more congested and create additional strain on the urban infrastructure.

4. Neighbourhood Character

There is a perception among some residents that affordable housing will be built from low quality materials and that it will not be aesthetically pleasing or well integrated. The feeling is that this would undermine the neighbourhood character.

5. New Resident Behaviours

Residents sometimes feel that with additional affordable housing options will come an influx of residents from other communities that may not share similar values or social norms.

6. Enough Affordable Housing

Some residents comment that their neighbourhood may already have its fair share of affordable housing and that it is time for developers to look elsewhere.

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1. CMHC. 2001. Survey of Canadian Municipalities: Regulatory Measures for Housing Affordability and Choice. Socio-economic Series Issues, 87.
 2. Ibid.
 3. http://cmhc.beyond2020.com/HiCODefinitions_EN.html#_Affordable_dwelling_1
 4. Statistics Canada. 2006. Census of Population and Housing.
 5. Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness. 2013. Facing Homelessness: Greater Victoria Report on Housing and Supports 2012/13. [Victoriahomelessness.ca](http://victoriahomelessness.ca)
 6. CMHC. 2006. Gaining Community Acceptance of Affordable Housing Projects and Homeless Shelters.
 7. Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2009. Housing In My Backyard: A Municipal Guide for Responding to NIMBY.

Affordable Housing has a Positive Impact on Property Values



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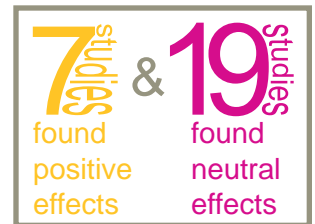
Why Property Values are Important

Increasing property values indicate a number of positive trends for neighbourhoods. They signal that the neighbourhood has become a desirable place to live, to locate business, and to invest in for the future. For homeowners, an increasing trend can enhance their equity position. Measurable increases in home prices and rents as well as a general increase in real estate activity often represent important benchmarks when thinking of neighbourhood revitalization, growth and security.

The vast majority of studies have found affordable housing does not depress the neighbourhood property values, and may increase them in certain instances.¹

What About Property Value?

A literature review of 31 separate studies to examine if non-market housing had a negative impact on surrounding property values in California found that **seven studies documented positive property value effects and 19 had no discernible effect at all**. Negative effects were found in one study and three were inconclusive.²



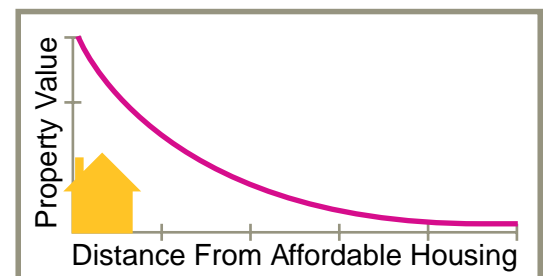
What About Selling Price?

Another study looking at the acquisition of existing properties by a public housing authority and the subsequent rehabilitation and occupancy by subsidized tenants in Denver, found **the proximity of a property to a subsidized housing site had an independent, positive effect on the single-family home selling prices**.³

In a BC study, professional appraisers tracked the impact of seven social housing projects across the lower mainland, Vancouver Island and the interior. In every case, neighbours opposed the projects because they feared their property values decline, thus threatening their investment. Over five years the appraisers tracked sale prices among nearby houses, and compared those to a control area. **The study found house prices near the controversial projects increased as much or more than houses in the control area. In addition, there was no evidence of panic selling, or of houses taking extraordinarily long times to sell**.⁴

How Much Can the Value Increase?

According to a study from the University of Minnesota, **for every 100 feet closer to a well-managed non-profit multi-family subsidized housing development, a property was valued \$86 more than if it was not**.⁵



How is This Studied?

There are two analytical frameworks used to address the question of affordable housing development and nearby property values:

1. Matching – Compares the performance of two otherwise comparable neighbourhoods, one with affordable housing and one without. **Historically, all of the studies that make use of this methodology have found no difference in property values between two areas or a positive effect** in those neighbourhoods with affordable housing.⁶
2. Multivariate Statistical Analysis – Explains the property value as a function of structural characteristics (age, square footage, etc) and neighbourhood characteristics (poverty rate, amenities, etc.). This methodology can compare the value of properties both close to affordable developments and further away, while controlling for the influence of these structural or neighbourhood variables. **Most of these studies support the ones developed through the 'Matching' methodology in that affordable housing generally has no, or a positive effect on surrounding property values**.⁷ It is important to note this methodology provides a more nuanced, detailed analysis of the relationship between affordable housing and surrounding property values, suggesting that in some circumstances, negative effects are possible.

Important Considerations

Many community members, even those who support the idea of affordable housing, may object when there is a proposal in their community. Often the first comment in reaction to a proposal will be about preserving or enhancing the property values across the neighbourhood. This fear is often misplaced, as **typically the addition of affordable housing units to the neighbourhood will further enhance the surrounding property values while providing numerous beneficial spill over effects.**



Suggested through the literature are five concrete ways to minimize both negative effects and neighbourhood opposition to affordable housing developments:⁸

- 1. Design** – Research suggests the type of housing matters less than the quality of the property’s design, management, and maintenance. If the development is poorly designed, built and operated it can negatively impact the surrounding property values.⁹
- 2. Management** – Poorly maintained housing – private or public – is shown to depress the neighbourhood property values. For example, proximity of a property to an abandoned home reduces a property’s assessed total value by \$859.98, and substandard homes compared with homes in standard condition were \$7,473 less, on average. This suggests that locating near a property that has not been kept up or has been abandoned by private owners can have a more significant effect on property values than locating near affordable housing.¹⁰ Affordable housing that is well managed is more likely to have a neutral or positive effect on property values.
- 3. Revitalization** – Rehabilitation of distressed properties for affordable housing has been shown to have positive effects on neighboring property values. Data collected from New York over 10 years, published in 2006, shows that when the rehabilitation of abandoned or distressed properties takes place, there are significant positive spill over effects on surrounding property values regardless of the neighbourhood’s socioeconomic characteristics.¹¹
- 4. Strong Neighbourhoods** – Evidence indicates affordable housing is more likely to have no effects, or positive effects on surrounding property values in neighbourhoods that are wealthier with lower rates of poverty. The impact of affordable housing development on the surrounding property values tended to be positive when located in areas that were typically wealthier and were appreciating in value. By contrast, when affordable housing development were located in areas where the properties were depreciating and had a higher proportion of vulnerable or economically marginalized residents, these developments tended to result in continued negative effects on surrounding property values.¹²
- 5. Concentration** – When affordable housing is relatively dispersed, research suggests that the impacts on surrounding property values are neutral or positive, but can become negative once a critical mass of units or developments in a given area is reached.¹³ Interestingly, in distressed areas, large-scale affordable housing projects are considered desirable when they result in an upgrade to the housing stock at a sufficient scale to change the neighbourhood trajectory. Upgrading housing stock through affordable housing development may have positive impacts on surrounding property values if done at a sufficient scale and as part of a larger community revitalization strategy.¹⁴

1. Centre for Housing Policy. “Don’t Put it Here!”: Does Affordable Housing Cause Nearby Property Values to Decline. www.nhc.org

2. Ibid.

3. Santiago, Anna M., George C. Galster, and Peter Tatian. 2001. Assessing the property value impacts of the dispersed housing subsidy program in Denver. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 20 (1): 65-88.

4. http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/pub/htmldocs/pub_neighbour/p_value1.htm

5. Goetz, Edward G., Hin Kim Lam, and Anne Heitlinger. 1996. *There goes the neighborhood? The impact of subsidized multi-family housing on urban neighborhoods.* Minneapolis-St. Paul: University of Minnesota, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

6. Centre for Housing Policy. “Don’t Put it Here!”: Does Affordable Housing Cause Nearby Property Values to Decline. www.nhc.org

7. Ibid.

8. Centre for Housing Policy. “Don’t Put it Here!”: Does Affordable Housing Cause Nearby Property Values to Decline. www.nhc.org

9. Goetz, Edward G., Hin Kim Lam, and Anne Heitlinger. 1996. *There goes the neighborhood? The impact of subsidized multi-family housing on urban neighborhoods.* Minneapolis-St. Paul: University of Minnesota, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.

10. Ibid.

11. Ellen, I.G. & Voicu, I. 2006. *Nonprofit housing and neighborhood spillovers.* New York: Furman Centre for Real Estate and Urban Policy.

12. Galster, G.C. 2002. *A review of existing research on the effects of federally assisted housing programs on neighboring residential property values.* Washington, DC: National Association of Realtors.

13. Galster, G.C. 2002. *A review of existing research on the effects of federally assisted housing programs on neighboring residential property values.* Washington, DC: National Association of Realtors.

14. Ellen, I.G. & Voicu, I. 2006. *Nonprofit housing and neighborhood spillovers.* New York: Furman Centre for Real Estate and Urban Policy.

“What About Crime and Safety?”



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Crime and Safety

Neighbourhood objections are raised based on concerns for safety and the associated and speculative perception of increased crime that could be caused by a facility and its residents entering a neighbourhood.¹ **Most of these fears are ultimately based on the negative stereotypes of the perspective residents of a building.**

This fear-driven link between certain types of housing and crime ranks as one of the strongest perceived negative consequences of affordable housing projects and is **cited in 61% of cases where there is opposition to an affordable housing project.**^{2,3}

It is important to note that, in general, arrest rates are higher for individuals and families experiencing homelessness when compared to the general population. However, the link between crime and this very vulnerable group is exacerbated by the lack of access to appropriate types of support and the criminalization of homelessness.⁴ Unfortunately, as many people experiencing homelessness spend much of their lives in public spaces, the day-to-day behaviours that would normally occur in private are often treated as criminal when they must take place in public (e.g. sleeping, substance use, urination, etc.).⁵

How is Crime Examined?

Typically, researchers look at report rates of specific types of crimes over a given time in a designated area. This provides an accurate assessment of crime levels and by tracking these trends over time, researchers can get a sense which specific factors can contribute to, or reduce, crime levels.

Does Affordable Housing Impact Neighbourhood Crime Rates?

No, affordable or supportive housing do not negatively impact crime rates.

In fact, most research suggests low-income housing development, and the associated revitalization of neighbourhoods, brings with it significant reductions in violent crime with no detectable effects on smaller crimes such as property crime.⁹

In Toronto, over a ten-year period between 1997 and 2006 the neighbourhood surrounding a supportive housing facility experienced a 27% drop in dispatched calls, a 32% decrease in sexual assaults, an 11.5% decrease in other assaults, a general decline in breaking and entering, robbery, theft under \$5,000 and motor vehicle theft. **These declines mirror those across the city as a whole, indicating there**

Three kinds of Offences

1. Summary Offences

These are less serious offences. The maximum penalty for a summary offence is usually a \$5,000 fine and/or six months in jail. Some summary offences have higher maximum sentences. They include breaches of a probation order.⁶

2. Indictable Offences

These are more serious offences and include theft over \$5,000, break and enter, aggravated sexual assault and murder. Maximum penalties for indictable offences vary and include life in prison. Some indictable offences have minimum penalties.⁷

3. Hybrid Offences

These are offences that can be dealt with as either summary or indictable. Crown counsel makes the decision about how the offence will be handled.⁸

is no negative association between supportive housing and crime rates.¹⁰ In some instances, public housing can even decrease rates of crime.¹¹

Crime Trends Around Supportive Housing 1997 - 2006



In Denver, it was found that for buildings with 53 or less residents, supportive housing, including those with more threatening clientele, did not lead to increased rates of reported violent, property, criminal mischief, disorderly conduct, or total crimes. In some instances, residential facilities over 53 units did report some increases in reported violent and total crime in a close proximity to the housing facility. It was found, however, that **it was not the residents perpetrating these crimes. Rather, they were victims of crime as this group is traditionally more vulnerable and therefore become targets for others.**¹²

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A Vancouver Experience:

"In 25 years of experience with supported housing in Vancouver, there is no evidence there has been an increase in crime in areas around these buildings. There are 16 apartment buildings outside the Downtown Core, ranging in size from 9 to 34 units, located in apartment zoned residential neighbours. A review of the complaints filed with the City's Licenses and Inspection Department and Vancouver Police Department shows few calls have been made by neighbours of supportive housing projects."¹³

A Final Thought to Consider:

A different but equally important angle on this question is to consider the impact of community opposition on crime rates. For those needing supportive or affordable housing, the link with crime has been exacerbated because individuals have been unable to access appropriate levels of support and treatment. **One implication of this is that instances of successful community opposition may, in fact, be creating more crime by reducing the number of options open to those individuals who would otherwise have resided and received care in the proposed facilities.**¹⁴ In other words, to more effectively manage incidences of crime within our communities, we must first work to end homelessness through more effective housing and treatment programs that are available to those the most in-need of the same safe, secure, affordable housing that the rest of the community enjoys.

1. Wynne-Edwards. 2003. Overcoming Community Opposition to Homelessness Sheltering Projects under the National Homelessness Initiative. National Homelessness Initiative.
2. Horner, H. 2009. Affordable Housing Research and Recommendations. Minneapolis, MN: McKnight Foundation.
3. Salster, G et al. 2002. The Impact of supportive Housing on Neighbourhood Crime Rates. Journal of Urban Affairs, Volume 24, Number 3, Pages 289 – 315.
4. Wynne-Edwards. 2003. Overcoming Community Opposition to Homelessness Sheltering Projects under the National Homelessness Initiative. National Homelessness Initiative.
5. Dear, M. & Wilton, R. (1996, January). Community Relations: A Resource Guide. Retrieved in April 2003 from www.bettercommunities.org/index.cfm?method=nimby13.
6. http://www.justicebc.ca/en/cjis/you/accused/understanding_charges/types_of_offences.html
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. <http://paa2011.princeton.edu/papers/110122>
10. de Wolff, A. 2008. We Are Neighbours: The Impact of Supportive Housing on Community, Economic and Attitude Changes. Wellesley Institute.
11. Joice, P. n/a. Neighbourhood Effectz of Public Housing: How the level of pubic housing concentration influences neighbourhood crime levels. Martin School of Public Policy and Administration. University of Kentucky.
12. Ibid.
13. "Supportive Housing Strategy for Vancouver Coastal Health," June 2007 www.vancouver.ca
14. Wynne-Edwards. 2003. Overcoming Community Opposition to Homelessness Sheltering Projects under the National Homelessness Initiative. National Homelessness Initiative.

'NIMBY' to Neighbours

DENSITY = Healthy, Strong Communities



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Congestion and Infrastructure Strain

The third most commonly cited concern linking NIMBY sentiments to affordable housing is around the issue of density.¹ More units per acre mean lower land costs per unit and in an effort to provide meaningful levels of affordability, developers have been producing smaller units as these offer the lowest cost of land per unit.

It is important to note that density alone is not enough to ensure affordability. Local governments must also intervene with programs and additional concessions to ensure the new higher-density developments are affordable to those in-need.²

Typically, density concerns present themselves in two distinct ways:

1. Traffic

Residents often comment that more affordable housing will increase the density of a neighbourhood, which will lead to increasing congestion on roadways. When interviewed about the typical objections on the physical characteristics of a proposal, traffic is second only to location as the most cited concern and is mentioned in 22% of cases.³

There is nothing to suggest residential intensification will lead to congestion and increased travel times within neighbourhoods.⁴ This may seem somewhat counter intuitive as the assumption is that more households equal more cars.

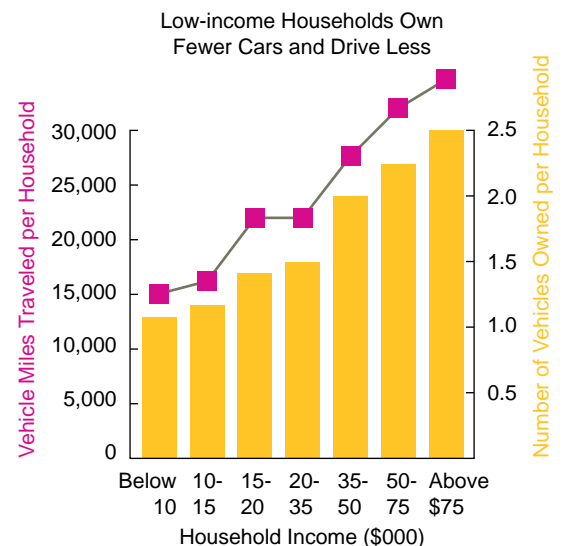
In truth, there are a few key points that indicate an increase in the residential density for affordable housing will not lead to too much traffic:

- Like any new development, there is a requirement that higher density or infill housing meets certain municipal planning and engineering standards.⁵ This ensures there is a degree of harmony between a proposed residential development and the surrounding community.
- Affordable multiple-family dwellings near high-quality mass transit provide numerous alternatives to car travel.
- Low-income households own fewer cars and drive less.⁶

Some important numbers to consider:

- **75% of households below the poverty line own one or fewer cars compared to 54% for all households.**⁷
- **Low-income households make 40% fewer trips per household than other households.**⁸
- **For every doubling of neighbourhood density, vehicle miles travelled are reduced by 20% - 30%.**⁹

In addition, high-density housing can encourage nearby retail development encouraging walking and transit usage, the latter of which, only becomes cost-effective at densities above eight or 10 units per acre.¹⁰



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Residential Transportation Energy Consumption Survey, Household Vehicles Energy Consumption, 1994

2. Infrastructure Strain

Residents are often concerned increases in neighbourhood density will strain infrastructure and public services.

In truth, there are numerous advantages to encouraging a higher degree of residential diversity across communities, which could include medium-high-density residential development. Some of these advantages include:

- **High-density residential development requires less extensive infrastructure networks** compared to low-density single-family housing.¹¹
- High-density housing creates an economy of scale for the cost of providing the infrastructure with the cost savings being passed on to the resident, resulting in **more affordability for all residents**.¹²
- More affordability for all residents creates enhanced fiscal stability for a neighbourhood, resulting in **fewer turnovers of residents and a higher degree of collective efficacy**.¹³
- More density means more users of **public transit** making it more viable, and encourages **additional routes and more frequency**.¹⁴
- Communities can **save taxpayers and new residents money** when residential development is allowed in existing communities where the infrastructure has already been paid for and is underutilized.¹⁵
- Higher-density infill residential development can also **revitalize stagnant commercial districts and spur additional community investment**.¹⁶

Research has identified some recurring themes across strong neighbourhoods, indicating that strong neighbourhoods are:¹⁷

1. Inclusive with active community involvement as well as a respect for diversity and a tolerance of differences.
2. Vibrant with a strong sense of place identity, pride and opportunities for community interaction.
3. Cohesive with a sense of mutual responsibility and trust.
4. Safe with positive subjective and objective measures of safety.

Supporting appropriate increases in density across neighbourhoods can help ensure these communities remain strong, healthy and affordable places for all people to call home.

1 Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2009. Housing in My Backyard: A Municipal Guide For Responding to NIMBY. <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/mythsnfacts.pdf>

2 Wynne-Edwards, J. 2003. Overcoming Community Opposition to Homelessness Sheltering Projects under the National Homelessness Initiative. Government of Canada.

3 Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2009. Housing in My Backyard: A Municipal Guide For Responding to NIMBY.

4 Ibid.

5 <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/mythsnfacts.pdf>

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Cambridge Systematics and Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas. Making the Land Use Transportation Air Quality Connection: Analysis of Alternatives. Vol. 5 Friends of Oregon

10 <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/mythsnfacts.pdf>

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2009. Housing in My Backyard: A Municipal Guide For Responding to NIMBY.

14 <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/mythsnfacts.pdf>

15 Ibid.

16 De Wolff, A. 2008. We Are Neighbours: The Impact of Supportive Housing on Community, Social, Economic and Attitude Changes. Wellesley Institute.

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTER



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Neighbourhood Character

Neighbour residents often express a concern affordable housing will be made of low-quality materials and it will not be particularly well integrated in to the existing community. The fear is the design and construction of affordable housing will undermine the character of the neighbourhood.

What is Neighbourhood Character?

Neighbourhood character often refers to the look and feel of a particular residential area and is used to describe the uniqueness or strengths of certain areas. This concept is applied to urban planning systems that seek to identify and enhance a city that is comprised of distinct neighbourhoods, each with their own identity and character.

What is Affordable Housing?

Affordable housing is not affordable because it is poorly constructed from cheap or low-quality materials. Housing is affordable because innovative non-profit housing developers, with government support, are able to keep the construction and operating costs low.¹ These savings are then passed along to the residents in the form of additional affordable housing options throughout the neighbourhood.

Affordable housing must comply with the same building code standards as market-rate housing and as such, the physical condition and quality is the same.² In fact, it is very common that affordable, **non-profit operated rental housing is mistaken for market condo developments.**³

When residential projects receive public funding, there are generally additional development restrictions and higher building standards when compared to non-funded projects.⁴ Ultimately, this results in a higher quality building that is well designed and is effectively integrated into the community. Further, the **evidence clearly fails to support the idea that subsidized rental housing can in some way undermine community.**⁵

It is also very important to consider **affordability and density do not mean high-rise developments** in traditionally single-family home residential neighbourhoods. There are numerous ways that developers are enhancing, rather than detracting from, the neighbourhood character. Good design that respects planning guidelines and regulations will create a successful project that supports the existing character of a neighbourhood.

1 Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2009. Housing In My Backyard: A Municipal Guide For Responding to NIMBY.

2 Ibid.

3 <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/hpd/mythsfacts.pdf>

4 Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2009. Housing In My Backyard: A Municipal Guide For Responding to NIMBY.

5 http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/rr07-3_ellen.pdf

Stigma - Based Reactions



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New Resident Behaviours:

An issue that often rises when affordable housing is discussed in established neighbourhoods is that this will encourage an **influx of residents who may not share similar values or social norms.**¹

This reaction is **based on the imagined characteristics of the people** that objectors fear will ultimately live in the project. Often these objections will be **based on the individual prejudices and beliefs of opponents, rather than the actual impacts of a development** on a neighbourhood.²

In this situation, an objector may not want a development in their neighbourhood because:

- they consider that residents of affordable housing to be lazy, non-productive, deviant or unworthy;
- they object in principle to government-subsidised housing;
- because they believe it would be unfair that people receiving welfare payments could then live in the same street or neighbourhood as they do.³

These types of arguments against affordable housing development are often emotional and/or ideological in nature, and are often founded in much broader issues of stigma and discrimination.⁴

This is well summarized as:

... local opposition, which often successfully thwarts the development of affordable housing, is often based on misperceptions and stereotypes of the people who may live there. Such opposition is seldom grounded in the reality of modern affordable housing but shaped by perceptions of public housing and the negative externalities that it produced.⁵

It is important that communities realize the **future occupants of an affordable housing development are already residents of the neighbourhood and members of the community.**⁶ Often times, it is an individual or family who is sharing an apartment that's too small, or who has to make a choice between paying market rent and healthy meals or medicine.

There is also a very important human rights lens to consider when discussing perceived new resident behaviours.

People who have a mental illness, disability and/or are receiving social assistance have the same rights as any other resident.

For housing providers, this means:

1. It is not about asking the neighbours for a favour to allow a type of tenant into a community. For example, would any other resident be expected to knock on every potential neighbour's door to ask if it would be okay if they rented or purchased the adjacent property?⁷
2. There is no need to obtain the community's permission for a proposed project. Planning approvals may be necessary, but municipal planning by-laws regulate land use and building form and not the people who live there.⁸

Three Things to Overcome Discrimination

1. We must understand the difference between discrimination and legitimate opposition.

To untangle the difference between legitimate and discriminatory opposition, it is helpful to introduce the ‘cringe’ test.

If you were to substitute the word “black” or “Greek” or “gay” for the word “low income”, “mentally ill” or “people with addictions” – would the statement make any fair-minded person cringe?⁹

2. We must point out the discrimination.

It is very unlikely that individuals or organizations would ever think of opposing an affordable housing proposal based on racial or ethnic grounds as this would immediately be flagged as illegal, though they do still look for ways to prohibit residents living with low-incomes, mental illness, or substance use issues.

Typically, this will mask discrimination as a criticism that the project does not ‘fit’ the neighbourhood, or that it is not ‘appropriate’, or that the site is ‘not in the best interest of the residents in the long-term’. This is discrimination and should be labelled as such. It is critical that the language shift from these generalized ‘concerns’ to genuine land-use issues.

3. We must challenge discriminatory planning policies and by-laws.

Policies that impose additional restrictions on supportive housing because of the people they house may be vulnerable to legal challenge, especially if the requirements cannot be justified on land use grounds. Even restrictions that have some basis in planning principles may be found to be discriminatory if, upon a legal analysis using human rights principles, the need for supportive housing outweighs the rationale for the restriction.¹⁰

Keep in mind that 60 years ago in Canada, there were subdivisions that prevented people of Jewish, Asian, or African descent from purchasing a home. The lawmakers who established these restrictions believed they were ensuring the continuation of safe communities through preventing crime and protecting property values.

It would be unthinkable for practices such as these to exist today. Over time, numerous court decisions have labelled these as illegal and public opinion has shifted as a result of mountains evidence demonstrating that neighbourhoods have only to gain from residents of all religions and races.¹¹

We must end the similar existing discriminatory practices against those with low-incomes, mental illnesses or those living with addictions. By doing so, we will not only build homes for all, but create strong, resilient, diverse neighbourhoods as well.

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1. Nguyen, M.T., Basolo, V. & Tiwari, A. 2012. Opposition to Affordable Housing in the USA: Debate Framing and the Responses of Local Actors. *Housing, Theory and Society*, pp.1–24.
 2. Galster, G., Tatian, P.A., Santiago, A.M., Pettit, K., & Smith, R.E., 2003. *Why Not In My Backyard?* Neighborhood impacts of deconcentrating assisted housing. New Brunswick, New Jersey, Center for Urban Policy Research.
 3. Gethin, D. 2012. Understanding and Addressing Local Opposition to Affordable Housing Projects. AHURI – University of New South Wales. <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p71007>
 4. Ibid.
 5. Tighe, J.R. 2010. Public Opinion and Affordable Housing: A Review of the Literature. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 25(1), pp.3–17
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 7. Connelly, J. 2005. *Yes, In My Backyard: A Guide For Ontario’s Supportive Housing Providers*. Homecoming Community Choice Coalition.
 8. Ibid.
 9. Ibid.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Ibid.

Neighbourhoods and NIMBY



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Neighbourhood oversaturation and NIMBY

Often, in response to an affordable or supportive housing proposal, communities will express a position they already have their “fair share”.

Opposition based on a perceived “unfair concentration” is raised by residents that feel their community has been victim to an unfair saturation of services for certain groups of people. This type of reaction does not focus exclusively on the proposal itself, but rather on the residents’ perception of the proposed incoming residents and the feeling that they as a neighbourhood have already done enough.¹

This position is based on the concept of “fair share” and implies that people with mental illness or addiction are a burden that must be spread out across a region, thus allowing neighbourhoods to more effectively manage this burden.²

Mental illness or problematic substance use can certainly be a burden. It can be a burden for those suffering and their loved ones in the same way that cancer or Alzheimer’s disease can be a burden to those afflicted and those close to them. This personal burden does not translate to the people next door, nor does it burden the neighbourhood as whole. The same is true for mental illness and addiction.

If a neighbourhood stood up and stated it already had a large enough percentage of Greek people, or Catholics, or Black people, that it already had its “fair share”, would it be well received?

Absolutely not.

This type of statement is illegal, just as it is illegal to discriminate against people with mental illness or addiction. No part of any city can be, or should be, “off limits” to any group of people.³

But there is another reason we don’t object to Greek or Chinese or Caribbean communities: we see ethnic neighbourhoods as part of the richness of the city. People with mental illness are also part of this city, whether they live in supportive housing or not. By creating opportunities for housing for people with mental illness or addiction, the community is ensuring that every person regardless of race, religion, age, wealth, or illness is afforded the same basic rights and any other resident.

It is also important to consider what make neighbourhoods attractive to residents. Neighbourhood qualities such as:





- Affordability
- Suitable Housing
- Good Public Transit
- Good Amenities and Services

It is entirely likely that these very conditions are why the most vocal NIMBY moved into a community in the first place. These are also the qualities that a person with a mental illness or addiction looks for as well. This is why **individuals with mental illnesses or addictions should be given every opportunity to use community-based amenities to enhance their quality of life, just the same as any other resident.**


It is important to remember that it is against the law to discriminate against people because of skin colour, religion, ethnicity, mental/physical abilities, or just because they are poor. **Communities cannot let their stigma, stereotypes, and assumptions limit the opportunities to create housing for those the most in-need across our society.**

To help address some of the misconceptions about housing the mentally ill or those suffering from addiction, it is helpful to focus on what supportive or affordable housing residents are or are not through the lens of “fair share”:⁴

Residents of supportive or affordable housing:

-  Are not scapegoats for larger or more general community problems.
-  Are not scapegoats for people's frustration over larger social issues surrounding homelessness.
-  Will not be the straw that broke the camel's back.
-  Are not a burden to be spread out across a region to be better managed.

Residents of supportive or affordable housing:

-  Are a community asset that will contribute to a vibrant, dynamic, liveable, and inclusive neighbourhood that offers opportunities for all people regardless of skin colour, religion, ethnicity, mental/physical abilities, or income.

1. <http://www.urbancenter.utoronto.ca/pdfs/elibrary/NHINIMBY.pdf>
2. Connely, J. 2005. Yes, In My Backyard: A Guide for Ontario's Supportive Housing Providers. Homecoming Community Choice Coalition.
3. Ibid.
4. Wynne-Edwards, J. 2003. Overcoming Community Opposition to Homelessness Sheltering Projects Under the National Homelessness Initiative. Government of Canada.