

# Isothermal Regional Housing Summit Results



During the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Isothermal Housing Summit, representatives across the region discussed and identified the main housing issues facing the Isothermal region (Cleveland, McDowell, Polk, and Rutherford County). The results of those discussions are listed below and ranked according to priority by the group at large:

## **Defining the housing issue:**

- 1) Inventory – Overwhelmingly, participants agreed that a lack of quality housing inventory is the biggest housing issue for the region. This includes a lack of ADA compliant rental properties, available rental properties for seniors, families, and young professionals, quality single-family homes for sale, and affordable land available to purchase.
- 2) Cost – Participants identified high housing and rental costs as the second-highest housing issue in the region.
- 3) Section 8 – The stigma and misrepresentation of Section 8, which leads to few available properties and landlords is a housing issue for the region. Plus, attendees discussed issues with the concept “Not in My Backyard,” which plagues Section 8 housing.
- 4) Zoning & Construction – Participants noted that the region’s lack of stringent zoning codes and building codes as a housing issue.

## **What kind of housing is needed?**

- 1) Affordable Housing – The group identified affordable housing as the most urgent housing need in the region. Particularly, affordable housing for low-income individuals, seniors, families, and the workforce.
- 2) Quality Housing with Amenities – In addition to affordable housing, participants agreed that the region needs more quality housing with amenities that are attractive to young professionals, families, and retirees. For example, housing close to downtown, trails, and/or retail shops.

- 3) Senior Housing – Participants also listed senior housing as an urgent need for the region. For example, apartments or homes that are ADA compliant or are constructed specifically for seniors.
- 4) Workforce Housing – The third most critical type of housing needed for the region, as identified during the housing summit, is workforce housing. The Urban Land Institute defines workforce housing as housing that is affordable to households earning between 60-120% of the area median income. Workforce housing typically targets middle-income workers, which includes professions like police officers, firefighters, teachers, healthcare workers, retail clerks, and similar positions.

### **Define the affordable housing issue:**

- 1) Cost of Living – Participants overwhelmingly agreed that low wages, high housing costs, and a higher cost of living is the primary issue with affordable housing in the region.
- 2) Problems with Landlords– Regionally, participants noted that landlords have failed to maintain quality rental properties over the years and have shown little interest in renovating older properties or applying to be part of the Section 8 housing program.
- 3) Lack of Quality Inventory – Again, the group agreed that the region severely lacks quality housing inventory for both rental properties and available single-family homes.

### **What are the barriers to creating affordable housing?**

- 1) Lack of Available Land or Properties – Participants again prioritized a lack of inventory of available land and properties as a housing barrier in the region.
- 2) Issues with Section 8 – Community perception of affordable housing, the stigma of Section 8 housing, and general issues with the Section 8 program are barriers to creating affordable housing in the region, according to participants. Again, the argument “Not in My Backyard” was noted.
- 3) Cost – Housing, land, and building costs again were noted as barriers and issues to be addressed within the region.
- 4) Issues with Developers – The group also listed issues with developers as a barrier to creating affordable housing in the region. For example, a lack of developers, contractors, incentives for builders, and barriers between county/town/community was noted.

## **What should we do regionally or locally to address our housing needs?**

- 1) Housing Task Force – The group agreed that the top priority to address housing needs in our region to create a housing task force that can address the issues outlined in the summit.
- 2) Educate the Region – Participants also agreed that the community (local government, landlords, developers, and the public) should be educated on the issues facing the region and the options available for affordable housing; including, the stigma of Section 8.
- 3) Landbank – Landbanks were also identified as an option that could alleviate the housing issues facing the region.
- 4) Zoning – The group also discussed the need for more zoning and code enforcement across the region to address housing needs.

## **What role do we each play in improving our housing issues?**

- 1) Regional Clearinghouse – The group agreed that communication and education about the housing crisis are critical to improving housing issues in the region. For example, a collection of case studies and best practices that can be applied at a regional level to help local housing matters.
- 2) Advocacy – Participants also noted that the group as a whole should advocate for affordable housing and changes in housing regulation across the region and state.
- 3) Changes to the Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) – Attendees also discussed the need to suggest changes to the QAP to better address housing issues. The QAP sets out the state's eligibility priorities and criteria for awarding federal tax credits to housing properties.

## **Where do we go next?**

- 1) Task Force – The group recommended IPDC convene a task force to form a plan of action to address the region's housing issues.