

New Mexico Chapter of the American Planning Association

POLICY GUIDE ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Adopted by the Membership on October 1, 1998

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUES¹

A major quality of life issue for any community is meeting the housing needs of its citizens. When a community is characterized by exorbitant housing costs or blighted and crime-ridden neighborhoods, livability suffers. The Housing Act of 1949 states that all residents have “a right to a decent home and a suitable living environment.” Many New Mexicans are denied this right due to their economic circumstances or discriminatory practices, and many people pay so much for housing that they cannot afford other necessities of life. The quality of housing – affordability, security of tenure, ownership and design – has a major influence on the strength of the social fabric of the surrounding community.

New Mexico has been lagging behind the nation in the housing affordability index. In a comparison of median housing value to median household income for the past three decades, we see that it’s becoming more and more difficult for a family in New Mexico to afford a home.²

AFFORDABILITY INDEX	NM – 1970 – US		NM - 1980 – US		NM - 1990 - US	
Median Housing Value	\$13,000	\$17,000	\$45,300	\$47,002	\$69,900	\$78,300
Median Household Income	\$ 7,096	\$ 8,486	\$14,654	\$16,841	\$24,087	\$30,056
Ratio	1.8	2.0	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.6

New Mexico has traditionally been recognized as an integrated community, both ethnically and economically. However, if measures are not taken to strengthen this unique characteristic of our State, this tradition could be lost.

GENERAL POLICY POSITION

NM-APA supports vigorous action to implement the right to decent housing in a suitable living environment for all New Mexicans. The further this policy, NM-APA will work with both the public and private sectors to support the following specific actions:

1. Include mandatory minimum density requirements in local zoning and land use regulations. Regulations typically specify a maximum allowable density for each zoning district. Housing may be built at density levels up to the maximum or “ceiling” density that often leads to unplanned development patterns. Minimum density standards or density “floors” are necessary to retain buildable land for multiple-family and lower-cost single-family housing. Single family housing should not be allowed to develop on lands zoned for multiple-family use.
2. Reform local development review procedures and regulatory requirements which impede the production of affordable housing units. The development review process is often slow and cumbersome, adding to the costs of development which are ultimately passed on to the consumer. Regulatory requirements, such as standards for parking spaces, may unnecessarily reduce the number of housing units which can be built on a site or increase the per unit costs. Local governments should closely examine their development review processes and regulatory requirements to eliminate unnecessary delay and costs.
3. Local communities should demonstrate compliance with a housing fair-share requirement. Unmet housing needs should be identified and regional strategies developed to focus land use policy and public and private investment toward meeting unmet needs. Affordable housing must be provided without compromising public health and safety or the public treasury. Regional strategies for affordable housing should address the “fair-share” distribution of housing responsibilities among the jurisdictions of the region, including the provision of supporting social services.
4. Undertake an active public education campaign on growth management and housing. Many communities in New Mexico are struggling to implement innovative housing programs and policies while many citizens and policymakers do not understand the connection between land use policy, housing affordability and cost-effective urbanization. NIMBYism is alive and well in New Mexico. A serious and effective education program is necessary and planners are well-equipped to lead this educational effort.
5. The State should adopt a statewide housing goal which supports the ‘right to a decent home and a suitable living environment’ with which local communities and state agencies must comply. As an example, Oregon’s goal 10 requires local governments to provide, through planning policies and zoning, reasonable opportunity for people of all income levels to obtain adequate and affordable housing.
6. Encourage local inclusionary housing policies. Communities that have serious affordability issues should be empowered to adopt inclusionary housing policies that require new housing developments to provide a fixed percentage of the units at below-market rates for the low and low-moderate income households.

7. Examine the viability of reforming the property tax system in New Mexico. The existing property taxation system hits many cash-poor, land-rich families very hard as property values increase with new development and growth. Examine real estate transfer taxes and other tools to equitably address the issue.
8. Require every Comprehensive Plan to include a housing element. A reform of the planning statutory framework should include a required housing element with clear direction on what needs to be addressed, including the housing affordability issue.
9. The State Land Office should play a leadership role in providing affordable housing on state-owned lands. When developing state-owned properties, the State Land Office should respect local comprehensive plans while providing new affordable housing units.

¹ The membership recognized the special concerns and issues raised with mobile homes and manufactured housing. A separate policy paper will be prepared to address these issues.

² Information obtained from the Decennial Census for 1970, 1980, 1990, compiled by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER).