

Building Support for Supportive Housing

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Building Support for Supportive Housing

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Building Support for Supportive Housing

INTRODUCTION

Definition of Permanent Supportive Housing

Supportive housing is the commonsense solution to chronic homelessness. It offers homeless people who are coping with additional problems like mental illness, substance abuse and HIV/AIDS, a home of their own along with whatever support they need to stay housed and healthy. A marriage of permanent, affordable housing and easily accessible support services, supportive housing was first developed 30 years ago to help homeless mentally ill New Yorkers live safely and stably in their own apartments. Today, supportive housing's mix of quality independent housing and on-site support helps a wide range of poor and low-income families and individuals—veterans, young adults aging out of foster care and victims of domestic violence—regain a foothold in the community.

Supportive housing's success over the past 30 years has garnered unprecedented local, state and federal backing and is now widely accepted as the most humane and effective approach to resolving a seemingly intractable social problem.

And, because tenants in supportive housing no longer cycle among hospital beds, emergency rooms, psychiatric centers, shelters, foster care and jails and prisons, supportive housing essentially pays for itself in savings from other systems.

(www.shnny.org/research)

Supportive housing also has graced communities with residences that improve the look, feel and safety of the neighborhoods in which they are located. Multiple studies across the country have shown that supportive housing can even lead to increases in neighboring property values. These findings contradict a commonly held fear that supportive housing will “ruin” neighborhoods. Yet despite the model's history of success, nonprofit organizations seeking to develop supportive housing frequently encounter stiff community and political opposition that can slow and stop current development and discourage future development.

Opposition to Permanent Supportive Housing

Misinformation and lack of information — both about the tenants and the model — usually form the basis of supportive housing opposition. The media, for one, tends to portray homeless and psychiatrically disabled people as dangerous, so neighbors fear baselessly for their safety. In addition, most community members are unfamiliar with supportive housing, confusing it with interventions that are conventionally unwelcome like emergency shelters and methadone clinics. As a result, community members imagine an array of negatives, from increased loitering and late-night activity to spikes in drug and gang activity. Further, neighborhoods frequently mistrust the nonprofits seeking to develop supportive housing, confusing them with government agencies. And finally, opposition to supportive housing often stems from an age-old human reaction: The fear of change.

Why Addressing Opposition Is Important

Organizations have differing approaches toward the often labor-intensive work of building support. Some believe wholeheartedly in the process and think that developers should do whatever's necessary to gain a community's trust. Network member Yves Ades of Services for the Underserved, for example, applauds community members who question new development for taking an active role in ensuring their community's safety. Some groups consider support building a necessary evil and feel that communities should not have the power to keep housing for homeless people out of their neighborhoods.

Whatever a group's position on this question, however, community and political opposition to supportive housing exists and has very real human and economic costs. A University of Washington study that looked at housing prices in 250 cities over 17 years found that community opposition could delay building permits by 12 to 18 months. A 1995 survey of the San Francisco Bay Area's nonprofit housing development community found that 59% of the 49 developers surveyed encountered community opposition, leading to delays lasting anywhere from two months to over two years. The most significant conflicts added an average of \$100,000 to development costs.



In 2009, the Supportive Housing Network of New York surveyed 52 New York City developers to determine the most egregious barriers nonprofits face as they attempt to develop supportive housing. When asked to rate 16 prevalent barriers, nonprofit developers identified property siting requirements as second only to locating a suitable site. In addition, 28% of developers spent more than a year performing community outreach and up to \$50,000 in staff and consultant fees. The Supportive Housing Network's "Development Barriers Report" also found that 39% of respondents had abandoned a site due to community opposition and 53% had simply avoided neighborhoods in which they anticipated entrenched opposition.

Nonprofits and taxpayers alike bear the economic costs of such lengthy battles, while vulnerable citizens remain in shelters, on the streets or in institutional care.

The Supportive Housing Network of New York and the Good Neighbor Initiative

The Supportive Housing Network of New York (the Network) was formed in 1988 to help nonprofit organizations create sufficient supportive housing to meet the state's need. The Network represents more than 200 groups that have developed and manage more than 42,000 units of supportive housing in New York State. Through advocacy, public education, research, training and technical assistance, the Network strives to end homelessness for vulnerable New Yorkers by helping nonprofits develop and operate effective supportive housing.

In 2007, two years after the signing of the landmark New York/New York Supportive Housing Agreement, a city/state commitment to create 9,000 units of supportive housing in ten years, the Network created the Good Neighbor Initiative (GNI) to help nonprofit members overcome uninformed resistance to the development of new residences. Part public education campaign, part training and technical assistance effort and part advocacy campaign, the initiative has provided assistance to more than 40 nonprofits seeking to develop more than 3,000 units of supportive housing.

Through the Good Neighbor Initiative, the Network offers members assistance in several interlocking areas: training, assistance with planning and effecting community support building plans, educating decision-makers about supportive housing and

maximizing media opportunities.

Early on in the initiative, the Network worked closely with the late Debra Stein, the nation's leading expert on siting. Ms. Stein was the president of GCA Strategies in San Francisco and author of numerous books and articles about overcoming Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) opposition. She helped the Network develop an overarching strategy with key messages and materials. She also trained more than 100 providers, appeared at two Network statewide supportive housing conferences and provided national siting assistance to one of the country's most prolific supportive housing developers.

The Purpose of Building Support for Supportive Housing

With the understanding that no magic bullet exists for successfully siting supportive housing, the following manual and attachments are intended to provide the tools for minimizing resistance and maximizing success. The manual seeks to define essential outreach principles, provide useful tools and prototypes and offer practical resources, including persuasive media coverage and relevant property value studies. This manual is not intended to be a cure-all for NIMBY opposition, but it does attempt to distill the knowledge accumulated by the Good Neighbor Initiative as well as the lessons learned by nonprofits seeking to develop supportive and affordable housing over the past 20 years.

Planning for Outreach

Despite the risks of not obtaining community/political support for siting supportive housing, funders rarely provide money—and providers rarely set aside staff time and other resources—for carrying out this vitally important work. The Network strongly recommends that all stakeholders—corporate investors, government funders and foundations as well as the nonprofit community developers—include community outreach and building political support in the development process.

This manual offers a detailed roadmap for executing a successful coalition-building and outreach effort.



Building Support for Supportive Housing: Lessons Learned From The Supportive Housing Network Of New York's Good Neighbor Initiative

The following manual outlines the five steps necessary to imagine and shape an organized, comprehensive and proactive community outreach plan to site supportive housing. In addition, we have added a “Toolkit” of sample materials, educational tools and other resources for use in siting new residences.

PHASE 1: Do your homework

So, you have a site in mind...now what? The first thing to do is learn as much as possible, as quietly as possible, about the neighborhood and the relevant decision-makers within it. Also, use this opportunity to take stock of you own organization's strengths and weaknesses as they pertain to garnering sufficient support to build your residence.

Research:

Site/neighborhood

- What is the neighborhood's history with supportive housing? Shelters? Affordable housing? Other social service programs?
- What is the history of the site itself? If vacant, how long? Have others tried to buy the lot. If so, who, when and for what?
- What is the neighborhood like? Walk the neighborhood, know it personally.
- What is the socioeconomic make-up? Has that changed? Who lives there? How long have they lived there?
- Will the proposed project design blend into the neighborhood in size and style?
- Are there particular neighborhood needs that could be easily met by the project? Computer lab, meeting space, etc.?
- Have there been other recent events or issues in the neighborhood around which neighbors may have organized in opposition or support?

Players

- What other social service programs are there?
- Who are the community, political and religious leaders?
- Who are the closest neighbors? How long have they lived there?
- Who are the decision makers? What is known about them and their views?

- Who influences the decision makers?

Legal landscape

- What approvals are needed to proceed with development?
- What zoning laws will affect the development?
- What legal precedents and/or zoning impediments could impact the development?

Sources

- The Network's Good Neighbor Initiative
- Media (blogs, press, social service density)
- Public records (including minutes of previous Land Use meetings)
- Network of board members, friends, associates and senior staff
- Other trustworthy nonprofits

Assess:

Know your organization

- Does the organization have a track record for developing safe and similar projects? If so, can concerned neighbors take tours of existing residences? Can they do so without prior notice?
- What is the organization's reputation on issues the community will be concerned about (e.g. safety, responsiveness, property management)?
- What is the organization's history with this community, if any?
- What are the spokesperson's strengths and weaknesses as an effective representative and community support builder?
- Have sufficient staff resources been committed—especially those of senior staff—to focus on community support-building efforts?
- Should a consultant be engaged to conduct research and assist in outreach to stakeholders?
- How are you (or might you) be perceived by the neighborhood?



PHASE 2: Create a draft plan

Once research is complete, loosely map out an overall strategy draft plan. Think about who will do what, and when, with the understanding that this plan is fluid and will almost definitely change. The strategy should have a timeline and distribute roles and responsibilities. It should also include several, if not all of, the following:

- A strategy to build support before engaging in other outreach (e.g. aim to have a list of at least five supporters at the first stakeholder meeting).
- A plan for creating messages
- A plan for creating materials
- A plan for identifying and meeting community concerns
- A strategy for reaching out to key decision makers
- A strategy to reach out to nearby neighbors

Based on research, it may be determined that the best strategy will be to try “flying under the radar” at first, telling as few people as possible about the proposed project. While this is a perfectly viable and sometimes advisable approach, there should always be a list of key messages and rebuttals available to use when responding to anticipated critics. Also, it is very important to remember that supporters should always be informed. Do not forget to take the all-important step of recruiting and educating supporters about the proposed project. Even if all that is needed is to meet with one or two elected officials to get the project approved, a list of at least five supporters should always be available to call. As a result, the option of “flying under the radar” will look a lot like a fully-developed outreach strategy, without the actual outreach — that is, completing Phases 1-4 (and of course 6) but omitting Phase 5.

Also, depending on the proposed development site and the zoning laws impacting it, there may be legal challenges to project siting attempts. There is a separate Legal 101 in this manual that summarizes the Fair Housing law and legal precedents that pertain to supportive housing in the Toolkit, as well as some thoughts about using a legal strategy.

PHASE 3: Create messages and tools

- Create messages (see Key Messages and Ten Variations)

Before reaching out to supporters and key decision makers, craft the messages that will help ensure success: easily articulated sound bites about the project that will resonate with those with whom you will be speaking. Since most outreach will be to community leaders and elected officials, many of whom will be concerned that this project will negatively affect their quality of life, the messages should seek to reassure audiences that this will not be the case.

Several Key Messages are in this manual, all of which were developed in conjunction with the Network’s Good Neighbor Initiative. Key Messages focus on: 1) the organization’s reputation for developing similar safe projects, 2) internal and external safeguards that will ensure that the proposed development will be a good neighbor and 3) accountability. Refining and sticking to these positive messages is an important part of the process. Repetition is a key ingredient of education.

For a demonstration of how to use these messages effectively under fire, the Network staged a mock Community Board meeting at its annual Statewide Supportive Housing Conference in 2008. Called Ugly Questions, Elegant Answers, the workshop’s transcript is an excellent demonstration of how to conduct oneself effectively in a heated mass meeting setting (see Toolkit).

For nonprofit developers who need only notify community leaders about proposed projects, the Network also created Ten Variations on Messages as part of the Initiative.

The Network also included basic messaging tools about supportive housing in general. While supportive housing has a strong record of excellence, it may help the outcome to characterize the project as simply affordable housing for needy people.

- Create Project One Pager

Using simple language (no acronyms, no social service-speak) and lots of bullet points, consider creating short, easily understood materials that stress the project’s community benefits (jobs, improved look and feel of block, improved safety, additional affordable housing, community space, etc...see Providence House Sample One Pager). While it may not be advisable to have this document distributed throughout the neighborhood too early in the process, it can be a useful tool to have on hand during outreach to key decision makers, neighbors and the media.



- Anticipate community concerns, prepare, and train all stakeholders in how to answer those concerns

Though the specific concerns neighbors may raise can never be predicted with absolute certainty, many can be routinely anticipated. These include: safety, property values, etc. This manual includes examples of positive press about supportive housing, studies that show that supportive housing does not depress property values (and, in fact often leads to increases) as well as fact sheets. In addition, it is recommended that personalized responses be created to anticipated concerns and make sure that everyone who speaks for the organization knows the details.

PHASE 4: Build support

- Take stock of current supporters—staff, board, partners, funders, etc.
- Think widely about very probable supporters
- Build outward from current supporters
- Make sure everyone can articulate key messages and answers to anticipated community concerns

How to organize/build support

Building a strong base of support from a wide range of stakeholders will exponentially increase chances of success. Organizing/building support is the single most overlooked element of the siting process, because it is often both time-consuming and tricky.

Remember: All it takes to derail a siting process are a few very angry people with time on their hands. Overnight, they can form a block association or a special-interest group specifically created to stop the project, which invariably puts the developer on the defensive. This one tactical error can add years to a development timeline and tens of thousands of dollars to development costs. Not infrequently, it can even stop the project entirely.

Developers of controversial land use projects typically spend 75% of their time and energy answering critics and 25% organizing supporters; those numbers should be reversed. With a strong base of well-informed supporters, NIMBYists can be portrayed as an entrenched, unpersuasive minority.

Start with a cadre of close, trustworthy supporters and slowly build the base of support outward. Ask these supporters to think creatively about their circles of influence: Board members may be able to access members of the business community, clubs and business associations; church leaders may be able to approach social justice committees. Analyze the organization's own staff database—and list of programs—to find out which staff members live or work in the area being considered for development. Play six degrees of separation wherever possible: Close supporters will know people, who know people, who know people, who know people, who may be important to deciding the fate of the project, and who can also provide valuable market intelligence about the most effective strategies to ensure success.

Set up an easy-to-use system for keeping supporters informed and excited about their participation, but remember that any information shared, especially via e-mail, can be easily forwarded to others. Acknowledge supporters' participation and thank everyone again and again.

Potential supporters and how they can become part of your team

Shockingly, nonprofit developers of supportive housing often believe detractors' claims that “nobody wants this.” Nothing could be further from the truth—lots of people want the proposed residence built, yet it is often difficult to remember this essential fact in the face of loud, ugly opposition from a few people who claim to speak for the entire community.

Other supportive housing providers

Throughout the Good Neighbor Initiative, providers generously offered support and assistance to one another in the face of siting obstacles. For example, when one member faced community and media opposition to a proposed project, another provider offered to allow a reporter to tour its project as a “stand-in” for the contested proposed residence. During another heated siting battle, a nonprofit provider performed the same “stand-in” favor by touring a politician. Providers have provided vital information about neighborhoods, as well as introductions to community leaders, sent staff and tenants to community meetings and written letters to media editors defending con-



tested residences. When siting in a community where another supportive housing provider already has a residence, always try to enlist that organization's help.

The Supportive Housing Network

Since starting the Good Neighbor Initiative in 2007, the Network has sent staff members to speak at public hearings, mobilized members to speak at meetings, contacted reporters and editors to educate them about supportive housing, written letters to editor, helped set up tours and, most importantly, worked closely with members on developing, implementing and revising outreach strategies in the often lonely business of trying to gain sufficient acceptance.

Supporters and key messengers

Not all supporters need to come to large, ugly meetings and take bullets for a project in order to show support. They can write letters to elected officials, sign petitions, call friends, hold small coffee-klatches, write op-eds and engage in any number of other useful and helpful activities. Don't underestimate supporters' creativity and zeal or be shy about asking them to be a part of the team. There are a lot of people interested in seeing supportive housing developed in that neighborhood, and they can become active participants in the campaign to get it built. Supporters and key messengers will frequently mobilize other supporters to the cause as well.

For instance, if the plan is to provide housing to people living with psychiatric disabilities, their families can be eloquent and persuasive third-party endorsers of the project. These family members can mobilize friends, colleagues and members of any clubs they may belong to, like the PTA or the Scouts, on behalf of the project. They are both highly motivated to help get the residence built and their voices are especially persuasive. And, in the event of organized opposition, they are without parallel: Not only will critics find it very hard to say ugly things about a homeless, mentally-ill person when in the presence of that person's mother, but that person's mother can help neighbors understand that future tenants are human beings like everyone else.

Similarly, religious leaders can be monumentally important spokespersons on behalf of a project and can mobilize their congregations to support the proposal on moral/religious/humanitarian grounds.

Project beneficiaries

Think about all the people benefiting from this development and how to make their support for the project heard. Some of the following examples may be applicable.

- **Proximate neighbors:** A blighted property — one that may have attracted criminal activity — will be replaced by a multimillion-dollar housing project guaranteed to be well-maintained for the next several decades as a result of federal, state and city regulations. One provider working to buy and rehab a drug-infested building found that co-op owners in the high-rise directly behind the property were having trouble selling their units because of the noise and danger. The provider gained these residents' support and asked them to write letters to their local politicians in support of the plan. This effort generated 300 letters and won the support of a community board that had earlier declared a moratorium on supportive housing.
- **Local job seekers:** Nonprofit developers can often offer neighborhood residents priority hiring status for construction and permanent jobs. According to New York City's Housing Preservation and Development Department, a 100-unit supportive housing residence can create 133 construction jobs and 16 permanent jobs. One provider created a Memorandum of Understanding with its local Community Board promising that 20% of all construction jobs would go to local job applicants, additionally agreeing to report on progress quarterly. Again, the provider was ultimately able to develop in a community that had declared a moratorium on supportive housing.
- **Prospective tenants of affordable housing units created by the residence:** The persons who will benefit the most from new housing — and are often eager to help make those plans a reality — are those who want to move into the units. One developer placed advertisements in the paper to recruit prospective tenants, while carefully explaining that the project still needed public support and political approval. More than 300 families signed up on a waiting list for affordable housing and were pre-screened as qualified applicants. Out of this potential pool of supporters, more than 200 prospective tenants actively participated in the entitlement process, writing letters to the Planning Commission, calling City Council members, testifying at public hearings and helping neighbors to get to know the real people soon to be living next door.



- Local businesspeople/business associations: New residents and staff will shop at local businesses, adding to neighborhood business revenue. In communities where street homelessness has negatively affected businesses, supportive housing will help solve an identified problem and positively impact businesses and their trade associations. In some communities around the country, downtown business associations have proven to be a positive force in helping to develop supportive housing.

Other possibilities:

- Police officers and/or security personnel working near existing residences: One provider asked police officers with beats that included two of the organization's existing residences to testify at a meeting to discuss a proposed residence in a different neighborhood. The officers came dressed in uniform, spoke briefly about the increased neighborhood safety they witnessed as a result of supportive housing development and, according to the provider, "the moment they sat down, the meeting was essentially over: We won." Please note: In some cities, the police department is wary of allowing officers to publicly testify on any subject. Providers have, however, been able to convince individual officers to appear on videotape (see Good Housing, Good Neighbors) or be contacted as a reference.

- Neighbors of existing residences: One provider asked leaders of a Community Board in which they already had a residence to speak to leaders of a Community Board in which they sought to develop. "We basically put the two boards into a room together and locked the door. When they came out, the new Community Board approved our proposal."

Former critics: Neighbors who used to oppose supportive housing and now support it. Few people are as persuasive to current opposers as past opposers: They too believed that supportive housing would destroy their neighborhood, make their homes worthless and endanger their children. But now that these former critics actually live near a residence, they see that it has actually made the block safer, cleaner and nicer. As examples, the Network has put several of these voices on tape in "Good Housing, Good Neighbors" and "Supportive Housing: A Good Neighbor" on www.shnny.org.

- Political leaders and former political leaders who can attest to the organization's reputation for excellence.

- School representatives (for family supportive housing): Principals, teachers and support staff in schools where children from existing family supportive housing are enrolled can attest to improved education outcomes. Education professionals from schools located near existing residences can attest to supportive housing as a good neighbor. One provider running family supportive housing has a strong ally in the neighborhood school principal who has seen supportive housing students' test scores soar as a result of the supportive services for families; he speaks eloquently on the subject to representatives from other schools concerned about supportive housing. Another provider with a residence for youth aging out of foster care located near a parochial boy's school worked closely to integrate staff and tenants with the school; one of their tenants even coached the school's basketball team to multiple victories! As a result of this community building work, when the provider sought to develop on another lot nearby, the school strongly supported the proposal.

- Organizations associated with future tenants: If veterans are to be served, veterans groups; if seniors, senior centers; etc. who can attest to the need for supportive housing.

- Civic organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, the NAACP and the Rotary Club.

- Community leaders: One New York provider attempting to develop a second residence in a new community met stiff opposition; it called upon a staunch supporter of the earlier residence—the publisher of the New York Times Company—to speak on its behalf.

- Potential additional residents: If workforce housing is being developed as part of the residence, potential tenants and/or the sectors whose employees will be eligible to live in the newly created housing (such as nurses, firefighters, etc.).

- Real estate brokers working near existing residences who can attest to improved property values resulting from development of quality supportive housing.

- Leaders of other local organizations including nonprofits.

- Proponents of energy efficiency: If the residence will include green features, representatives from organizations dedicated to environmental improvement.



PHASE 5: Outreach to stakeholders: Educate those who are open to information, isolate those who are not, then STOP. Don't try to change everyone's mind!

- Start outreach strategy to political leaders, community leaders and proximate neighbors identified in your overarching strategy using small meetings and asking each person for recommendations for future contacts — a “concentric circle” approach.
- Where applicable, use media proactively, not reactively (see “How to Work With the Media”).
- Keep talking to community members who are open to information, while remembering that some critics will never approve of the project.
- Work with community leaders and other important stakeholders to address legitimate concerns.
- If at all possible, avoid a large public meeting. These are rarely productive and often bring out the very worst in people, encouraging a mob mentality. If, however, the process requires it, follow steps for “How to Run a Successful Public Meeting.”

OUTREACH

Research will inform the outreach strategy: how to outreach to whom, and when? It is important to know who's who in the neighborhood, who the decision makers are, who they listen to, who the proximate neighbors are, how long they've lived there and who will probably oppose the project, if anyone.

Outreach is about explaining what the proposed residence will be and who will live there: Most people are not familiar with supportive housing and it can seem frightening at first. Also, for the most part, the provider proposing the project is a stranger to most of the people being approached. For these reasons, consider conducting outreach one-on-one or in small groups in order to hear and answer concerns quickly. If at all possible, try to involve allies and third-party messengers in outreach efforts. This way, community members are hearing about the project from people they know. Try to hold meetings in comfortable, relatively intimate settings. Some nonprofit supportive housing developers go door-to-door to talk to neighbors. Some providers hold open houses with staffed tables at residences that neighbors can visit at any time during the day, thus allowing for full community access without erecting a stage for massive protest. Still others arrange sequential gatherings such as “teas” through third-party endorsers to introduce neighbors to the project. Whenever possible, refreshments should be offered.

Every meeting should engender another: Ask the participants for the names of other people in the neighborhood to engage and then use the recommenders' names when setting up future meetings. The idea is to spread real information as an inoculation against fear.

Give out cell-phone numbers for follow-up. It seems scary, but it can build immediate trust.

Providers should continually offer to take neighbors and policymakers on tours of existing supportive housing, preferably of their own residences but, failing that, of other organizations' willing to stand in for the developer (see “How to Set Up a Tour”). Tours are, hands down, the single most effective outreach strategy available; no one who has ever been to a residence will ever confuse supportive housing with a negative “facility” again. However, opposers rarely avail themselves of simple offers to tour, forcing nonprofit developers to be both creative and persistent in getting stakeholders to see actual residences. One New York City provider uses the creation of a Community Advisory Board as an organizing tool (see “How to Set Up a Community Advisory Board”), and makes touring an existing residence a requirement for CAB participation. Another provider holds outreach meetings (with food) at his residences. Another provides van service from stakeholders' homes to the residence in question. Another holds neighborhood barbeques at residences to get community members to see supportive housing for themselves.

Throughout the outreach process, providers need to hew to the guidelines for behavior outlined in “How to Run a Successful Meeting.” Specifically, it is important to ask for stakeholders' participation and input and to actively listen to their concerns, to stay positive and on message and to refer questioners to third-party endorsers. The don'ts are of equal importance: Don't get defensive, don't panic and make promises that can't be kept and don't argue about saturation (see “Special Note about Property Values and Saturation”).

Meeting community concerns: separating the “wheat” (legitimate community issues) from the “chaff” (bedrock discrimination/hidden agendas) and addressing legitimate concerns

Opposition to supportive housing falls into several categories —much of it, however, is based on misinformation and fear. It is the provider's responsibility to educate community leaders



about what supportive housing is and isn't, who lives there and the model's reputation for safety and excellence. This process must be undertaken in good faith and with a poker face, no matter what the provocation. Certainly it is difficult to remain a dispassionate teacher when faced with ugly invectives, but that is the task. One group described the process of talking to angry community members as "putting on an invisible suit of armor."

It is vital that providers actually engage with neighbors, find out what their issues are and answer the ones that they can. The dialogue itself is an essential act of respect and demonstrates the developer's intentions to be responsive to the community in the future. The answers to their questions may not be immediately available (or have no real answers), but the fact that these questions are taken seriously is proof positive of an open process where all voices will be heard.

While it is sometimes hard to believe, keep in mind that the majority of people who think they oppose a well-conceived quality supportive housing residence would, in fact, welcome it given enough time (yes, it could be years) and education.

Providers can anticipate legitimate concerns and answer them—either in a written or orally prepared format (see Cedar Ave). They can arm themselves with third-party testimony to buttress their own statements (police to attest to reputation for safety, neighbors of other residences to attest to responsiveness, etc.). They can—and should—have materials on hand to demystify the proposed project (photos of existing residences, renderings of the proposed project) and plans to persuade people whose preconceived notions are false (see Outreach, above).

Work on persuading those who are important to the process and might actually be open to not opposing the project. If given sufficient time, most will probably be convinced—or at least back off from vehement opposition. What will be left will be a small core of people who will forever try to stop the project for reasons that are neither pertinent nor particularly interesting. Not infrequently, this process unearths hidden agendas of self-interest, like people who wanted to buy that particular parcel of land themselves. At this point, stop: Do not try to persuade people who are committed to opposing the development. All that is needed is to show the first-tier decision makers that there is support from a significant portion of the community, broadly defined. Reasonable people can be persuaded about the reasonableness of a proposed project.

Concessions

In the course of working to attain community and political approval, providers are frequently asked to make concessions. In a recent study conducted by the Network, it was found that more than half of the active providers in New York City had altered the design of their buildings in response to community concerns. The study also found that 53% had altered the number of units they initially intended to build as well as the number of people they initially intended to serve in response to community concerns. In some cases, these concessions represent laudable compromise; in others, knuckling under to discrimination. Some providers believe wholeheartedly in working hand in glove with the community to shape projects; others do not.

Easy concessions to alleviate community concerns include the creation of a Community Advisory Board (see Toolkit), the promise of additional community resources like use of the residence's common spaces and computer rooms and other pluses that many providers regularly offer the community, like preference to local residents on jobs and affordable housing. In addition, some nonprofit providers use Good Neighbor Agreements (see Toolkit), which codify the developer's oral promises about being a good neighbor as a means of meeting/allaying community concerns.

PHASE 6: Win

Win the necessary approval to develop your residence.
Thank everyone.

CODA:

After a supportive housing residence opens, those who feared the worst—that the residence and residents would "ruin" the neighborhood—see how wrong they were. Ironically, some of the most fervent opposers turn out to be the new building's biggest fans—they are eager to speak at openings and are frequently pictured holding the giant scissors at ribbon-cuttings. Perhaps this phenomenon is not that surprising, because the people who genuinely worry the most about their community are understandably the most pleased to see their neighborhood's visible improvement.

Needless to say, providers never point out the obvious on these happy occasions: that had these individuals had their



way, the building currently being praised to the sky would not have been built. Developers of supportive housing are, after all, pretty nice people.

But one provider took this generosity of spirit even further. The scene was the very celebratory opening of a gorgeous new supportive residence that had been developed after a long, especially contentious fight with the neighborhood. A community

leader who had initially led the opposition had just spoken at the opening, and she and the provider were chatting after the festivities. The provider said, “You know, you should be really proud. The next time you see someone on the street, homeless, disheveled, talking to himself, you’ll be able to say to yourself, ‘I did something to help; my community welcomed 48 people like him into our neighborhood and gave them a safe, affordable place to live.’”

A special note about property values, safety and saturation

Much of the opposition to supportive housing will be voiced as concern about the impact of new residences on property values and public safety. Providers often feel that if they could just refute these fears with the FACTS, that these preconceived notions would simply evaporate. Regrettably, this is not usually the case. In 2008, the New York University Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy published a study that measured the impact of 123 supportive housing residences developed over 18 years in New York City and found that property values within a two block radius actually increased over the norm. When confronted with the study findings, however, community leaders have been quoted as saying, “We don’t believe it” and, even more pointedly, “We don’t care.” Debra Stein famously said, “If it wasn’t a study of my block, yesterday, it’s meaningless.” In general, she contended, people change their minds slowly and through direct and indirect personal experience: by seeing residences, meeting residents and listening to people they trust.

The Network has, however, included a range of studies that measured the impact of supportive housing on neighboring property values—the aforementioned study in New York City, one in Connecticut, one in Fort Worth and one in Philadelphia. Since property values reflect a neighborhood’s overall desirability, these studies can also be construed as measuring perceived neighborhood safety.

Please note: While some providers cite studies that disprove media myths about the prevalence of violence among people with psychiatric disabilities, they are not included in this manual. Again, no number of studies can counteract a lifetime of media messages about mentally ill people as “psycho killers.” In the Network’s experience, when a neighbor expresses concern for her family’s safety, she will not be comforted to hear that mentally ill people are statistically more likely to be preyed upon than to be predators; she will want to see with her own eyes or hear from someone she trusts that her fears are unfounded.

As to saturation, providers again often take this objection literally and seek to refute neighbors’ protestations with facts. Again, this particular objection is based in emotion and cannot be eradicated by referring to actual evidence. When community leaders say they have too much supportive housing in their district, it does no good to point out that there is, in fact, no supportive housing in that district—it only makes people angrier. These community members are talking about how they feel—namely, that they have too many bad things in their neighborhood. One does not want to, essentially, argue the point that they don’t have that many of this particular bad thing. Instead, make it clear that supportive housing is not, in fact, a bad thing. No community ever complained of having too many amenities they considered assets. Or, as Debra Stein liked to say: “No neighborhood ever said it had too many independent book stores.”



The Supportive Housing Network of New York's Good Neighbor Initiative

In 2007, the Supportive Housing Network of New York — the membership organization representing New York State's supportive housing community — created the Good Neighbor Initiative to help nonprofit members overcome one of the greatest barriers to new supportive housing development: misinformed Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) opposition.

Supportive housing has a 30-year track record of success in New York — ending homelessness, saving public resources spent on crisis care and contributing positively to the civic life of surrounding communities. Despite this history, the majority of nonprofit developers still face community and political resistance as they attempt to site new residences. Meanwhile, New York City and the State of New York have agreed to fund the creation of more than 9,000 new units of supportive housing over the next ten years. The Good Neighbor Initiative (GNI) was conceived to assist nonprofits in meeting these ambitious development goals by helping providers minimize the opposition that slows or stops development.

GOOD NEIGHBOR INITIATIVE:

With support from Fannie Mae, the Good Neighbor Initiative has grown in depth and breadth each year to meet provider need. Since inception, the initiative has assisted 40 providers that are in the process of developing 3,000 units of supportive housing. Dozens of community leaders have been convinced of the housing model's value. Both city and state government funding agencies have asked grantees to work with the Network to site new residences.

TOOLS/MATERIALS:

Many GNI tools are available on the Network's website, www.shnny.org, and even more are included in the attached Toolkit.

In 2009, with support from the New York State Office of Mental Health, the Network produced a five-minute video, "Good Housing. Good Neighbors," that features residents, neighbors and community leaders discussing their positive experiences

with supportive housing. The film is available on YouTube (<http://bit.ly/ar832Z>) and at www.shnny.org.

RESEARCH:

In 2006, the Network initiated a rigorous study about the impact of supportive housing development on neighboring property values. Released in 2008 by New York University's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, the study concluded definitively that supportive housing does not depress property values. The Network helped place more than a dozen articles about the study, including an editorial in the New York Times, following the study's publication.

In 2009, the Network embarked on the Project to Remove Barriers to Supportive Housing Development, a three-year effort to assess and ameliorate the numerous obstacles that can slow or prevent supportive housing development. In the project's first phase, the Network conducted a survey of every supportive housing organization that had developed housing in the previous five years. Among the barriers being studied are those associated with NIMBYism. Some of the most significant results are included in this manual.

MEDIA OUTREACH:

GNI has sought to publicize supportive housing's community benefits in the media, including proactively contacting reporters and editorial boards, writing (and ghostwriting) opinion pieces and letters to the editor and refuting inaccurate stories. The Network also held a workshop at a recent annual conference featuring reporters and editors, including Daily News columnist Errol Louis, to help members work more effectively with the media.

TOURS/PRESENTATIONS:

The Network also acts as an expert witness on the overall effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and community enhancement of supportive housing. In this capacity, the Network has spoken at



The Supportive Housing Network of New York's Good Neighbor Initiative

numerous gatherings of community leaders, including municipal council meetings and zoning hearings. The Network has also participated in well over 40 tours of supportive housing — the single most effective support-building tool.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

The most frequently utilized component of the GNI is individualized support to providers on matters such as site selection, community outreach planning, networking and advocacy.

Since the Network maintains a comprehensive database of all supportive housing residences in New York City and State, providers call the Network as they shop for sites. Using its database, the Network can research the location and provide current information on how much supportive housing the area already has, who built it and when. In addition, the initiative has amassed a wealth of anecdotal information on providers' individual siting experiences; the Network matches the data provided with qualitative information about potential challenges and allies in the siting process.

RECOGNIZING COMMUNITY AND POLITICAL PARTNERS:

As the hub of New York's provider community, the Network has used its two major annual events as opportunities to train members in community outreach techniques and build relationships with proven and potential allies of supportive housing development. The Network's conference, which has drawn over 1,000 people in each of the past three years, devotes at least two workshops each June to highlighting state-of-the-art support-building practices. In addition, the Network has designed workshops that consciously include third-party supporters of supportive housing, including local elected officials, police officers and members of the media.

The Network has advanced the GNI's goals by honoring the efforts of community members and organizations in welcoming supportive housing to their neighborhoods with a Neighbor of the Year award at its annual Awards Gala. Recipients have included churches, police officers, Whole Foods, the Town of Islip, NY, and a New York State assemblyman.

MAXIMIZING THE PROVIDER COMMUNITY'S STRENGTHS:

One of the richest sources of assistance the Network offers is connectivity among providers: literally "networking" one provider to another. A provider seeking to develop in a community with which it has no connection can ask another organization that has a residence there to host a tour for community members and elected officials who have expressed concern about the newcomer's proposed residence. In this way, providers stand in for one another, allowing individual residences to represent supportive housing as a whole and new, often controversial projects in particular. Since no single tool is more persuasive than a one-on-one supportive housing tour, the ability of new providers to lean on old ones in a given community can be of great value.

PAYING IT FORWARD:

The Network also uses its position as a hub of the provider network to help individual providers build active supporter bases as they seek to site residences in new neighborhoods. Often, resistance to a new project finds voice through a large community meeting in which opposers far outnumber supporters. The Network can help even these odds by alerting agencies with programs in the area that neighbors are opposing the creation of supportive housing. Thus, the Network can harness the voices of staff members and residents of supportive housing to advocate for more development.

GOING FORWARD:

The Network's Good Neighbor Initiative has developed a number of tools and strategies, as well as an information base to help providers site new residences. The Network is, however, constantly looking for new approaches/thoughts/materials that might help supportive housing developers in their often isolated efforts to build new homes for those who need them most.



Toolkit



How To Set Up A Tour

Touring existing supportive housing is the single most persuasive strategy available to providers. No one who has walked through supportive housing, seen what it looks like inside and out, let alone met a tenant, will ever again confuse it with something objectionable. For example, when Fred Shack of Urban Pathways begins to talk to a new community about developing supportive housing, he tells all community members that they are free to visit his existing residences at any time. In addition, he insists that anyone who wants to be on a Community Advisory Board tour one of his existing residences.

But some providers don't have existing residences to show. Others don't have residences sufficiently like the project being discussed or residences near the neighborhood in which they are seeking to develop. In these cases, providers must depend on the kindness of (not-quite) strangers —“borrow” another provider's residence to tour. While this may seem like a tremendous ask (which it is), we have never known a provider to turn another provider down.

Although touring has the potential to be a game-changer, a good tour requires a great deal of thought, preparation, time and coordination between multiple parties.

Select the appropriate site. In many localities, selection may be limited by geography and housing stock. In New York City, consider sites similar in project size, tenant type and neighborhood to your proposed project. However, weigh site appropriateness against quality of site. People don't need to see something identical to what is being envisioned for their community. For example, stakeholders from all over the country have toured the 652-unit Times Square as their introduction to supportive housing. The most important question to ask yourself is: Does this residence put supportive housing's best foot forward? So, when choosing between a beautiful residence that is nothing like the one you'd like to build and an older, less sparkling one that is a closer match, choose the former. Touring is all about impressions: If the touree walks away thinking “I'd be happy to have a family member live here,” it's been a successful tour.

Decide with the hosting organization (if it is not you) who you might like to have at the tour—from your organization, from

other organizations, even neighbors or other allies. Also decide the agenda. Basic elements of a tour include:

- Informational sit-down in which facts about supportive housing in general and the residence in specific are shared and tour participants can ask questions.
- Tour of the residence, which usually includes common areas, garden (if any), computer room, gymnasium, library, laundry facilities and any other “extras.”
- Tour of an apartment—either empty or with a tenant inside.
- Talking with a tenant—providers often ask tenants whose lives have been significantly impacted by supportive housing to talk briefly about their experiences. These encounters can be extraordinarily meaningful for those touring, both by de-stigmatizing supportive housing tenants in general and in creating personal bonds between community stakeholders and residents. It is, however, important to choose tenants who are both comfortable with sharing their stories as well as interested in helping outsiders understand the nature of supportive housing.

Carefully coordinate among all the stakeholders. Make sure you know who's coming, the details of the agenda and that everyone from the hosting organization knows what's expected of them. Send out multiple reminders. Take everyone's cell phone numbers.

During the tour: Provide sufficient handouts (including a list of participants if a lot of people are attending). Bring snacks and business cards. Take notes, especially if tour participants have any questions you can't answer.

Follow up.

Thank everyone.



How To Work With The Media

Many nonprofit supportive housing developers are wary of speaking to reporters based on the assumption that it is always better to err on the side of caution than risk being misquoted or misrepresented. And while there are indeed risks, there are also potentially great rewards to media exposure, especially if providers work proactively with members of the media. 60 Minutes' Miracle on 43rd Street, the 1997 seminal national television report on supportive housing, was the direct result of a pitch to a reporter that supportive housing is the answer to homelessness.

All press outreach, however, whether proactive or reactive, must be thoughtful and well-planned.

PROACTIVE:

Don't assume that reporters are only looking to do negative stories; they are looking for news. If you can convince them that the positive things you do are newsworthy, most reporters will be delighted to work with you to get that story out. But you will need to create a "hook"—a reason to write this story now. Supportive housing's relative lack of fame can work in our favor in this respect; many reporters "discover" supportive housing and consider this discovery sufficiently important to warrant a piece. Plus, supportive housing embodies a lot of qualities that are counterintuitive and therefore potentially newsworthy: No one expects homeless housing to be as beautiful as it is; no one expects homeless housing to improve property values or decrease crime. Other hooks can be unique programs, extraordinary tenant stories and holiday events. You will need to be able to imagine and, to whatever extent you can, pre-produce the story you'd like to see: Reporters generally don't have a lot of time or resources to dig into a story—the more you can help them by providing places for them to go and people for them to meet, the better.

1. Before you reach out to a reporter, assemble the pieces:

- Try to find tenants whose stories embody the story you'd like to tell (if you're building houses for homeless veterans, you'll want to find a tenant who is willing to go public with his/her story and whose story of rebirth through supportive housing is compelling and inspirational).

- If your pitch has to do with the physical reclamation of a building, try to obtain the before and after pictures.
- If your story has to do with supportive housing as a good neighbor, find the third-party endorsers (neighbors) that the reporter should speak to.
- If your pitch centers on a drop in neighborhood crime, line up the police officers who can attest to this fact.

2. Next, think about the messages you want to embed in the piece (see messages).

3. Research the reporter. Learn about his/her take on the issues you'll be discussing (and, if possible, give yourself something to talk about other than your story idea).

4. Hone your pitch: Write it down and edit it so that it seems interesting and compelling.

REACTIVE:

Frequently, however, providers' involvement with the press is reactive—especially in the case of siting battles. Negative, inaccurate articles or opinion pieces (or blogs) appear and providers shrug and ignore them. Reporters call for comments about brouhahas already in progress and the only stance possible is a defensive one.

It needn't be this way. You—and your network of supporters—can write positive, non-defensive opinion pieces and letters to the editor (see the clips from the Norwood News and the Staten Island Advance elsewhere in the Toolkit). You can call reporters and editors who have written inaccurate reports and offer to set the record straight; chances are, they have no idea that there's another side of the story. Again, you have to carefully prepare what it is you'd like to say and what you'd like them to do—usually you'll want to take the reporter on a tour and introduce him/her to third-party endorsers who can attest to your claims that, so far from ruining the neighborhood, the planned development will actually improve the block and property values. Among the clips in the Toolkit is an article entitled "Homeless no more, residents are grateful for housing." The article was born as the result of inaccurate reports, heavily weighted toward opposers, covering a NIMBY battle in a neighborhood where



How To Work With The Media

no supportive housing existed. The Network offered to take the reporter on a tour of a residence in another neighborhood (after checking with the other provider whose residence would stand-in for the contested one).

Don't be afraid to ask friends and colleagues to help counter inaccurate media: There's no such thing as too many letters to the editor, especially these days when you can essentially post comments on online versions of newspapers.

In any dealings with the media, the important thing to remember, and the thing that providers forget most often, is that you have nothing to be defensive about. You are doing a really good thing for the neighborhood, your future tenants and the world. Well-run supportive housing is a plus. It does improve property values. It does improve a block's look and feel. It does improve neighborhood safety. And it immeasurably improves very vulnerable peoples' lives.

For examples of positive press about supportive housing, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and responses to inaccurate coverage, visit www.shnny.org.

Good Neighbors, New York Times, November 7, 2008
Housing that's more than a home (slideshow), City Limits, January 17, 2011

Home (for the mentally ill) is where the heart is, New York Daily News, November 2, 2010

Homeless no more, residents are grateful for housing, Riverdale Press, January 14, 2010

Domestic Violence Survivors Find a New Destiny, Norwood News, June 25, 2009

Supportive Housing Faces Down Routine Opposition, City Limits, February 3, 2009

A Room and Not Bored, One Path Out of Shelter, City Limits, October 26, 2009

Resident Builds a Life in Supportive Housing, Affordable Housing Finance, December 2007

Transitional Housing is Not Supportive Housing, Norwood News, March 19, 2009

Residents of Fort Place facility would be fellow Islanders in Need, Staten Island Advance, September 28, 2009

Miracle on 43rd Street, 60 Minutes, August 1997



How To Build And Use A Community Advisory Board

What is a Community Advisory Board (CAB)?

A CAB is a group of community stakeholders brought together to provide feedback about a proposed development. The Board can advise the developer about community concerns and help engage members of the community. In addition, CABs can serve as a means of disseminating information to the community, alleviating rumors and providing a resource for community members who want to seek information about a project.

Who should be invited to serve on a CAB?

Immediate neighbors should be offered a spot on a CAB. Representatives from local businesses and churches can also be an important resource for reaching out to the community. In addition to these community members, local elected officials should be given the opportunity to appoint someone to the group.

Not everyone in the above categories should necessarily be offered a seat on a CAB, however. The goal is to find people who are going to keep an open mind about the project. There is no value in having someone on a CAB who is clearly opposed to the project from the beginning and is not willing to compromise. Anyone who will simply be disruptive and will not contribute productively should not be included.

When should a CAB be created?

Whether community approval is necessary for a project's success or not, a CAB can be a useful tool. Creation of the CAB should begin early in the pre-development process. The developer can collect names of community members interested in serving on a CAB at one of the early community meetings or reach out to specific individuals who would be productive members. However, it is not necessary to convene the CAB until there are substantive topics to discuss, such as when construction is close to beginning.

The existence of a CAB can continue after development as well. It can be challenging to find topics to discuss given that confidential tenant matters cannot be shared, but it is important for

CAB members to have a phone number for someone on-site to call if there are issues. CABs can be used to involve the community in the building, speak to residents about community engagement and serve as a general liaison between the community, the residents and the provider.

What should be the end goals of a CAB?

1. Build community support for your organization that can carry over to future projects.
2. Demonstrate transparency by showing neighbors that there is nothing to hide.
3. Get tenants involved in the community and the community involved in the building.
4. Serve as a resource to address community concerns.

The creation and maintenance of a CAB can be time-consuming, but if members and leaders are chosen carefully, it can be a crucial step in the siting process.



How To Have A Successful Large ‘Open’ Meeting

If there is any way to avoid participating in a large, open-community meeting...do so. They are rarely productive and only serve as an opportunity for opponents to discover and adopt each other’s agendas while simultaneously unleashing the “mob mentality” in otherwise well-behaved community members. Sometimes, however, they are unavoidable. In these cases, the following are suggestions for maximizing civil behavior and minimizing psychic damage. Many of these strategies are referred to and reflected in “Ugly Questions, Elegant Answers” in the Toolkit, a mock community meeting in which siting expert Debra Stein illustrates some of these techniques.

BEFORE THE MEETING:

- Identify key participants and contact them personally to set up the meeting (to lessen the “us vs. them” dynamic).
- Find out what concerns they would like to address (if possible).
- Identify and recruit a neutral third party to run the meeting (e.g. member of the clergy or professional facilitator).
- Where key participants are anticipated to oppose the siting of your project, brainstorm “ground rules:”
 1. Meeting start and end time?
 2. Speaker time limits?
 3. Meeting format (will there be a presentation by the developer followed by community comments? Questions and answers? Rebuttals?)
 4. Can we limit repetitive testimony by asking that speakers only cover new points?
 5. Taping the session?
- Select a size-appropriate, conversation-conducive meeting space that is well lit, well-ventilated and whose seating can be arranged in a circular or semi-circular fashion. Before the meeting starts, arrange the seating to minimize the appearance of “podium versus audience” dynamic.
- Organize supporters:
 1. Who can come to the meeting?
 2. Who can come to the meeting and speak?
 3. Who can write letters (or emails) of support?
 4. Who can sign petitions in support?
- Think through the materials you would like to bring. These may include simple one-sheets about the project and/or your organization, studies about supportive housing’s impact on property values, positive press about supportive housing, myths and facts about supportive housing, etc. (see Toolkit).
- If possible and appropriate, create mounted posters to illustrate both the proposed project and the residences you have developed in the past. Before the meeting begins, place them on easels around the room as meeting-long visual aids on the nature of the proposed project.
- Think through the questions you are likely to hear. Prepare and rehearse your answers and make sure that everyone who has the authority to speak for your organization is similarly prepared.
- Think through and rehearse your key messages.

AT THE MEETING

Before the meeting starts, have a staff member ask all participants to add their name—and contact info—to a sign-in sheet so you can follow up. Have that staff member also create large nametags for participants. (People are more likely to act badly if they’re anonymous).

FACILITATOR:

Ensure that the third-party facilitator articulates the meeting ground rules, including the requirement that no one interrupt anyone else, no one shout out comments from the audience and everyone behaves in a civil manner.



How To Have A Successful Large 'Open' Meeting

PROVIDER:

1. LISTEN! Neighbors don't want you to talk; they want you to listen to their fears and demands. Don't launch into the information you want to convey about your proposal; instead, emphasize that you're really seeking input, advice, opinions and ideas. You don't have to agree with what you've heard, but you need to show that you've listened to what's been said and that neighborhood comments will have some actual impact on the overall project.

2. Recognize emotional opposition and respond in kind: When a woman tells you she's afraid her children will be murdered, don't respond with facts and figures about the likelihood of that happening. She is asking for emotional reassurance; let her know she's been heard. Tell her you understand these concerns, that you in fact share them and that you have a long history of ensuring neighborhood (and tenants') safety (then invoke third-party corroborators). When another person says the neighborhood is "saturated" with supportive housing, don't argue statistics. This person is worried that there are too many programs hurting the neighborhood already; explain that supportive housing, so far from hurting the community, will improve it.

3. Reflect back/reiterate participants' needs and concerns. "I heard Mrs. Jenkins say she is concerned about neighborhood safety..."

4. Agree whenever you can (replace "yes, but" with "yes, and").

5. Ask clarifying questions to ensure you understand the concern (and demonstrate you have understood it).

6. Take concerns seriously no matter how frivolous they may seem.

7. Be respectful.

8. Don't get angry or defensive no matter how great the provocation.

9. MAKE EYE CONTACT—it is much harder to treat people disrespectfully when they're looking directly at you.

10. If asked a disruptive question, shift your gaze away from the questioner, reframe the question in neutral language and answer genuinely (making sure to never look at the disruptive questioner again, which encourages follow-up questions).

11. Never answer questions if you don't know the answer; tell questioners you'll get back to them (ask them to see you after the meeting so you can actually do so).

12. Be prepared to invoke third-party endorsers who can verify your testimony and attest to your reputation (e.g. "our organization has a 30-year history of helping keep the neighborhood safe, and I'd be happy to put you in touch with Captain Perry of the 91st Precinct who can tell you more").

13. Be approachable—offer your cell phone number to participants seeking more information.

Please keep in mind, having one or even a handful of obstreperous, unreasonable opposers speaking out at these large meetings may actually work to your advantage. Their words and actions may be so repugnant that potential opposers will flock to your side, refusing to identify with ugly bigotry.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Thank the key participants
- Thank the facilitator
- Follow through on any commitments made at the meeting
- Update and thank all the supporters



Key Supportive Housing Messages

Though nonprofit developers should tailor their messages to the specific audiences they're trying to influence, the messages below — created by a team of New York City stakeholders, the Network and Debra Stein of GCA Strategies — cover the essential points you will want to make. To see how they can be used in a community meeting setting, see “Ugly Questions, Elegant Answers,” a mock community meeting with siting expert Debra Stein. In general, the developer's goal is to convince people who don't trust them to do so. Messages need to communicate not just information about the project but address common community concerns that have, at their base, fear. These are the positive, pro-residence messages that one should assert wherever possible. The idea is to stress that, contrary to popular belief, supportive housing will not damage a neighborhood. Developers needn't get caught up in arguing about saturation or how many “facilities” are in the neighborhood. Their job is to distinguish permanent supportive housing, which has a 30-year history of excellence and community benefit, from all the programs the community associates with “bad.”

Because, as Debra Stein indelibly pointed out: No community ever said it had too many bookstores.

1. Fit In: The new supportive housing building will fit in with the neighborhood.

- The new apartment building will be well-designed and well-maintained.
- The new apartment building will be designed to blend with the neighborhood's look and feel.
- It will be responsibly operated by a nonprofit with a track record of running safe, similar projects.
- It will have regular oversight by numerous city, state, federal and private funders to ensure continued excellence.
- Neighbors who live near similar supportive housing buildings can confirm that projects that are a well-designed, professionally-maintained and responsibly-operated fit into the community.

2. Track Record: The new supportive housing will be operated by a nonprofit with a track record of running safe, similar projects.

- Neighbors who live near similar supportive housing apartment projects can confirm that the agency's residences fit into the community.
- The nonprofit agency has a track record of fulfilling its commitments and being good neighbors.
- The agency has a track record of getting actively involved in helping solve neighborhood problems.
- The agency has a track record of success helping people with special needs live in health and dignity in communities.

3. Self-Help: Supportive housing helps homeless people help themselves.

- Supportive housing offers permanent, affordable housing to people who want to escape homelessness and become responsible renters.
- Supportive housing residents have made a personal commitment to rebuild their own lives. They have signed leases and bound themselves to comply with the lease terms and rules of acceptable behavior.
- Counseling and supportive services like job training and placement and education are always available for residents.

4. Residents as Good Neighbors: The new residents will be good neighbors.

- Experienced social service professionals will screen each potential resident to ensure that the individual is ready to become a responsible tenant. Supportive housing applicants are assessed for their capacity for independent living and their personal commitment to becoming responsible neighbors.



Key Supportive Housing Messages

- The nonprofit agency has full authority to reject referrals based on a clinical determination that the homeless individual may pose a serious threat to him/herself or to other people, or that he or she is unable to fulfill the obligations of a responsible tenant and neighbor.
- Each resident will sign a regular lease that includes detailed rules of acceptable and prohibited behavior. These lease terms will be strictly enforced, and residents who significantly violate their lease terms can be evicted, just like any other New York leaseholder.
- Counseling and supportive services are always available for residents of supportive housing, and caring case workers are on-site to help residents with whatever challenges they face.

5. Property Value: Because the supportive housing project is a responsible project, it will not reduce property values.

- The project will fit into the neighborhood because it will be well-designed and well-maintained.
- A new supportive housing project typically turns a blighted building into new homes or converts an empty or dangerous lot into an active, secure part of the neighborhood.
- The new supportive housing will be operated by a nonprofit agency with a track record of running safe, similar projects.
- The nonprofit agency operating the project will always have security and management personnel on site or available.
- Two major studies, one of a major city and one of smaller towns, found that supportive housing actually helps boost property values because it improves area aesthetics and reduces crime. A study published by the NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Policy looked at the impact of 123 developments on surrounding property values and found that properties nearest the residences actually increased

over the norm (<http://www.shnny.org/research.html>). Another study, conducted in Connecticut in conjunction with the Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration Program Evaluation Report (www.csh.org), showed that surrounding property values substantially increased in eight of the nine neighborhoods surveyed. Two additional studies complement these: one in Philadelphia the other in Fort Worth, Texas.

6. Crime: Because the project will be a responsible project, it will not increase crime.

- Supportive housing typically turns blighted buildings or empty lots that attract crime into active, secure havens in the neighborhood.
- The new housing will be operated by a nonprofit agency with a track record of running safe, similar projects and a track record of working closely with district police to root out illegal neighborhood activity and keep the area safe.
- The nonprofit agency operating the project will always have security and management personnel on site or available to monitor residents' activities and to encourage and require responsible resident conduct.
- Exterior lighting and on-site security will increase neighborhood safety.

7. Part of Solution: These new apartments are not intended to solve every housing, service or retail need in the community.

- While there is a compelling need for more affordable housing in the neighborhood, senior housing, housing for families with children, a senior or youth center or additional retail business, this supportive housing project is just part of the solution.
- The agency will work with neighbors to help build additional (housing, service, retail) resources within the neighborhood.



Key Supportive Housing Messages

- The project will include both supportive and affordable housing units, and 40% of the units will be reserved for low-income people who live in the area.

8. Benefit to the Community: The new supportive housing project will create new amenities and community benefits.

- Local residents will be given preference for both supportive and affordable units. Potential supportive housing residents will be screened for local ties to the neighborhood and given preference for the new supportive housing units. Forty percent of the units will be reserved for low-income people who live in the area.
- The new apartment building will create construction and permanent jobs for area residents.
- The new residence will solve community problems like neighborhood cleanliness and safety.
- The new supportive housing project will include amenities that all neighbors can enjoy, including public gardens, a community room, computer labs, etc.



Ten Variations On Messages When Approval is Not Required

1. We are excited to have received funding, approval and permits to build NAME OF PROJECT on STREET/NEIGHBORHOOD with X residents, including Y% families (or children). We want to know what we can do to be better neighbors.
2. We are proud to be new members of this community. From today on, we are available to answer any questions and address any concerns our neighbors may have about PROJECT NAME'S daily routine and operational standards.
3. It is our foremost goal to have every one of our residents and staff members exceed your expectations of a good neighbor. What ways can we improve our current operational standards so that we can be an even better neighbor?
4. With the last funding detail in place, we are ready to build NAME OF PROJECT. As building commences, we want to reach out to the community and find ways in which the supportive housing staff and residents can be better neighbors.
5. While the Community Board does not need to officially approve PROJECT, Y Company has a proven track record of proactively addressing and responding to community concerns, which is why we're meeting with you today.
6. With every residence, we make it our first priority to meet the neighbors and address any questions about our operation standards, even where official Community Board approval is not required.
7. NAME OF PROJECT has already been funded and approved by the state. We believe that answering your questions and addressing your concerns in a proactive manner is the best way to be a good neighbor. Introducing you to our key staff members and explaining the daily activities of this residence is a great way to begin this discussion.
8. We are excited to have received the funding to build NAME OF PROJECT. Our goal is to reach out to the community and learn ways that we can be the best possible neighbor.
9. Our top priority is to work with our neighbors to improve our operational guidelines. We are excited to begin construction on this residence, but having a deep-seated and open relationship with our neighbors is most important to us. We value the cooperative spirit of community and want to know from you the ways in which we can be better neighbors.
10. As NAME OF PROJECT moves into the pre-construction stage, we want to reach out to our new neighbors and answer any questions you might have about the facility. It is important for the staff and administration of PROJECT to address any concerns you may have at this stage.



Ugly Questions, Elegant Answers

The following is a transcript of a panel at the **2008 Supportive Housing Network Conference**, “*Ugly Questions, Elegant Answers: Responding to NIMBY Questions.*” The speakers attending were Debra Stein, president of GCA Strategies, and Jessica Katz, director of housing development in the Division of Special Needs Housing at HPD. The workshop was moderated by Joseph Weisbord, director of Homelessness Initiatives at the Fannie Mae Foundation.

The mock community board meeting below is a meeting of the Green Hills Community Board. Ms. Stein plays the role of the executive director of Acme Benevolence Association and Ms. Katz plays the role of the government partner. They present a project—*The Facility for Mentally Ill Homeless Drug Addicts*. The participants regularly broke character to explain their strategies; these asides appear in blue type.

Joe Weisbord: Hi everyone. I’m Joe Weisbord and I chair the Facilities Siting Committee for Green Hills, and I know that the ACME Benevolence proposed Facility for Mentally Ill Homeless Drug Addicts is of great interest and concern to us, so we’re joined for tonight’s meeting by Debra Stein, the president of ACME and Jessica Katz, representing local government. What we want to know is: Why is this community, one that is already overrun with so many treatment facilities and other noxious uses, being targeted when there are so many other places that you could put this. Why here?

Debra Stein: First I want to say thank you Joe and thank you to all the neighbors here tonight for inviting me to have a chance to hear your concerns about our residence that will provide 67 new apartments with \$15 million of new federal funding that can only be used to create this housing. Joe, you’ve introduced an issue that’s really important to everybody, which is that there are very high levels of economic deterioration and poverty in this neighborhood. Businesses are reluctant to move here because they see so many abandoned buildings. People are reluctant to move here because they see so many people without permanent homes...This neighborhood does need more economic development, it does need some special assistance to make it an even better neighborhood, and supportive housing offers that solution. It helps to turn people who have no homes

into responsible members of the community and creates an environment where much-needed businesses can feel comfortable and they can really thrive.

DS: *In a one-on-one discussion, it’s important to use eye contact, etc. But in an audience format, it can be disastrous because if I maintain eye contact with this questioner it’s disrespectful to the rest of the audience and I immediately distance myself and dehumanize myself from the rest of the audience. And then the rest of the audience sees me as a dehumanized target of attack. Also, maintaining eye contact with the questioner encourages follow-up questions. And the next thing you know ...one-on-one grilling. So what I do instead, I shift eye contact and restate the question since they may have missed it the first time. Plus, there are a lot of theatrics involved in these group settings and re-stating the question minus the drama indicates that you’ve heard and intend to respond to the meat of the question, but not the theatrics. Also, re-stating the question allows me to answer the question that I want to answer. So, Joe in his introductory remarks manages to throw in a hundred different attacks. I picked out the saturation argument and I maintained eye contact and restated the question...never look back at the questioner to say, did that answer your question? In this case, the questioner doesn’t matter as much as did I get the question out that I wanted to.*

Jessica Katz: I think one issue that we all share in this community is that the impact of gentrification is going to price out a lot of the long-term residents, which many of you are. One of the things that we’re really proud of in this project is that a portion of the units in the building are set aside to make sure that people from this community benefit from the building and are able to stay in the neighborhood. You hear a lot that kids growing up in these neighborhoods move out to go to college and often don’t have a place to come back to. There’s an increasing trend of single family housing and the housing market reflects an increase in availability for family housing, so in addition to providing special needs housing we hope to provide affordable housing units for those just starting out in their professional careers.



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JW: Debra and Jessica are also modeling an important behavior: staying respectful and civil. Their tone diffuses the hostility and creates a more pleasant discussion.

JW: One of the questions about this project is its size, both for the street and the population. It seems so large for the homes in this community and does it really make sense for this population?

JK: It's important for there to be an economy of scale for the number of people who are here. Having 40 people rather than 20 people allows us to have the 24-hour security that you are all interested in having.

JW: These residents you're talking about, won't they need psychiatric treatment and care and is it really possible to provide these people with the level of care that they need? Will there be enough services provided so that these people can live stably?

JK: We've tested and used this model for many years. We have about 10,000 units on the street already. The housing style allows us to bring services into the communities that are needed. You may be picturing something more like a hospital, where people are lined up waiting for their medication, but it's really like an apartment building. We call the on-site services case management, but they're really like the kind of services that you or I can get from our family and friends that a homeless person may not have. The services help tenants look for jobs, budget their money, gain computer skills; these are people who lost a lot of their social networks; the services help them re-enter the world with connections similar to the ones you and I already have.

JW: What happens if a tenant starts using drugs? Are you going to evict them from the property?

DS: These residents have signed leases just as each of us has with our landlords. They force us to conform to the good neighbor rules, but also to the fundamental law. Residents who are engaged in criminal activity are subject to eviction just like any other lease-holding resident in the city of New York.

JW: Will these services be available during the weekends? It just seems like these services will be a huge cost.

JK: There will be a front-desk person 24 hours a day and then the social workers will be on site from 10am to 6pm. They are also always available by page in case there is any issue that comes up.

DS: Groups frequently trip themselves up on these types of questions, with one staff member saying services are available 9-5 and another 10-6 and opposers suddenly have a reason to discredit you. Everyone on the team should get their role and story straight and practice what they're going to say. You should try to figure out what questions are going to be asked and be prepared. But if there's a question you didn't anticipate, make sure to tell the questioner that you will find out and get back to them with the answer. It's better to give no answer than an inaccurate answer because credibility is all that your agency has to go on.

JW: What about parking? It's impossible to park in this area already and now you'll be adding all of these additional units. I'm not sure that we can tolerate the extra traffic.

DS: Residents of supportive housing generally don't have cars so this housing has less parking demand than you would find with any other housing development that could go on this site.

DS: Short answers are usually better answers. Three or four short, strong messages are twenty times better than nine weak messages.

JW: One of our neighbors submitted a question where we had a father who was mentally ill and occasionally violent. If such behavior is unpredictable, how can we guarantee that our kids will be safe?

JK: Residents are much more likely to be the victim of a violent crime than they are to be the perpetrator of a violent crime.

DS: It is likely that your existing neighbor is more likely to be a bad neighbor since no screening process has taken place besides a basic credit check. In supportive housing, each resident is screened by a trained professional based on a list of criteria. For example, there is a psychological evaluation that takes place. If we find that a prospective tenant poses a serious threat, then that person won't be a resident. For example, there will be no



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sex offenders living in this building. There are strong security measures to ensure that the residents themselves are safe and that the residents are acting in a safe, pro-social manner. There are leases to protect against serious criminal behavior and there are permanent security cameras available to monitor the sites.

JW: Debra, I noticed that you were proactive on raising the issue of sex offenders and pedophiles and we actually received about twenty questions submitted on this issue. So you addressed this as one of the negative flags of the project, so do you find that this is usually addressed along with many other issues, or is this usually one of the first issues that is raised?

DS: Well Joe, this is the difference between a single-sided and double-sided argument. A single-sided argument is where I'm only going to tell you all of the great things about my project and I'm not going to tell you anything bad about it. And that's going to impair my credibility. It would be great if I just had a cheering section in front of me with no opposition arguments, but in fact those opposition arguments exist and I can anticipate some of them. So yes, I happen to know that people with criminal backgrounds will be eligible to live in this residence, but it is also true that serious sex offenders will not be accepted. So when Mrs. Jones stands up and says that we're going to the most dangerous sex offenders and child molesters living in my neighborhood, the audience goes, wait a minute, I remember that they're going to have a screening process...so the answer is yes, it's okay to bring up your weak spots and immediately rebut them. My least favorite approach is stay under the radar and hopefully nobody mentions it. That's never going to work.

JK: I wait for someone to bring it up. I would say that not only are we not putting sex offenders in these buildings, but we are using federal funds so it's illegal for us to do so. You can look it up on the website. Don't take my word for it. This approach builds up my credibility and discredits that agitated, crazy person in the room who thought that this was their "got ya!" moment.

JW: How can you guarantee us that our families will be safe?

DS: This has to be a top priority for every parent and every member of the community. That's why the residents for this project are going to be carefully screened and selected. That's why trained professionals who are experienced with mental health disability and homelessness are going to be carefully screening to ensure that those people who pose a serious threat to themselves or others are not be residents here. This is not the appropriate residence for them. In addition, there will be significant and substantial operational and management procedures to ensure that the people who are here have access to social services and counseling services to deal with the issues that have prevented them from being integrated into society. There will be 24-hour security and 24-hour staffing. Our goal here is ensure that all members will be fully functioning members of this community.

JW: You also were proactive when you mentioned the issue of schools.

DS: I try to demonstrate that I really understand the audience's values, priorities and concerns — that the people who live near them are good neighbors. I reflect back on the fundamental substantive inquiry; I demonstrate that I hear the emotional issue underlying the question — I let them know that the safety of their community is a top priority for everyone. By reflecting back it keeps the audience from having to escalate. If I don't reflect back, they'll keep escalating as if I hadn't heard their position. Before I try to give a practical message, I try to reflect back the underlying priority: The safety of our children is a concern for every parent in this room.

JK: I very much hope that all of you have concerns about this project and will come and visit one of these existing buildings. You can set up a tour with me or you can just show up and knock on the door unannounced and look around a little bit. If you take me up on that offer, and I hope that you do, you'll find that one of the great things about these buildings is the community that is fostered in the building. I have to tell you that people who have been living on the street and had a lot of issues in the past, when they finally get that apartment and they're finally pulling themselves together... this is a group of people who really need to live in a community that is a safe environment.



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DS: Can I get a sense of seeing how many people who are personally interested in visiting an existing Supportive Housing Residence, meeting residents, in order to decide on some real background on how this would fit into their community. Please keep your hand raised so that I can get your name and email address so that we can contact you about a future trip to a site.

JW: I think we welcome the invitation but we're concerned that your agency has never run a project this large. It may be possible at a small scale; maybe 20 or so units is an appropriate scale for supportive housing for the mentally ill. Have you ever done anything on this scale?

DS: Our agency has a track record of running safe and successful housing and service programs for residents of Brooklyn and Bronx for the past 20 years. We have for this project partnered with community based organizations such as Project X and Project Y to meet the needs of this community and operate in the most responsible way. If you have questions about how safe our projects are, you can talk to Captain X or Captain Y who's in that district there, and they can tell that our projects are safe, positive parts of the community.

DS: You'll notice how often I use third-party references trying to tell people they can talk to the police, the mayor, the head of the Homeowners Association, the principal of the school. That does two things. First, it significantly enhances the credibility of the statement that I just made because I'm not going to say anything false if the reference is going to disavow it. Second, it puts the burden back on the audience members that if they really want to know that piece of information, they can go find the answer themselves. In our last meeting I encouraged people to talk to the principal of the elementary school. Did anybody get a chance to talk to him? Well that's a shame because I know the safety of schools is very important. Siting third-party endorsers can be a good tool when giving an answer to community members.

JK: I find that from the government perspective — and the nonprofit perspective as well — that the neighbors' and community members' lack of access can make them distrustful of us. So we try to say if there is any problem, call me; if you want a tour, call me. Once I was in a meeting

where someone said, what's your phone number? I kind of flinched for a second and then I gave the person my phone number — in a room of 300 people — and one person called me. I think they expected I'd say "you can take a look at our website" or "you can talk to me afterwards" because there were so many people in the room. When I didn't, when I gave out my phone number to a room of angry people, no one abused it. They were so pleasantly surprised by the fact that I gave out my direct line.

JW: But that raises a good question about the demand for police and fire services. We're already concerned about response times and we're seeing crime go up in our neighborhood. And we hear that this project won't even pay taxes or contribute to providing the services that the neighborhood needs.

JK: One of the reasons why I have a \$60 million budget to do supportive housing is not only because the city and state governments care; it's not only out of the kindness of their hearts. It's because it really saves tax payer dollars. There's plenty of research showing that you can spend tons and tons of dollars doing absolutely nothing for people, and they're lining the streets, they're going to the emergency room, they're cycling through detox. So we work very hard to make the argument about how great these buildings are; they're huge savings for taxpayer dollars, which is really why this program has been as successful as it has been.

JW: Many of us have family members who suffer with mental illness in our community. Will they be able to live in this project?

JK: It's very important for us at the HPD program to make sure we build these buildings as an asset to the community. 60% of the units go to homeless tenants. The other 40% are not going to go through any of the HPD lotteries that we know you've all applied to a million of, and never got any. They're really going to be for this community. So we want to hear from you about how you want that marketing process to go. We can leave an application with the community board, we can speak to the council members. We're really open to how the marketing process should go, so we'd love to hear any suggestions from local community residents.



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DS: Joe, you mentioned that many of us have family members who are mentally ill. We know people who have mental disabilities, and it's actually a very important part of our community that people who have some support can learn to function in society despite their mental illness. With regards to the services, I don't know whether the services for this project are right for your relative; you can speak to Person X after the meeting who would be better able to talk about your son and the best options for that situation. Or you can go to website X where you can upload additional information that's available for different types of mental disability.

JW: Could my brother get a job here? He's a registered nurse.

JK: That's one of the things that we wanted to ask you about today. I wanted to answer any questions that you had for me, but I also had some questions for you, and one is about how you think we should implement our local hiring strategy. We're very committed to doing that, but obviously we're not based in the community. So we are going to need your help on the best way to get the word out on construction jobs, property management jobs and social work jobs on the site. You can talk to Joe or me afterwards and we'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

JW: Now we've read a lot of stories in the paper about homeless people who have brought violent friends or partners into the buildings like this. You may have a great screening process, but what about these other violent homeless people that could victimize our community?

JK: One of the policies that we have is to make sure that all guests have to sign in at the door. It's like a real apartment building; you're allowed to have guests as you wish, but you will be required to have your guests sign in. Not all of the tenants like this policy, but we feel it's important. And as I said before, it's a community of people who are trying to band together to help each other. So within the building, it's not tolerated to have people who are being disruptive. We sometimes get calls from other tenants who report if they don't like another tenant's friends, so we do ban people from our projects who are being disruptive.

JW: Well we all know that these mentally ill people sometimes

go off their medications and can have a breakdown. We're just really concerned to know that you'll make sure that once this project goes through, that those people are thrown out?

JK: The reason why supportive housing exists is because the mental health field has evolved to the point where you really can live stably if you have the proper services. One of the things that supportive housing provides is a caseworker who has an ongoing relationship with the tenant that they may not have had when living in the shelter. This is someone who checks in with the tenants regularly to make sure they don't go down a wrong path. They can catch it early. You know what their triggers are. They can come to trust you and say, "I'm not doing so well lately." Or the social worker can come to that tenant and say, "You seem like you're having a hard time these days." So people use the term "breakdown," but really when someone has a psychiatric issue, it's not a zero to sixty thing — there are signs, there are warning signals. The whole purpose of supportive housing is to create a network around people so that they feel comfortable. They can talk it through, so it doesn't get to that point. The social workers can keep an eye on people when they see early signals that things aren't going so well.

JW: With all of these services in this building, why not make this for our seniors? We have so many seniors in our community on fixed incomes. They're living longer and they need the services that you're talking about, so why not make this a seniors project?

JK: Almost 20% of the people who are living in the NYC shelter system are seniors, which is a complete abomination and one of the reasons why we're doing this project. I want to point out that the type of services that a senior citizen needs may tend to be more toward medical services, which is really not what this is about. People aren't there to help you with your laundry, or your meals, or get you out of bed in the morning. This is really not that kind of setting for someone who has very chronic, physical needs. These are places for people who need case managers.

JW: Even if you can address all of our concerns, and get a project like this going, with all of these services and with the budget problems that we're having in the city and the state and the



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project not paying taxes, it might be fine for the first month or first few months or year, but how do we know that this project will have all of these services, and the security, and the screening processes and all this stuff you're telling us... How do you know that in 3 years, 5 years, 10 years that it will all still be in place?

JK: The great thing about supportive housing is that it saves the city money, so it tends to be something well protected from the ebbs and flows of city budgets. There was an article in the New Yorker a few years ago called Million Dollar Murray about a guy who was sort of the town drunk in a town in Nevada, and it went through a year of his life talking about all of the different emergency services he used. He went to detox, he fell and hit his head and went to the emergency room, he got picked up for panhandling, and all of the energy and money that the city put into doing absolutely nothing to help this guy cost them one million dollars. They could have put him in the Ritz-Carlton for a year for the amount of money that they were doing absolutely nothing to help. So, one thing that supportive housing does in addition to being a wonderful, new choice and new rebirth for the people who move into this building is that it saves a ton of money for city government.

DS: Acme Benevolent Charities, our agency, has a track record of over 27 years of experience in running safe, similar projects and more importantly, following through on the commitments that it makes. If you talk to me after, I can give you the number for the president of the Homeowners Association near our X property who can tell you when we make commitments, we follow through on them.

JK: The reason why we work with ACME is their very long history in the city. And it's in our interest to make sure they're going to be around for 30 years and able to do a great job. Of course, there are times when social service agencies aren't so great, and there have been situations in which we needed to replace a group that wasn't doing so well with one that was qualified.

JW: Great. Can members of our community who are concerned about this participate in the oversight of this project? Can we help screen tenants, can we help interview the staff to make sure that the people working there and living there really meet our standards?

JK: One thing that we always try to have is a community advisory committee, and we'll be taking names for that so if anyone's interested, you should talk with Debra. We'll have a community advisory group and we'll go over the local hiring process, what the landscaping should look like and you can look over the design a little bit. We won't have neighbors involved in the tenant selection process because it's a medical privacy issue. So the same way that you didn't get to look at my medical files when I moved into this neighborhood, you're unfortunately not going to be able to look at their medical files.

DS: First of all, the answer to whether neighbors can participate in the selection of residents, is no. That process is conducted by a group of trained professionals using careful selection criteria in the selection process. However, there are many ways that we can work together to make certain this project is a good part of the community and that we can make the community better. We're going to have a community advisory board, etc, etc.

JW: You know, we're all very concerned about what's happening in real estate now, and a lot of us have seen the values of our homes drop. A project like this is just going to be the last nail in the coffin. We're worried about losing our homes and going under water on our mortgages. Isn't this going to destroy our property values?

DS: Property values right now are very repressed because there a lot of vacant properties that remain boarded up. This residence is going to take state and federal funding that is only available for housing of this kind to create a beautiful, neighborhood-enhancing building. It will be a well-designed, well-maintained, attractive part of this community. It will be operated by an agency with 27 years of experience running safe, similar projects. We're going to be carefully selecting the right residents to be neighbors and they'll be in a setting that allows them to be good neighbors. This project will not have an adverse impact on property values because it will be a good project.

DS: Notice that I'm not citing a statistic here. The answer to questions about property values is that it will not damage property values because it will be a good project. It will be well designed and well maintained. It will be operated by an agency with 27 years of experience running safe, similar projects. We're going to be carefully selecting the right resi-



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dents to be neighbors and they'll be in a setting that allows them to be good neighbors. Anytime a project comes into the community it can have a good impact and bad impact. And if there is no project on this site, we have to look at the cost of having a continuously blasted out building and boarded-up site. This project will not have an adverse impact on property values because it will be a good project.

JK: I agree with everyone on this. A lot of the sponsors come to us and they look for data and want copies of all the studies on everything. We love the studies but it's a nightmare in meetings like this. It's just awful.

DS: It wasn't this project, on this block, on this week. I did a supportive housing project five blocks away and had statistics about sales of properties less than a year ago. Not this project, not this block, not this week. You lose your opportunity for the impactful answer by starting to bring in some appraisers to tell you what the sale price numbers are. Now, for decision makers who are actually looking at the facts, the facts are very compelling; I think that in Connecticut eight out of nine neighborhoods had property value improvements, but it's not that statistic that's important. What is important is talking about the fact that property values are repressed due to vacant properties like this one, and that state and federal funding that is only available for this type of housing can be used to put a beautiful residence on this vacant lot — or in place of this boarded-up building. It will be well designed and well maintained and an attractive part of this community. So, explaining that this is a good project helps to answer the question about property values.

JK: It's important to remember when people are asking these questions, no one is actually worried about their property values; they're worried about the crazy guy screaming in the streets. They'll say it's about parking, property values...a hundred different issues. Even in New York, there are people who know that it's rude to stand up and talk about those crazy people. So don't get too hung up on property values, because it's not really what they're asking about.

JW: What about that guy who killed his psychiatrist; it was in the paper. He didn't have a criminal background. How would you be able to screen him out? He just lost it one day.

CS: The people who screen prospective tenants are looking for individuals who will succeed in this type of housing with these supports. They are trained in just this type of screening process and have a strong, vested interest in ensuring that the other vulnerable tenants are safe. Our organization has a 30-year track record of unblemished safety — for tenants and for the community.

Audience: I live across the street from this building and you're telling me one thing but I know something else. I've read that the regulations about who qualifies under the NY/NY III agreements. It's substance abusers, the chronically homeless, mentally ill with a diagnosis, people coming out of prison, young people coming out of juvenile detention. So what's the story here? We're not going to be safe...

DS: Safety is an issue that's critical for everyone who's in this room. The real question is how can this project enhance the safety of this neighborhood. How can it take this empty building, which has become an absolute magnet for drug dealers and for criminal activity, how can it take this boarded-up nightmare and bring it back to a safe, secure part of the neighborhood? How can we make sure that the people who are living in this project are appropriate and can benefit from the kind of programs and services here and ensure that they're going to be good neighbors? This is why you keep hearing me talk about the importance of an agency like ours, one with a 27-year record of running safe, similar projects. We have experience working with the district police to ensure everyone's safety and community members like yourselves who really care about the community. Frankly, I'm looking forward to working with you in the years ahead to make certain that this project becomes a safe and responsible part of the community.

JK: And again, if there are people who are nervous about what a supportive housing project is, I encourage you to come speak to me afterwards, so you can go on a tour to see what this is and talk about it after.



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DS: Don't be afraid that you have to come up with a unique answer to every question. Pick your messages and look for opportunities to get your message out. You do not have to answer every question as it is asked and it is okay to go back to your key things—the messages that are good. You can re-frame the question so that you can get the message out. Don't feel like you can't give the same answer a second time. You can.

Audience: How would YOU like it if a supportive housing residence wanted to move in next door to you?

DS: There's only one answer to the question, "How would you like this in your backyard?" And the answer is I would love it because I know that these projects can be well designed and well maintained and that when they are professionally operated by agencies with a track record of running successful projects, they can really be a positive part of the community. If you can't answer that question that way, then you have no business being at the community meeting. If you don't genuinely believe that this can be a positive part of the community, then you can't persuade anyone for that to be the case. You better practice, do not hesitate...The answer is I would love to have a project like this in my backyard because I know that projects like these can be terrific neighbors.

JW: I want to thank our guests tonight. I know many of us continue to have concerns about this project, but we appreciate the thoughtful answers that you provided to our questions. And shifting back to the Supportive Housing Conference, I want to thank Jessica Katz and HPD for their leadership here in New York City to help overcome some of the most significant barriers to developing supportive housing. And I want to thank Debra Stein for bringing her expertise under the sponsorship of the Supportive Housing Network to New York and helping us do a better job of confronting the opposition that we face in our communities. And I want to thank all of you for sharing your thoughts and questions. So thank you very much.

The workshop was moderated by Joseph Weisbord, Director of Homelessness Initiatives at the Fannie Mae Foundation. Prior to working at Fannie Mae, he was executive director of Housing First! A coalition of nonprofits, faith-based organiza-

tions, funders and businesspeople working to elevate the need for affordable and supportive housing in New York as an issue. Prior to that, he was a program director at the Corporation for Supportive Housing.

Debra Stein — who passed away in 2009 — was the nation's foremost authority on how to overcome Not In My Back Yard opposition to controversial land use projects, including affordable housing. She was the president of GCA, the author of several books on NIMBYism, including *Winning Community Support*, and countless articles about NIMBYism, most of which are available at www.GCAstrategies.com.

Jessica Katz was the director of housing development for the Division of Special Needs Housing at the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. She was a graduate of MIT's planning program and worked as a housing developer in the Boston Area. In 2009, she became the executive director of the Lantern Group, a nonprofit supportive housing organization in New York City.



Sample Documents

Providence House's proposed supportive/affordable housing at 273-277 Kosciuszko



Providence House, created by the Sisters of St. Joseph and a responsible service provider in CB3 since 1982, proposes to build a new supportive/affordable housing complex at 273-277 Kosciuszko with:

- 45 affordable/supportive apartments comprised of 35 efficiency (studio units) and 10 1 – bedroom apartments. 40% of these apartments will be available to neighborhood residents who meet the low income criteria (\$29,760 – efficiencies; \$34,020 for 1-bedrooms).
- The remaining 60% will be reserved for graduates of transitional housing programs, women who have histories of homelessness and incarceration, most of whom are expected to be from the community.
- 1,200 sq. ft. common space area featuring a meeting room, exercise room, and a Learning Center (computer room/library)
- 2,800 sq. ft garden/recreation area

Providence House is a nonprofit organization founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph that has been providing quality transitional and permanent housing for 30 years; 27 of them in Community Board 3. We propose to create 45 affordable/supportive apartments at 273-277 Kosciuszko on a lot that has been empty for decades. 26 apartments will provide homes for formerly homeless women with a history of incarceration graduating from Providence House's and others' transitional housing programs. We anticipate many of these 26 women will be current or former residents of the Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood. 19 apartments will be reserved for community residents. An additional one bedroom unit will be reserved for the on-site super/building manager. Each apartment will have full amenities including bathroom, equipped kitchen, and a living room with telephone and cable access ports.

Community Space: The first floor Community Space is over 1,200 square feet and can be made available for use by non-tenants on a pre-determined basis. The space will encompass a meeting room, an exercise room, a kitchen, and a Learning Center with library and computer space. Space is also available in the basement for storage and/or future program space.

Garden/green space: Over 2,800 square feet is available in the rear yard for a garden/recreation area.

Services: Providence House's will provide on site case management and life services to each resident as well as referrals to a spectrum of services in the community to include employment and training programs, health and mental health services, and childcare/after school programs. Providence House will connect tenants to recreational activities both inside and outside the building. 24 hour/7days/week security will also be provided.

About Providence House

Emphasizing the dignity of every human person, Providence House affirms its commitment to provide shelter and support to homeless, abused and formerly incarcerated women and their children in a hospitable, non-violent, compassionate atmosphere. Founded in 1979, Providence House is a not-for-profit organization that accomplishes its mission one family at a time through our programs and services. These include transitional residences, transitional apartments, parole resource centers and permanent housing. Not only do we provide shelter to people in need, we also strive to break the cycle of homelessness and return to incarceration through the values, skills and relationships that are established during their time with us. Many more mothers and children have followed over the past 30 years. To date, over 7,000 women and 3,800 children have lived at Providence House.

About Community Access

Community Access was founded in 1974 as a not-for profit agency helping people with disabilities make the transition from shelters and hospitals to independent living. They provide safe, affordable housing and support services. Currently Community Access runs over 800 units of transitional and permanent supportive housing in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx. Several of their residences have won awards for design and excellence. (Below left to right: 551 Warren Street and Dekalb Apartments in Brooklyn).



If you would like additional information about Providence House or to take a tour of any of our residences please contact Sister Janet Kinney, Executive Director of Providence House., 703 Lexington Avenue, phone: 718-455-0197 ext. 12; jkinney@providencehouse.org.



Proposed Apartment Buildings for Families and Individuals

Barrier Free Living (BFL) proposes to build two affordable apartment buildings on the empty site next to St. Luke's Church: one building with 50-units (1 & 2 BR apartments) for families and a second building with 70 studios for single adults who are either disabled veterans, victims of domestic violence and/or disabled homeless women. Both buildings will be affordable to individuals and families earning 60% of Area Median Income. We are working with Alembic Development Company on the development of these two new, fully accessible apartment buildings.

Benefits to the Community:

The development of these apartment buildings will help to fill the local need for affordable housing and bring the empty lot next to St. Luke's Church back to life after over 17 years of sitting vacant and unused. During construction we will make efforts with the general contractor and subcontractors to hire local firms and workers. When the apartment complexes are built and operational, hiring preference will be with the local community for a minimum of 35 full time and part time professional and paraprofessional positions with a projected payroll of \$1.2 million annually.

Barrier Free Living's Programs:

- Nursing Diversion Program
- Outreach Program
- Freedom House Emergency Domestic Violence Program for Families with Disabilities
- Secret Garden, Domestic Violence Non-Residential Program

BFL has developed formal ties with social service, education and medical providers in the South Bronx, including the South Bronx Council of Churches. BFL's professionals would provide services to residents of the new apartments, including individual and group counseling for all family members; help with concrete services; linkage to community resources; Occupational Therapy services for independent living capacity building; consulting nurse to address immediate medical issues and coordinate ongoing care. Child care; after-school tutoring and recreation activities would be available for children.

Questions/Comments/Contacts:

Paul Feuerstein, President/CEO
paulf@bfnyc.org
(646) 831-3718 (Cell Phone)

Donald Logan, Chief Operating Officer
donaldl@bfnyc.org
(973) 219-7733 (Cell Phone)
(212) 677-6668, Ext 124 (Office)

Cedar Avenue Apartments

1854-1874 Cedar Avenue

Fact Sheet

Project Sponsor:

The mission of Community Access is to provide affordable housing for people with a diagnosis of mental illness who would otherwise be homeless, living in temporary housing, or in a hospital. Community Access is also dedicated to providing affordable housing for local residents, including families and the elderly.

Community Access has a 35 year track record of creating award-winning affordable housing and currently owns and manages 12 apartment buildings with 860 tenants. The Cedar Avenue Apartments will be Community Access' sixth project in the Bronx, and second in Community Board #5.

Project Description:

Cedar Avenue Apartments will be a new 84,000 square foot, 6 story apartment building, which will contain 111 units, including 72 studio units, 5 one-bedroom apartments, and 33 two-bedroom apartments. One two-bedroom unit will be set aside for a live-in superintendent. The project will feature 28 parking spaces, 24/7 front desk service, free high speed WiFi Internet access for all tenants, security cameras in all interior and exterior public areas, a community room for tenant activities, library/computer center, and on-site support staff to assist tenants with education, employment, and health care needs.

The project is being financed with \$34 million in grants and loans provided by the New York State Office of Mental Health, the NYS Department of Housing and Community Renewal, the NYS Housing Finance Agency, and Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Construction is anticipated to begin in early 2009. Community Access is the project co-developer and will own and manage the building after it is completed.

The apartments will range in size from 415 square feet for the studio units to 813 square feet for the two-bedroom units. All units will include a full kitchen, bathroom, baseboard heating, hardwood cabinets, intercom, and wiring for phones and cable TV.

Rents for studios will be \$682, one-bedrooms \$782, and two-bedrooms \$892. All tenants will sign a standard NYC rent-stabilized lease agreement.

Referrals and Eligibility:

For 60 studio units set-aside for people with special needs, Community Access will solicit referrals from Bronx-based agencies licensed by the New York State Office of Mental Health. There are 19 agencies in the Bronx that provide transitional housing for 1,500 individuals.

Referrals will target individuals who are already living in the community and have demonstrated the ability to manage all the responsibilities of being a tenant.

The remaining 51 units will be advertised, as required by funders, and tenants will be selected through a lottery. Local elected officials and community groups will be notified when applications are available.

Government guidelines limit the income of all tenants to 60% of the area median. For a single person the maximum household income would be \$32,280. For a family of three, the maximum household income would be \$41,460.

Community Benefits:

Employment: Each Community Access project creates approximately 10 new jobs with an average salary of \$25,000 per year, including a full health insurance package provided by Oxford Healthcare. Our lowest paid employees make at least \$11/hour. Over 40 people are working at our Bronx housing sites, 75% of whom are Bronx residents.

Quality Affordable Housing: There remains a critical need for decent, safe, affordable housing. By providing two bedroom apartments that rent for \$892 a month, we are helping local residents who cannot afford \$1,200 and more for market-rate two-bedroom apartments.

Neighborhood Stability and Safety: Community Access buildings are well-managed and carefully monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our lights are always on and front desk receptionists are trained to respond to any situation that may arise.

Community Partner: Community Access and its staff become active partners in a range of local community projects, from hosting and organizing street fairs to working closely with local law enforcement to make our neighborhoods safer for everyone.

Local Economy: Over 100 new households and 10 staff with steady incomes will be shopping at local businesses.

About Community Access

Community Access is a nonprofit agency with an annual operating budget of \$16 million and 300 full-time and part-time staff. Our mission is to help people with psychiatric disabilities live a healthy and dignified life in the community. We offer a positive and effective alternative to shelters, abusive adult homes, and expensive hospitals. Please visit our website at www.communityaccess.org to learn about our housing and employment programs.

Community Access receives 90% of its funding from government contracts. It raises the balance from foundations and private donations. The Robin Hood Foundation is a major supporter of Community Access.

Questions:

Are the tenants dangerous?

People diagnosed with mental illness are no more likely to commit a violent act than anyone else. It is also a fact that people living in safe, stable housing are more likely to follow a healthy lifestyle and be connected to needed health and mental health services.

We do not accept tenants who we believe to be dangerous.

Do you conduct background checks on all tenants who apply for your housing?

Yes, we do both criminal and credit checks on all tenants before signing a lease.

What if tenants stop taking their medication? Will they become suddenly violent?

The medications help people manage their symptoms, but they rarely cause a wholesale change in someone's personality. A person taking psychotropic medications will experience changes in mood or temperament if they change or discontinue their medication. Staff will usually notice these changes and begin talking to people about issues that may be bothering them.

Stopping a medication suddenly is not safe for a person's health, but it does not cause an otherwise nonviolent person to become violent.

Is it safe to have families with children living in the same building with disabled tenants?

People with mental illness already live in apartment buildings with families and children, sometimes their own. We are creating a home that reflects what already exists in every community. Cedar Avenue Apartments will be our fourth project that includes families. It is a successful and proven model that is being replicated in other cities, states, and countries.

What is the average age of the tenants?

The average age of tenants living in our supportive housing is around 45 years. In one of our oldest buildings, which opened in 1993, the average age is 56 years.

How are the tenants monitored by staff?

All tenants are assigned a service coordinator who works with the tenant to develop a comprehensive service plan. This plan can include goals for employment, education, health care, recreation, and family and social activities. Staff write service notes on a routine basis to document progress on the plan, which is fully reviewed on a regular basis.

In addition to meetings and counseling sessions, staff organize a variety of activities to engage all the tenants in the building, including holiday parties, picnics, movies, exercise clubs, gardening and more.

What are the staff qualifications?

Staff are hired based on their ability to relate to people in a genuine and compassionate way. Our counseling staff must also demonstrate the ability to solve problems using solid judgment and communicate both in writing and verbally in a way that is clear, concise, and respectful. Staff must be able to document all their work using an electronic case record system.

How does Community Access train and supervise its staff?

Community Access has developed an extensive in-house training program for all staff. Several training sessions are provided immediately after an employee is hired and additional sessions, covering more complicated subjects, are provided on an on-going basis.

Community Access has an experienced management team with an average tenure of over 10 years at the agency. All staff are evaluated annually and day-to-day supervision is provided by a full time on-site program manager. Case notes, service plans, and desk logs recorded by the front desk staff all go into our electronic case record system and can be viewed by supervisors at any time via a secure Internet website. Our case record system is also programmed to send reminders to staff when service plans or physicals need to be renewed.

How do you select the tenants?

Tenants are selected based on their ability to maintain an apartment. We assess these skills based on the referral information sent to us and at least two individual interviews. Applicants must also produce proof of income. Each applicant undergoes credit and criminal background checks to verify information provided during the interview process.

Aren't there too many of these projects already?

In CB #5, less than 5% of all households are special needs units, including treatment facilities, DHS facilities, and supportive housing (source: NYC Dept. of City Planning Community Profile). There is only one OMH licensed facility (38 units) in CB #5 and seven supportive housing apartment buildings (326 units), out of 40,220 total households and 128,313 people in the community board. By contrast, CB #3 in Manhattan has 69,000 households and 11 supportive housing projects with 642 units and another 250 units in development.

Because of discrimination and poverty, people with disabilities have been excluded from applying for decent affordable housing in the past. The development of supportive housing that integrates disabled and non-disabled tenants only began in 1991. Fewer than 10,000 units have been developed in New York City since then and there is a projected need for 20,000 more. Research has shown that supportive housing enhances neighborhoods by increasing property values (NYU Study, see below) and an improved quality of life for both the disabled and non-disabled tenants.

Both New York State and the City of New York have made the development of supportive housing a policy priority. In the last two years, funding has been allocated by our elected officials to create 4,000 new units of supportive housing for homeless and low income people with psychiatric disabilities.

November 7, 2008

EDITORIAL

Good Neighbors

The New York Times
nytimes.com

New York City pioneered the strategy of providing homeless people not just with housing but with drug treatment, psychiatric care and other services they need to live successfully on their own. Even with all the add-ons, supportive housing apartment buildings cost substantially less than shelters and are many times less expensive than jails or beds in psychiatric hospitals.

This strategy is taking root all over the country and proving beyond a doubt that people who were once homeless can be good neighbors and good citizens. Unfortunately, many neighborhoods are continuing to fight the developments, believing that they bring down property values. A long-awaited study from New York University's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy should put an end to that misperception.

The study examined the sale prices of apartment buildings, condominiums and individual homes in New York City neighborhoods where 123 supportive housing developments were opened between 1985 and 2003.

Fear seems to have suppressed property values somewhat while the new developments, which often replaced vacant lots or eyesores, were being built. But that evaporated once people saw the buildings and how well they were run.

In the five years after the developments were opened, the study finds, the prices of buildings nearest the supportive housing development experienced "strong and steady growth," and appreciated more than comparable properties that were slightly farther away. In other words, the closer property owners lived to these often handsome developments, the better they fared.

The Furman study confirms what advocates have been saying for years: well run supportive housing can help both formerly homeless citizens and the neighborhoods in which they are built. Politicians and business leaders across the country should pay attention.



Additional Materials

Visit <http://shnny.org/research-reports/research/neighborhood-impact/> to obtain the full studies pertaining to property values and supportive housing:

The Impact of Supportive Housing on Surrounding Neighborhoods: Evidence from New York City NYU Furman Center November 2008

Our Neighbors, Our Neighborhoods: The Impact of Permanent Supportive Housing on Neighborhoods in Fort Worth, Texas 2009

The Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration Program, 2002 Program Evaluation Report

Project H.O.M.E.'s Economic and Fiscal Impact on Philadelphia Neighborhoods November 2007



Supportive Housing Does Not Reduce Surrounding Property Values

Four studies show that nationwide the presence of supportive housing does not reduce surrounding property values. In fact, property values closest to supportive housing increased.



New York, NY: Property prices within 500 feet of supportive housing increased relative to other properties in the neighborhood.¹

Philadelphia, PA: House values within .25 miles of supportive housing appreciated at a faster rate than the city's average home values.²

Ft. Worth, TX: Property values within 500 feet of supportive housing appreciated at a greater rate compared to the census tract in which the properties were located.⁴

CT (Hartford, New Haven, Middletown, Bridgeport, Stamford, and Windham): Property values in neighborhoods surrounding supportive housing increased on average by \$6.24 after the introduction of supportive housing.³

¹“The Impact of Supportive Housing on Surrounding Neighborhoods: Evidence from New York City.” *Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy* (2009) http://furmancenter.org/files/FurmanCenterPolicyBriefonSupportiveHousing_LowRes.pdf.

²Enconsult Corporation. “Project H.O.M.E.’s Economic and Fiscal Impact on Philadelphia Neighborhoods.” *Project H.O.M.E.* (2007) <http://documents.csh.org/documents/ResourceCenter/SysChgToolkit/CredibleData/ProjectHOME.pdf>.

³Arthur Andersen LLP, et al. “Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration Program: Final Program Evaluation Report.” *The Corporation for Supportive Housing* (2002) <http://www.csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=3244>.

⁴“Our Neighbors, Our Neighborhoods: The Impact of Permanent Supportive Housing on Neighborhoods in Fort Worth, TX.” *Fort Worth Housing and Economic Development Department* (2009) http://www.fortworthgov.org/uploadedFiles/Homelessness/Homelessness/090902_report.pdf.



What is Supportive Housing?

Supportive housing — permanent, affordable housing in which a range of on-site support services are available — provides low-income, disabled and formerly homeless people the help and support they need to stay housed and live independent, healthy and fulfilling lives. Supportive housing is the single most effective and cost-efficient way to reduce homelessness. It strengthens communities and helps integrate people with disabilities and other special needs into the life of their neighborhoods.

Supportive housing and tenants

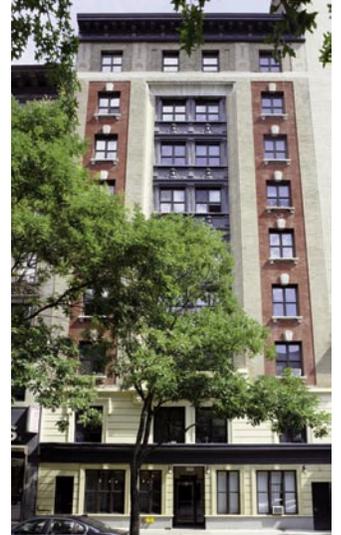
Because supportive housing is designed to meet tenants' needs with services that match their challenges, the people who live there thrive. Dozens of studies attest to the positive impacts of supportive housing: residents stay housed, get healthy and reconnect to the community.

Supportive housing and communities

In 2008, the NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy conducted the largest and most rigorous study ever done of supportive housing's impact on neighborhoods. Examining eighteen years of data on sales of properties near 123 residences in New York City, the study concluded that, contrary to popular opinion, the values of properties closest to supportive housing residences actually *rose* over the norm. Contributing factors may include developers' use of blighted properties and buildings, which, when rehabilitated into quality housing instantly improve a block's visual appeal; developers and investors' insistence on high quality design, construction and property management; supportive housing's 24/7 staffing which frequently leads to improved neighborhood safety; long-term oversight by multiple private and public agencies; and local accountability associated with operation by local non-profits.

Supportive housing and cost

Study after study attest to the cost effectiveness of supportive housing. Not only is it significantly less expensive than the institutional alternatives that homeless and disabled people often cycle through - including shelters, institutions and hospitals - it ends tenants' dependence on emergency services for healthcare and treatment.



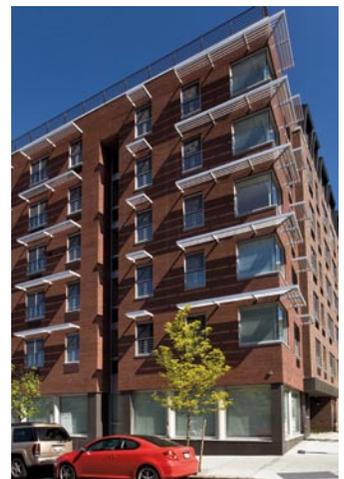
Huntersmoon, Manhattan



Diversity Works, the Bronx



From left: Dekalb Apartments, Brooklyn; bridge and computer lab, Dorothy Day Apartments, Harlem; apartment at Edith McGuire House, the Bronx; Fox Point, the Bronx





Supportive Housing: Myths and Facts

MYTH: Supportive housing is like a shelter.

FACT: No. Supportive housing is permanent housing in which on-site support, health, employment and therapeutic services are provided. Prospective tenants are screened to ensure they are good candidates for supportive housing (can live independently, are interested in becoming housed, healthy and being good neighbors). Residents have leases and must abide by the terms of those leases. Apartments are typically efficiency or one-bedrooms for individuals and multi-bedroom for families, just like every other apartment building.

MYTH: My property values will plummet.

FACT: No. There is no evidence that property values diminish at all as a result of supportive housing development. There is, however, both statistical and anecdotal evidence that property values INCREASE. NYU's Furman Center looked at the impact of 123 developments on surrounding property values and found that properties nearest the residences actually increased over the norm (<http://www.shnny.org/research.html>). Another study, conducted in Connecticut in conjunction with the Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration Program Evaluation Report (www.csh.org), showed that surrounding property values substantially increased in eight of the nine neighborhoods surveyed.

MYTH: We need affordable housing, not supportive housing.

FACT: Most supportive housing is a mix of supportive and affordable housing, with 40% of most residences' apartments reserved for low-income people in the neighborhood.

MYTH: Supportive housing development will discourage economic investment in the neighborhood.

FACT: No. In the 25 years that supportive housing has been built in New York, it has almost always been a CATALYST for economic development. Because supportive housing either rehabilitates a decrepit building or builds on an empty lot, it improves a block's look and feel. Because of on-site security and caseworkers who are concerned about vulnerable tenants' safety, neighborhood crime often sharply decreases.

MYTH: Supportive housing is developed overwhelmingly in poor minority neighborhoods in the outer boroughs.

FACT: Nearly half (47%) of city-funded supportive housing is below 96th Street in Manhattan. 58% of the city's supportive apartments are in Manhattan, 20% are in Brooklyn, 19% are in the Bronx, 2.5% are in Queens and .2% are in Staten Island. (as of 6/01/07).

MYTH: Crime rates will escalate.

FACT: Because supportive housing features on-site security and support staff who are focused on protecting vulnerable tenants, crime rates usually decrease as a result of supportive housing development. Management often work closely with local police to root out illegal activity in the neighborhood.



Supportive Housing: Myths and Facts

MYTH: The project will act as a magnet for homeless people.

FACT: Supportive housing is not a shelter with an open-door policy. It has a set number of apartments allotted for homeless people with special needs. These apartments are offered on a PERMANENT BASIS and BY REFERRAL ONLY. Further, all residents are referred by local agencies with a preference given to local residents.

MYTH: You'll just build this and leave. This is our home.

FACT: Supportive housing sponsors are members of this community too and have a track record of being responsible and responsive citizens. They understand your concerns and welcome your ongoing participation on any number of advisory committees. Virtually all providers work closely with their neighbors to both accommodate local needs and maximize tenant integration; some share resources like meeting spaces and computer labs, while others host block parties and local celebrations.

MYTH: This is just another government program being shoved down our throats.

FACT: No. Supportive housing, although funded by the city, state and federal government, is run by nonprofit agencies that traditionally care for the poor and sick. These groups are community-based, audited and governed by myriad rules and regulations to ensure excellence.

MYTH: Supportive housing is too expensive.

FACT: No. Supportive housing actually saves taxpayer dollars wasted on repetitive emergency services and housing. A recent study found that New York taxpayers spend an average of \$40,500 per person per year to leave a mentally ill New Yorker on the street. That same study found that once these individuals moved into supportive housing, their use of costly emergency services plummeted.

MYTH: These people just want a free ride at the taxpayer's expense.

FACT: Supportive housing helps people who want to help themselves. It provides a caring, nurturing community for those with problems, not unlike your own home. Residents are looking to put their lives back on track; permanent housing combined with access to services allows them to do that.

For more information, contact the
Supportive Housing Network of New York
247 West 37th Street, 18th Floor
New York, New York 10018
646-619-9640
www.shnny.org



Legal 101

Siting supportive housing can be an arduous process, but as a developer, it is important to know that the law is on your side. Federal laws prohibit housing discrimination on the basis of disability. This information can be an important tool in responding to policymakers seeking to block the creation of supportive housing in their communities. While litigation is expensive and time consuming, often the ability to articulate a few basic concepts about the laws and legal precedents that support the siting of supportive housing can dissuade community and political leaders from attempting to keep vulnerable people from living in their neighborhoods.

For a more comprehensive legal resource about the application of federal laws to NIMBYism, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's "Siting Drug and Alcohol Treatment Programs: Legal Challenge to the NIMBY Syndrome," Technical Assistance Publication (TAP) Series, available at <http://kap.samhsa.gov/products/manuals/taps/14.htm>.

The Laws

1. Fair Housing Act (FHA) 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601-3631 (1988). This federal law was passed in 1968 and amended in 1988. It prohibits housing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, and national origin by both public and private entities. 42 USC § 3604(f)(1) of the FHA applies directly to siting and makes it unlawful "to discriminate in the sale or rental, or to otherwise make unavailable or deny, a dwelling to any buyer or renter because of a handicap of ... a person residing in or intending to reside in that dwelling after it is so sold, rented, or made available...." In addition, "reasonable accommodations" must be made to afford disabled persons¹ an equal opportunity to use a dwelling. The reasonable accommodations requirement extends to zoning or land use requirements.

2. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (42 U.S.C. §§ 12131-33 (Supp. 1991)). Title II of this federal act prohibits discrimination by public entities (i.e. state or local government

or an instrumentality of state or local government such as a department, agency) based on disability.

3. Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. §§ 701-796 (1988)). This federal law makes it illegal for any entity that receives federal funding assistance to discriminate on the basis of disability. Discriminatory zoning decisions made by cities have been challenged under this law. The coordinating regulations of the Rehabilitation Act prohibit any recipient of federal funding from using criteria or methods of administration (including zoning and land use ordinances) that have the effect of discriminating on the basis of disability.

How to Identify Possible Illegal Discrimination

1. Is a governmental body blocking a supportive housing site for facially discriminatory reasons (e.g. "We don't want mentally ill people in our neighborhood")?
2. Does a law or government action treat your supportive housing differently than other types of development?
3. Has the fact that housing serves mentally ill people, recovering substance abusers, or another disabled group been a reason among other seemingly legitimate reasons for blocking development?
4. Has the government refused to provide reasonable modifications of its land use rules, policies, and procedures to afford people with disabilities the opportunity to live in a certain area?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, the law may be helpful in combating public opposition. The three cases below from New York State provide examples of how organizations have utilized the legal system to successfully challenge discrimination. Even if litigation is not the goal, awareness of the law and these specific cases can be useful in establishing leverage with government officials and other decision makers.

¹ According to the FHA and ADA, a disability is defined as: (1) a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities, (2) a record of having such an impairment, or (3) being regarded as having such an impairment, but such term does not include current, illegal use of or addiction to a controlled substance.



Legal 101

Three Sample Cases

Joseph's House and Shelter (JH), Inc. v. City of Troy, New York (2009)

Background: JH has been providing housing and services to homeless, disabled people in Troy since 1982. In 2004, the Troy Planning Board denied a JH application to build permanent housing for 16 residents. JH sued in U.S. District Court, claiming that the denial unlawfully discriminated against the disabled residents.

The Proceedings: This case provides an example of the three-step framework applied in similar cases. (1) The plaintiff has to demonstrate a prima facie case of discrimination—"evidence that animus against the protected group was a significant factor in the position taken by the decision-makers." JH used the delay in consideration of their application, the discriminatory community opposition, and the City's approval of other developments as evidence of such discrimination. (2) If there is prima facie discrimination, the defendant has to present legitimate non-discriminatory reasons for its decision. Troy argued that "the project [would impair] the development of important resources of existing community and neighborhood character," that more data was needed to assess the impact of the project, that it violated the city's Consolidated Plan, and that there were already too many residences serving the mentally ill. (3) The plaintiff then has an opportunity to demonstrate whether the explanation is simply pretext. JH reiterated its original arguments and demonstrated that the development was in accord with the Consolidated Plan.

Result: The parties settled after the Court issued a decision denying motions for summary judgment and permitting the case to go to trial. The City allowed the project to be built.

Human Resource Research and Management Group, Inc. D/B/A Homeworks, and Oxford House, Inc. v. County of Suffolk (2010)

Background: Oxford House is an umbrella organization for a network of houses for people recovering from substance abuse. They challenged a County law that regulated substance abuse recovery houses. Four aspects of the law were challenged: (1)

a site-selection provision that established a notice requirement and approval procedure; (2) a requirement that each substance abuse house must have a site manager on-site 24/7; (3) a limitation of six individuals in the house; and (4) a licensing requirement, which included a fee and an inspection provision. The law was challenged in U.S. District Court under the FHA and ADA.

The Ruling: The Court ruled that the law violated the FHA because it facially discriminated against a group of disabled individuals and the burdens placed on substance abuse recovery houses did not apply to other kinds of developments. Also, there was insufficient evidence to defend the city's claim that the law would improve public safety, prevent overcrowding, etc. Finally, even if the county had demonstrated that the law furthered legitimate government interests, it was not the least discriminatory means to further those interests (required by the FHA). Most importantly, this case demonstrated that a plaintiff can establish a violation under the FHA by proving discrimination in the form of: (1) disparate treatment or intentional discrimination; (2) disparate impact of a law, practice or policy on a covered group; or (3) by demonstrating that the defendant failed to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, or practices so as to afford people with disabilities an equal opportunity to live in a dwelling.

Result: The Court ruled that the law violated the FHA.

Regional Economic Community Action Program, Inc. (RECAP) v. City of Middletown (2002)

Background: RECAP—an organization that provides education, housing, and social services to low income individuals—proposed the development of two properties in Middletown, New York. One would serve children with Head Start classes, daycare, and medical care. The other developments would be transitional housing for people in recovery. All of these sites required special-use permits from the City Planning Board. The Board approved a permit for the children's facility but denied the permits for the transitional housing. RECAP requested a reconsideration to consider providing reasonable accommodations based on the clients' disabilities, but the Board did not reply. RECAP sued under the FHA and ADA, alleging that the City unlawfully denied the permits.



Legal 101

The Proceedings/Ruling: In District Court, RECAP argued their case based on three premises: (1) The permit was denied based on the identity of the residents (disparate treatment); (2) The denial of the permit had a “disparate impact” on people with disabilities; and (3) The City did not fulfill its reasonable accommodation responsibilities under the FHA. However, the trial court judge ruled for the City based on the claim that the denial of the permit was based on legitimate, non-discriminatory reasons. RECAP appealed.

The U.S. Court of Appeals took up the disparate treatment claim, finding that RECAP could persuade a jury that the City did intentionally discriminate against individuals with disabilities. The Court addressed the case using the framework described above in the Joseph’s House case. RECAP was able to establish a prima facie case of discrimination based on comments by the Mayor and other public officials that implied that the denial of the permit was based on the identity of the clients. These comments included concerns about the criminal histories of the clients, over-concentration of facilities, and the impact on the neighborhood. The City then identified legitimate, non-discriminatory reasons for the permit denial, such as preservation of land for industrial development and to protect residents from the nuisance of the railroad nearby.

Unlike the District Court, however, the Appeals Court determined that these reasons could represent a pretext for unlawful discrimination given that the Board had approved the permit for the adjacent children’s center without raising the same issues. The disparate impact and reasonable accommodation claims did not apply in this case because RECAP did not “seek a variance to a traditional rule or practice that was neutrally applied,” but rather challenged a specific permit denial.

Result: The Appeals judge vacated the District Court judge’s grant of summary judgment as to the disparate treatment claims, but affirmed the district court’s grant of summary judgment for the disparate impact claim. The case went to trial and was settled during the trial for money damages and attorneys’ fees.

USING FAIR HOUSING LAW EFFECTIVELY:

It is best to communicate information about possible violations of fair housing law ‘lawyer-to-lawyer’ if at all possible; at a small meeting between the provider’s legal representative and that of the entity seeking to block development. Fair housing laws should be invoked carefully, if at all, in public forums because experience has taught that community members may react with hostility to the implication that they are acting in a discriminatory fashion, and may feel that it is being used to quash community input. This is a judgment call, depending on the tenor of the public discussion, and whether it would be useful to let the deliberative body and community opposition know that the law is on your side and that you are willing to use it. Seek out guidance on your strategy prior to any public forums.

Whether or not a provider decides to proceed with either a legal action or the threat of one, it is important to collect and document all discriminatory statements—both those made verbally and those that appear in written form—including fliers, emails, blogs, petitions, newspaper articles etc. If people who have the power to prevent development are saying they oppose a given residence because it will house mentally ill people, recovering substance abusers, or another disabled group, that opposition violates fair housing law.



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