

***Together Lexington***  
***Courageous Conversations***  
***Affordable Housing & Homelessness***  
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***FUNNELING IDEAS INTO ACTION***

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## Purpose and Outcomes

**Overall Purpose:** To encourage meaningful discussion and awareness among all members of our community.

**Meeting Purpose:** To identify community concerns regarding affordable housing and homelessness in Lexington and share ideas on how to address them.

**Outcomes:**

- Prioritized list of concerns/issues
- List of ideas for how these concerns/issues might be addressed
- Recommendations for next steps

## Introductory Activity and Opening Conversation

*Participants were asked to introduce themselves at their tables, share what brought them to the event and how they would characterize housing in Lexington. Volunteers were asked to share their characterizations with the larger group. This conversation led to further discussion, which is captured below.*

### How would you characterize housing in Lexington?

- If we don't address it now, the problem will grow exponentially
- Not a lot of "middle ground" or options for middle-income families
- Scarcity of affordable housing and available resources
- Segregated

### When about housing in Lexington makes you proud? What makes you not so proud?

**Proud**

- Defined neighborhoods and communities
- Good neighbors
- Historic homes
- Unique architecture

**Not So Proud**

- Entire sections of town are run down, but no one looks at it as a problem, "it's just the way it is"
- Few neighborhoods where you can walk to places like the grocery store, shopping, etc.
- Inadequate regulations for landlords
- No public transportation to beautiful, open areas/parks
- Not bike-friendly

- Ratio of homelessness to total population feels high
- Some affordable housing areas don't have access to public transportation

### **What segments of the population or city struggle with these issues?**

#### **Affordable Housing**

- Educational background tied to housing issues
  - Understanding housing related documents or complicated application forms
- Geographically it's a problem everywhere
- Immigrants and cultural barriers
  - For example, four undocumented Latino men living in a mobile home with holes in the floor and walls, each paying \$400 per month
- Middle and lower income
- Minorities are disproportionately affected
- Those addicted to drugs or have mental health issues

#### **Homelessness**

- Educational background is not always an issue for homelessness – mental illness can affect anyone
- Middle and lower income
- Minorities are disproportionately affected
- More concentrated downtown, but is spreading outside of New Circle and is a problem everywhere
- Not as much homelessness seen among immigrant populations, perhaps because of different cultures and a willingness to band together and share housing
- Those with a criminal history
- Those addicted to drugs or have mental health issues
- Veterans

### **What should a community consider when looking at these issues?**

#### **Affordable Housing**

- Affordable housing options are confusing and frustrating to find
- Current cost of living is rising, but minimum wage is not
- Not enough affordable or government subsidized housing
- Potential loss of housing programs
- Section 8 units are scarce
- Use the same criteria as anyone looking for a house when considering locations for affordable housing, such as schools, stores, etc.

## **Homelessness**

- Affordable housing options are confusing and frustrating to find
- Current cost of living is rising, but minimum wage is not
- Domestic violence
- Drugs
- Employment for ex-felons
- Foster children that age out
- Housing not extended to people with criminal records
- Lack of transportation to outer Lexington
- Not enough affordable or government subsidized housing
- Potential loss of housing programs
- School system and teachers
- Section 8 units are scarce

## **What impact do these issues have on the community?**

### **Affordable Housing**

- Affects schools, including getting enough good teachers and resources
- Compounds problems when affordable housing is all in one area (i.e., schools)
- Crime – when you can't afford a home, you resort to other measures to take care of your family
  - Once you have a crime on your record, it makes it even more difficult to get ahead
- Financial thresholds that allow you access to affordable housing, prevent you from doing more
  - If you make under a certain income, you are eligible for subsidized housing, if you make even a small amount more, you aren't eligible any longer for the housing
- Lack of affordable housing impacts children and future generations

### **Homelessness**

- Affects schools, including getting enough good teachers and resources
- Children and future generations are impacted
- Could prevent people from moving here
- Crime – when you can't afford a home, you resort to other measures to take care of your family
  - Once you have a crime on your record, it makes it even more difficult to get ahead
- Increased financial impact to emergency operations and community
- Lowers tax base

- No hope impacts emotional state, such as joy, happiness, peace
- Stress on first responders and emergency operations

## What are the key issues regarding affordable housing and homelessness in Lexington?

*Participants were asked to answer the key question within their small groups. Once all of their issues and concerns were listed, each small group was asked to identify the two most critical issues for the community to address. Their prioritized responses are presented below.*

### Critical Issues and Concerns

- Concentration of affordable housing
- Everything is more expensive when you are poor
- Is housing a right or a privilege?
- Lack of resources (mental health, drug abuse, domestic violence)

### Additional Issues and Concerns

- Applications for employment and housing including questions about convictions (Ban the box)
- Definition of homeless is a barrier to getting help
  - Federal, state, and local definitions of 'homeless' are different
  - Sleeping on someone's couch may be considered 'homeless' by one definition, but not another
- Faith-based and government relationships
  - Faith-based organizations and government departments may have different missions or approaches to "helping", such as the homeless in Phoenix Park, that work against each other
- Lack of access to amenities
- Lack of adequate public transportation
- Lack of funding
- Lack of landlord regulation
- Low incomes
- Need for a small scale Housing First model
- No parity between income and cost of living
- Rights of convicted felons
  - Need full automatic restoration of felons' rights
- The "system" is self-perpetuating
- The poverty cycle is unbreakable

- The system is confusing, it's like finding a needle in a haystack
  - It's not one system, but multiple disjointed systems
- What is a fair housing standard?
- What you want versus what you need
  - Discerning between the two can be a challenge

## What can be done to address these issues?

*Using their prioritized key issues, each small group was asked to answer the key question. Listed beneath each issue or concern are their ideas on how they can be addressed.*

### Concentration of Affordable Housing

- Diversification of affordable housing assets
  - Current focus is on maintaining and need to focus on the future
- Incentivize affordable housing development in Lexington
- Inclusionary zoning

### Everything is More Expensive When You Are Poor

- Acknowledge this issue
- Create incentive for private involvement to create upward mobility
- Hope and incentive are key/absent
- If you are in the system, everything is different – permanent stigma

### Is Housing a Right or a Privilege?

- Choice, not mandate
- Government or private sector?
- Supply and demand
  - Five vouchers, but 50 people need them
- The cost of people not having a home
  - Direct versus indirect/secondary
- The key starting point is having an honest conversation about “right versus privilege”
- What is substandard?
- Would a person have to work for that right/privilege?

## Lack of Resources

- Dedicated funding stream
- Empower/Promote the public sector and existing resources
- Give faith-based organizations ownership over providing resources for mental health and domestic violence support
- Increased number of dispersed clinics and rehabilitation centers
- Lobbying for tripling federal affordable housing budgets
- Marketing and promotion increase, such as public service announcements
  - Conduct a cost-benefit analysis; Cost of housing is less expensive than homelessness

## Key Next Steps

*Participants were asked to provide recommendations for next steps based on the conversations.*

- Build a case for support in Lexington – include data that shows cost of homelessness is more expensive than affordable housing
- Generate more awareness that homelessness and affordable housing are community issues
- Get political leaders to buy-in and know they'd be supported
- Get private sector involved because the government has limited resources
  - Public/Private partnerships
- Regular meetings between housing groups and key government bodies

## Meeting Debrief

### Evaluation Questions/Responses

*To bring the session to a close, participants were asked to complete an evaluation. The complete evaluation results will be tabulated at the conclusion of the 12 conversations, but the closing three questions are included below to inform the remaining conversations. Duplicate responses are denoted with an asterisk.*

#### 1. What worked for you during tonight's session?

- Open conversation/discussion \*\*
- Able to be frank regarding your opinion
- I liked that the group was about 20 people, that really worked
- Insight I gained from others
- Location
- Small groups
- Small groups, people with experience
- The directed approach to the discussion
- Time and location
- Transitions, notes on the flip boards

#### 2. What would have made tonight's session better?

- Bring in members of the homeless or former homeless
- Focus more than a few minutes on the final steps
- Get more people involved
- Have more physical space between groups, particularly during group discussion
- It was great!
- More diversity
- More people involved – how do you advertise Courageous Conversations?
- Only that I want to know that the next steps might actually happen
- Promotion, make it clear people only have to attend one
- Reach out to homeless/living in substandard housing, like people at the Hope Center
- With two groups, cross talk made it difficult to focus – separate groups for acoustics

**3. Do you have any lingering comments and/or questions?**

- Disappointed with the low turnout/attendance and lack of diverse perspectives – too much preaching to the choir
- Great discussion
- Keep it going!
- Sometimes I wasn't heard or acknowledged; It's tough to share when a small group makes you feel judged
- Thank you