

Together Lexington
Courageous Conversations
Affordable Housing and 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 relationship concerns/issues regarding affordable housing and homelessness in Lexington and share ideas on how to address them.

Outcomes:

- Prioritized list of key 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 affordable housing/homelessness in Lexington?

Affordable Housing

- A lot of gentrification
- Accessibility is a necessity
- Dire – you can talk about affordable but it needs to be desirable
- Lexington is a tale of two or three cities
 - The poor are invisible to the rest
- Section 8 Housing
- St. James Place and Christ Church Apartments is what we think of affordable housing
- The term “affordable housing” is relative – something may be affordable but not desirable
- There are formulas that determine how much you should spend on housing

Homelessness

- Behavioral/Mental health issues
- Domestic violence
- Educational issues
- Elderly
- Felons
- Misunderstood people

- Numbers are rising in Lexington
- Panhandling is an issue in Lexington
- People living in vehicles and not viewing themselves as homeless
- People with multiple physical problems
- Rise in youth
 - Foster care youth aging out
 - Runaways
 - 17-18 year olds
- Shouldn't be a legal issue to be homeless
- Single mothers with children
- Stigma to being homeless
- Substance abuse
- There's a new homeless – those that are losing their housing
- Those who want to be homeless
- Veterans

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

Affordable Housing

POPULATION

- Disabled
- Elderly
- English as a second language
- Minorities
- Refugees and immigrants
- Single parents
- Unemployed
- Veterans

CITY

- Cardinal Valley
- Ghettos have been more dispersed to where they are more invisible
- Poorer, older, minority neighborhoods and neighborhoods that are neglected
 - Zip codes: 40511, 40508, 40507, 40517, 40504

Homelessness

POPULATION

- Lack of affordable housing leads to homelessness
- Panhandlers are doing what they are doing to get drugs, but they might have housing

CITY

- Communities that don't have resources are helping them get to Lexington because we have resources to accommodate
- Downtown – that's their place to socialize and where the community resources are located
- Lexington is a friendly, generous community and people come from all over
 - 46% of those housed in shelters are not from Kentucky
- North Broadway To New Circle and North Limestone to New Circle
- People are staying in the area where they lost their homes because it is familiar
- People in treatment or hospitals don't leave Lexington or their families don't come back to get them
- Pockets in the city

What impact do these issues have on the community?

Affordable Housing

- A community is only as good as its worst neighborhood
- Cascading effect
 - Voting and how it impacts the future is one aspect
- Good family life
- Decrease in community safety and cohesiveness
- Educational disruptions in children
- Health and diet
- Increase in foster care
- Increase in medical costs
- Increased need for policing
- Increased taxes for property owners
- It costs the community a lot more money to ignore the problem than to address it
- Leads to homelessness
- More safety issues
- Unsupervised children after school due to parents working multiple jobs

Homelessness

- Because it is visible, many people react with fear and it tears apart the community
- Mirrors affordable housing, just pushes a little further
- Reflects the type of society we are

What are the key issues regarding homelessness and affordable housing 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 regarding homelessness

- Collaboration with diverse agencies
- Compassion fatigue
- Jobs
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of resources - money
- Lack of shelter
- Lack of support services
- Medical care
- Strained resources
- Unaddressed, underlying causes
 - Substance abuse
 - Education

Critical issues and concerns regarding affordable housing

- Builders don't take incentives to construct affordable housing
- Determine what is affordable
- Gentrification
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of caring about the problem
- Lack of education

- Lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of incentives for people to offer affordable housing
- Lack of information about affordable housing
- Needs to be livable and safe
- Section 8 Housing availability

What can be done to address these issues?

Homelessness

- Affordable housing trust fund (subsidies)
- Education
- Employment co-op
 - Building trade
- Fundraising
 - Lemonade stands
- In-kind donations
- Livable Lexington age – friendly initiatives
- Outcomes and faith – based organizations – motivations
- Partnerships with cooperatives
- Public (taxes)
- Sharing resources
 - Children, aging, and time
- Tiny homes/Container units/Secured parking
- Visibility – basic access

Affordable Housing

- Create for-profit incentives to offer affordable housing
- Educate builders about how to build
- Educate public through art and writing to increase compassion
 - Showcase art displaying homeless individuals
- Educate versus mandate
- Inclusive zoning

- Increased educational and employment opportunities → affordable college and expanded technical/trade options
 - Improve public transportation options
- Research other communities where they have been successful with creating sustainable affordable living and implement locally
- Willingness to spend public funds on affordable housing

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*
- Different concern
- Everything
- Hearing other ideas about causes of homelessness and how to possibly deal with affordable housing
- Increased my awareness of the depth of the problems
- Knowledge about topic
- Listening to ideas and concepts
- Safety; Openness
- Total perspectives
- Very inviting and comfortable environment

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

- Nothing*
- More participants*
- A lot of the questions generated redundant answers - could move more smoothly and quickly if topic not separated or if separated into 2 different days, 2 different topics
- Appreciate the need for structure but the conversation felt stifled by time limitations and posed questions. Spend more time on solutions.
- More time on the solutions; some of the earlier questions seemed repetitive
- Next steps, how to continue the conversation (follow up)
- Outstanding format – almost could've divided into two separate meetings
- Repetitive
- Separate the two topics

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

- Great conversation
- Having the mayor present, etc.
- Thank you! I'd like to see Together Lexington and Age Friendly Lexington join forces.
- The idea of a cascading impact
- The last 20 minutes was the most helpful