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The State of Rural Housing in Virginia

A Rural Network Forum

Discussion Questions



Priority Needs:

1. What are the top 3 housing needs in this area?
2. How have these needs changed over the past decade?
3. Are these housing needs uniform throughout this area, or do some areas have different priority needs?
4. Looking out into the future, what do you think housing needs will look like in 5 years? How will they be different than today?

Let's talk about homeownership:

1. What are the major blocks to creating more homeownership opportunity?
2. Do we need to build more homes? What type? What price range? Is manufactured housing an important way to meet housing needs?
3. Is mortgage financing available / adequate?
4. How important is it to focus on rehab of owner-occupied homes?

Let's talk about rental housing:

1. Do we need more rental housing?
2. Should the focus be on rehabilitation, or new construction?
3. Is rental housing in this area affordable?

Let's talk about special housing needs and gaps in the housing delivery system:

1. What's the best way to meet the housing needs of seniors still living in their homes?
2. Are there other special housing needs in this area that need to be addressed?
3. What are the biggest gaps in the housing delivery system in this area?
4. If you could change one thing about housing in this area, what would it be?

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- Probably the most pressing need is a low inventory of quality affordable and senior housing
 - This is a need that has existed for at least over 30 years – the housing stock that's affordable is substandard
 - Medicaid has restrictions about keeping a house on the market at market rate for one year – which often prevents the owners for selling it for less and keeps the house on the market for much longer
- Seeing an increase in multi-generational households (adult families moving back in with their senior parents, etc.)
- There are a number of blocks to homeownership: loans, underwriting process, downpayments, closing costs
- Broadband and cell phone tower accessibility is a new facet to the infrastructure that is lacking in rural areas
 - Such areas become undesirable to move into, and potential home buyers end up buying in more suburbanized areas instead
- Realtors and loan officers need education on the assistance programs and grant money available for their clients – cross-sector communication is key
 - The local Community Service Boards offer a wide range of support, but they are not widely known by the population who could best utilize their services and they struggle with funding
- Though the region is in need of newly constructed homes to improve the inventory quality and style, rehabbing is still important to allow for aging in place
 - There has been a trend moving away from continuing care facilities for seniors, so home adaptability (accessibility improvements, weatherization, etc.) has become increasingly important
 - But it is still very expensive to make modifications such as first-floor bedrooms and maneuverable bathrooms
- Builders should move away from linear building into community-based planning strategies (closer proximity to transportation, healthcare services, community centers, etc.)
 - Currently there are too many barriers in zoning policy, especially for subdivisions

- The housing market is at a point right now where Baby Boomers and Millennials are seeking the same kind of housing as each other – smaller houses – but there is a lack of quality affordable options for either group to choose from due to a scarcity of builders willing to create affordable units
 - Boomers are looking to scale down as they age (single-story or smaller homes for easy mobility and lower electric bills)
 - Millennials are looking for small, starter houses
 - There seems to be a fundamental difference in how Boomers and Millennials view homeownership; where Boomers see housing as a means of upward socioeconomic mobility, Millennials see homeownership as an anchor
- Need more affordable rentals for households making less than \$50,000 a year – the wealthier sections of the counties in this region cause the AMI to spike, but there is still a considerable population of extremely low income households that need housing
- The region needs to build fewer “McMansions” and more modest houses to address issues of affordability, seniors, and first time homebuyers
- Seniors who age in place need more in-home services, including health care and property maintenance services
 - Seniors unable to take care of home maintenance contribute to the rapidly declining quality of the existing housing stock – preventative services would be more cost effective than full rehabbing
 - Currently many seniors live too far away from transportation, services and caregivers who can provide them with support
- The public should be educated on affordable housing to battle stigma and NIMBYism
- In Harrisonburg, JMU builds brand new student housing and leaves the substandard old student housing units to the immigrant population, who are vulnerable in that they are often hesitant or unable to argue for much-needed rehab
- Fauquier County currently does not have any affordable housing policies like other counties do – implementing some policies that incentivize or require affordable options can begin to chip away at the affordability problem
- The cost of land that can be zoned into multifamily developments is very high, so builders are not inclined to put money into multifamily rentals
- Other infrastructure issues include lack of road maintenance and access to sewer/water
 - Small towns do not offer sewer and water services – homeowners must pay a hefty fee (\$25,000 in some cases) to use their own well for water
- Large parcel farms are very hard to sell – they cannot be subdivided into smaller acreage for housing development because of zoning policy