

2019 CSAC Challenge Award Entry: Home for All San Mateo County

Overview: Home for All builds community support for all types of housing through education, innovative tools and by bringing people together to talk about housing.

Challenge: In 2014, there were 24 jobs in San Mateo County for every housing unit. The job/housing gap caused rents to skyrocket and home prices to more than double. Some residents moved farther away from their jobs, trading a home they could afford for a very long commute. Other residents left the area all together, leaving small and large businesses alike struggling to recruit and retain staff.

Between 2010 and 2014, housing production in San Mateo County was at an all-time low, averaging 340 new units per year, primarily due to neighborhood opposition to new housing. In most jurisdictions, opposition to housing was being driven by a small number of very vocal residents.

Solution: In 2015, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors convened a “Closing the Jobs/Housing Gap Task Force”, co-chaired by Supervisors Don Horsley and Warren Slocum. The Task Force brought together 54 people representing all sectors of the community, including representatives from all 20 cities and towns, housing advocates, realtors, developers, businesses, the faith community and school districts. The Task Force evolved into a staffed initiative, titled Home for All, to educate the community about housing options, increase funding for affordable housing, track housing policies and legislation, promote creative land use for all types of housing, and expand community participation in housing decisions.

Home for All created educational materials including a website, homeforallsmc@smc.org, newsletter and social media channels promoting a variety of housing solutions. Six community convenings have brought together over 1,000 attendees on topics ranging from second units, to community engagement, to parking and congestion. In funding, by 2020, the County will have allocated over \$200 million towards affordable housing and to work with school districts on teacher housing. Local foundations and banks are also working with the County to explore on-going funding for specific projects and for second units. Home for All tracks housing policies adopted by all 20 cities and the County, and hosts workshops on policies.

Second units (in-law units) are naturally affordable housing that are faster, cheaper and easier to build than larger development projects. A stakeholder convening, a website (www.secondunitcenterSMC.org), an online cost calculator, video testimonials, an inspiration book, and a 90-page “How to Build a Second Unit” workbook help residents navigate the process to building them. In addition, a “one-stop shop” service will be available soon to assist homeowners with all aspects of scoping, designing and permitting a second unit as well as being a successful landlord.

Expanded community participation in local housing decisions has facilitated political support towards new housing. Since 2017, Home for All has helped 9 (of 20) cities engage their broader communities in productive dialogue and support for localized housing solutions. In many cases, more than 50 percent of attendees were at their first city-sponsored meeting, and council members gained a better sense of the types of housing programs and projects the community would support. In addition, Home for All has commissioned research on communications framing, integrated community-based services such as home sharing, and hosted networking and continuous learning events that have been integral for cities and organizations as they progress towards housing solutions.

Innovation: Home for All is building new partnerships, testing new approaches to community engagement, and developing countywide support for all types of housing through high quality communications and publications, education of city staff and decision makers, and successfully getting new people to participate in community conversations about housing. This last accomplishment has been the key to removing barriers to Planning Commission and City/Town Council support for housing friendly policies and initiatives. In order to achieve the Board of Supervisors' goal to reduce the jobs/housing gap, Home for All had to be, and truly is, a countywide collaboration of many varied partners. The new approach to community engagement was jointly developed by the four pilot cities, consultant Common Knowledge and the Home for All staff, and has been successfully replicated in other cities. High quality materials and branding provide credibility and clarity on the initiative, and have received national awards and broad community interest. Finally, Home for All has prompted many new partnerships in the county, bringing together a diverse range of local leaders, community organizations, faith groups, non-profits, civic associations and the business community to participate in community conversations and to stay involved in housing discussions.

Results: Between 2014 and 2018, a total of 23,531 housing units were completed, under construction, permitted or are in the pipeline in San Mateo County. This number is a significant increase in housing production compared to the prior four years. Through education, a new approach to community engagement, countywide convenings and work with Planning Commissioners, City Council Members and our County Board of Supervisors, Home for All has informed people about housing options and generated support for local action. While much work on housing remains to be done to close the jobs/housing gap, that local action includes a quadrupling of second unit (ADU) permit applications countywide in the past four years, passage of over 40 local "housing friendly" ordinances, and the development of over 2,050 new affordable units and preservation of almost 600 affordable units.

Replicability: The Home for All model could be adopted and replicated by counties and cities throughout California. City partners have ranged from towns with less than 5,000 residents to cities with populations over 100,000. Home for All has developed workbooks for the community conversations and partner convenings, and makes them available to other counties and cities. In fact, Sonoma County is developing the next generation of the online second unit cost/benefit calculator.

The Board of Supervisors in any county undertaking the Home for All approach must be fully committed to working collaboratively with cities, towns and other community partners. This includes providing learning opportunities so elected and appointed officials and local residents can thoughtfully consider a range of housing options and then decide what is best for their communities. Home for All educates, convenes, and promotes innovation around housing in the hope that cities will take positive action. This is exactly what we have seen happen. There are still controversial housing issues, but San Mateo County has made progress on all types of housing – from new ordinances to approval of high-density development. As one of our partners said, "Home for All has changed the conversation about housing in San Mateo County. It has been transformational!"

Program Contact: Peggy Jensen
Deputy County Manager, San Mateo County
Pjensen@smctgov.org
(650) 363-4598