

Northwest Suburban Housing Collaborative (NWSHC)

Recognizing the market challenges related to bridging metropolitan Chicago's jobs-housing mismatch, and addressing local housing demands, municipal leaders in the job-rich northwest suburbs have been pursuing solutions to creating and sustaining the continuum of housing opportunities needed. Even if each municipality had the resources to address these topics on its own, these challenges do not adhere to municipal borders. Furthermore, there are tremendous efficiencies to be gained from sharing staff and programs.

Therefore, the Northwest Suburban Housing Collaborative (NWSHC) was created in 2011 to help five municipalities in Chicago's Northwest Suburbs develop regional solutions to address the short and long-term housing needs of the participating communities.

The five municipalities - **Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Mt. Prospect, Palatine, Rolling Meadows** - came together to address the common challenges of rising foreclosures, growing income diversity, demographic changes and an aging population, affordable rental options at risk of being lost, and employees being forced to live further from work to afford housing costs. Initial funding from The Chicago Community Trust, BMO Harris Bank, and Wintrust Financial through Village Bank and Trust allowed the five communities to work toward solutions to these challenges.

*Regional
collaboration
is a solution.*

Background

The Collaborative was initially established via two short (one and two-year) Intergovernmental Agreements. Thanks to key partners – including the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Metropolitan Planning Council – they created a subregional housing plan called [Homes for a Changing Region](#), and began implementing its recommendations. Due to initial achievements and increased confidence, all five village boards updated the IGA in 2015 for a five-year period.

Community and economic development staff from each of the towns comprise the steering committee. Following the completion of the Homes for a Changing Region report, the Collaborative was directed by its member communities to focus on the housing needs of the municipalities' older residents. The Collaborative proceeded in this direction by completing a Senior Housing Needs Assessment which quantifies senior housing needs in the subregion and includes strategies to address the goal to assist older residents with "aging in place" as recommended in the Homes for a Changing Region report. Accomplishments in this area include:

- 2014 - The design and implementation on a Handyman Program for the benefit of seniors and persons with disabilities; and
- 2015 - The publication of a Senior Resource Guide, which provides information on all types of senior housing and transportation services in the five municipalities and which is used widely by older residents and service agencies.



Current Efforts

Currently, in addition to continuing its emphasis on the housing needs of its older residents, the Collaborative is focusing on its sustainability while also working to strengthen the existing housing stock and increase housing options that are suitable for the area's diverse workforce. This work includes multifamily housing stabilization and preservation, single-family rehabilitation, and exploring the appropriate mix of housing options that will support area employers and encourage local employees to live near work. The engagement of key private sector partners including financial institutions, employers, and developers is part of this work. After signing the newest IGA in 2015, the Collaborative members identified a few priority activities for their initial workplan:

Continue to Preserve and Increase Housing for Older Residents

- The Collaborative is committed to ensuring that the five member communities have a range of safe, affordable, and accessible housing for seniors both within and among the Collaborative communities. This includes the potential for new housing as well as permitting older residents to safely and comfortably age-in-place in their current housing and/or communities. The Collaborative is exploring initiatives that support the ability of residents to reside affordably, safely and comfortably in their communities throughout their lifetimes.
- A top priority of the Collaborative is the continuation and expansion of the Collaborative-initiated Handyman Program, which was the Collaborative's important entry point into addressing its older residents' unmet aging-in-place needs. This highly successful program, funded as a pilot project by the Chicago Community Trust, and which is operated by the North West Housing Partnership on behalf of the Collaborative, is in need of sources of on-going support. The Handyman Program provides professional minor home repair services for Collaborative area residents age 65+ and persons with disabilities 18+ regardless of household income. Homeowners contribute a portion of the cost of the service on a sliding scale basis. Higher income participants receive services from a professional they can trust and receive very modest subsidies toward the cost. Lower income residents also benefit from professional services from a trustworthy professional and receive higher cost subsidies. Since its inception in June 2014, more than 700 people have been served and almost \$17,000 in revenue has been generated (through December 2016).
- The Collaborative is exploring current trends and innovative approaches to providing "lifetime communities" via senior services, infrastructure to support residents' housing and housing-related needs throughout their lifetimes, and programs such as the Senior Villages and Age Friendly Communities concepts.

Leverage more private sector development & redevelopment activity to address local housing needs and trends

- The Collaborative wishes to be proactive when it comes to attracting developers and investment that support balanced housing options that include meeting the needs of local residents and workers as well as adding to the area's diversity of housing stock. As outlined in the Homes for a Changing Region report, the region has gaps in the availability of both single-family and multi-family housing for both lower income and upper income families. The Collaborative wants to lay the groundwork to help developers craft housing proposals that meet these needs and will be well received by municipalities.



Current Efforts (cont.)

Pursue partnerships with local employers including live near work programs

- Local employers can be valuable partners in the discussion of a community's housing stock and whether that housing supports local employers and the local economy. Possible areas of partnership include working together to identify the types of housing that meet the needs (design, affordability, location) of the full spectrum of the workforce, supporting the municipality on specific housing developments or program proposals, and/or working directly on live near work programs (ex: homeownership, rental, home rehabilitation, and/or housing counseling programs for their employees). Employers reap many benefits from this engagement, including improved employee productivity, decreased turnover, enhanced employee morale, reduced carbon footprint and achievement of other corporate social responsibility goals, and stronger relationships with the local municipality.

Potential Partners:

- Local hospitals, which, due to the Affordable Care Act, must conduct Community Health Needs Assessments which may provide a link between healthcare and housing.
- Transportation Management Association of Lake-Cook (TMA) members located in the 5 communities. The TMA's mission is to improve commutes and work for a better quality of life in Cook and Lake Counties – goals which clearly align with the Collaborative's employer engagement efforts.
- Other employers and financial institutions who have already expressed an interest in/concern regarding housing for a competitive workforce, transportation, and planning issues.
- Large employers in the area who could become regional leaders.

Strategy:

- Meet with the employers to initiate a dialogue about the Collaborative and identify (a) where the employers' interests align with the housing goals of the municipalities, and (b) strategies for employers to demonstrate their support for those common housing goals.

Provide energy audits and retrofits for existing dwelling units and encourage energy efficiency development as well as accessibility

- Energy efficiency and accessibility are two priorities of the Collaborative. Energy audits can provide information on how to improve the efficiency of a home as well as decrease household costs, and accessibility improvements support aging-in-place goals. The Collaborative is exploring the idea of providing energy audits as well as subsequent assistance retrofitting homes to meet the audit recommendations.
- Utilize/market upcoming home rehabilitation programs that may benefit municipal residents, such as the Owner-occupied home upgrade program run by North West Housing Partnership and UP Development.

Build the sustainability of the Collaborative

- Since the Collaborative began formally operating in 2011, it has relied on philanthropic funding and revenue generated through the Handyman Program to support its activities. The Collaborative has chosen to utilize the majority of its funds for initiatives and research needed to support its activities and contracted for the services of a coordinator (funded under grants from the Chicago Community Trust) for only 14 months of this 7-year period. The Collaborative has otherwise relied on significant in-kind contributions of staff and administrative support from the member municipalities. However, in order to grow and accomplish its goals, the Collaborative is exploring a number of avenues of support including government (federal, state, and county levels), the private sector, and philanthropy, which would both sustain the operation of the Collaborative and its work.

