



Parks Plus: Affordable Housing Session 2 Summary

January 17, 2024

With this summary, you can...

- ❑ Share: Important insights at your next team meeting.
- ❑ Identify: 2-3 opportunities or challenges most relevant to your city.
- ❑ Discuss: What is one strategy your city is best positioned leverage? Which challenges are most relevant to your city?

Session Framing & Overview

This track elevates the complex relationship between **parks** and **affordable housing** and emphasizes the importance of **thinking holistically** about parks and housing to drive **equitable outcomes** for urban residents.

The second session of the Parks Plus: Affordable Housing track explored policies and programs that present opportunities or challenges when a city, housing authority, or land trust wants to develop parks with affordable housing.

Opportunities to Develop Parks with Affordable Housing

- **Infill Development:** Pocket parks in dense urban areas and redevelopment of vacant land present opportunities to co-locate parks and affordable housing.
- **Master Plans and Comprehensive Plans:** Leverage the planning processes to better integrate housing and parks. Plans allow for work across agencies to identify shared opportunities around densification and right-of-way-to-parkland conversion, parkland dedication ordinances, and investment in properties that have good access to resources (e.g., transportation) that improve overall quality of life.
- **Integrated Planning Efforts:** Building affordable housing projects in tandem with city-wide projects—for example, trails plans—ensures connectivity and meets other community outcomes, like improved health, better sidewalks, and safe routes to schools.
- **Park Equity in Developments:** Implement payment in lieu of taxes, inclusionary zoning, and tax incentive programs to promote park equity in housing developments. Proactively align land bank acquisition strategies with park opportunities.

Opportunities to Develop Parks with Affordable Housing

- **Non-Traditional Land:** As retail landscapes change, converting commercial spaces into residential opens up opportunities for the development of affordable housing with parks. Similarly, parking lots may present opportunities to redevelop land that may not be zoned for housing already.
- **Improve Existing Before Building New:** Consider improvements to existing affordable housing and green spaces instead of new development. Low-hanging fruit can include housing retrofits.
- **Leverage Different Lands:** Create trails or improve sidewalks to better connect people to green spaces.

Challenges to Developing Parks with Affordable Housing

- ❑ Opportunities to build parks and affordable housing are often **one-off and opportunistic**, i.e., resulting from individual CDBG grants. There isn't yet a policy framework that allows cities to approach this intersection in a more systematic and comprehensive way.
- ❑ **Public access requirements** may result in privately owned parks maintained by developers (e.g., waterfront areas in NYC).
- ❑ Housing authorities struggle to find **financing** for affordable housing and must secure that first before thinking about parks.
- ❑ Among city agencies, housing and parks work from **separate buckets** and often compete for resources and land rather than collaborate.
- ❑ **Parking minimums** inhibit productive use of land, such as for new housing and parks and open space. Beyond the negative externalities on the environment, parking requirements force taxpayers to subsidize the cost of parking without receiving a benefit.
- ❑ **Zoning codes** are difficult to navigate and change to allow for redevelopment of underutilized land for housing or open space.

Southend Park - Lexington, KT: Planning Considerations

- ❑ **Community Land Trusts** can serve an important role in acquiring land for and preserving affordability in housing developments.
- ❑ **Scale of funding** needed often does not match what's available. Even large scale HUD projects don't have comparable funding/support for what's needed to achieve parks and housing goals. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funding that made Southend Park Urban Village possible is not readily available.
- ❑ Consider the cost of **land remediation**. Local municipalities can be burdened with the cost of remediation despite the fact that previous land use may have been the result of policies outside of local control. The cost of land remediation often gets passed onto downstream aspects of the project, including housing costs that may be built there.

For Future Exploration

- What does **affordability** mean? Affordability relates to more than the cost of housing, it also includes access to transit, energy efficiency, etc.
- What are best practices and standards to address **park maintenance in co-developed areas**? Who should be responsible? How should it be funded?
- How can we better encourage and **enable collaboration**, coordination, and communication between state and federal agencies?
- Can **trails** act as linear parks to connect affordable housing?
- How can cities use **Public Facility Corporations** to finance, manage, and maintain affordable housing and parks?

Additional Resources

[10-Minute Walk Communities of Practice](#)

Find session recordings, presentations, and resources for each track.

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