



UCARE Networking Meeting

October 21, 2009

Jefferson School, 4th St

8am-9:45am

Four UCARE staff and seven community members gathered at the Jefferson School to discuss barriers and opportunities for affordable housing in the Charlottesville region.

The meeting began by going around the group asking for people to share their name and affiliation, as well as their responses to two questions: What are the barriers and opportunities to affordable housing, and how are you impacting or being impacted by those barriers and opportunities?

Everyone agreed that income and wages are the largest barriers to housing. One participant noted that income and wage limitations keep people in a box; rental companies can price out folks, and if you don't have a car, you can't move to places you can afford, like Waynesboro. It is also difficult for the younger black community because Charlottesville does not have higher income black neighborhood for people and youth to look to as "I can make it," "looks what possible." Another participant noted that economics are attached to everything we do; it is the biggest barrier in city. For folks on an individual level, a plantation mentality still exists and plays out on all levels. The community feels like there are certain positions that serve as gatekeepers to changing things; it's all politics. We need people in the room; to change things you cannot not be in the room, but economics keep people out of the room.

Another participant mentioned the system/cycle of dependence that comes up in her work. There is a definite gap between improving income/opportunity for people and the social services offered. The participant often hears “I’m better off if I don’t work.” Other skills, like computer skills, GED are barriers. The participant also believes that a lack of faith in people to achieve (from service providers or others) discourages people from working hard.

One person mentioned the living wage campaign from a few years ago; the living wage in Charlottesville was \$14.44/hr in 2006. When the University was approached, the community was told “we are here to educate, not solve social problems.”

Another participant wondered if a central inventory for housing shortage would be appropriate to help figure out how much of the problem is related to the University not housing enough of its own students. Again it was noted that wages and jobs don’t match living needs; IMPACT has helped raise awareness with the City. One person wondered if more support for Habitat would help the problem.

Other comments included concern about increasing homelessness/potential home loss because of economic crisis. How can the community support those people? As far as the University goes, how do we make Goliath understand there are a lot of Davids out there?

Many community programs exist to help people in times of need, but because of personal information requirements and waiting periods, people often don’t get the help they need when they need it. Other avenues, like quick cash/car loan places trap people. People work paycheck to paycheck and don’t know how to plan ahead. There needs to be a support system to help in these circumstances; other folks that people can trust to get advice and ask for help.

One student asked what the student role can be in creating a social conscience at the University; the University responded to students’ call for sustainability, so why not other issues? Another participant commented that if a role of the University is to prepare students for real life, then it should be part of the mission; if students can be here for four years and not know about other neighborhoods, that’s a problem. Providing a fuller education, socialization, thinking critically, understanding your role in the bigger world, that’s the mission of a university. Right now, UVa is

preparing people to be more isolated, not integrated, and those behaviors and attitudes will carry it into adult life.

There was a University, City, County housing task force put together to address some of these housing concerns, and the University opted out of participating. Students are University consumers - they can put pressure on leadership, they live on campus. There was a benchmark approved by City Council to increase affordable housing stock and increase funding. The movement needs solidarity. Closing reflected the group agreement that economics are the heart of the problem; residents need workforce development and budgeting skills.

Someone asked the question: how do we generate support and activism from alumni? Regardless, some participants agreed that if circumstances continue, there will not be housing for working folk in 20-30 years. The best and highest use of students is activism, and they will need to be a part of this effort.

Meeting Participants:

Harold Foley-Virginia Organizing Project

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