

# *Housing North*

## Strategic Communications Plan

*FINAL*

# Project Overview

Avenue ISR is working together with Housing North to provide regional housing advocates in Northwest Lower Michigan with consistent messages, tools and approaches to communicate housing needs and solutions.

## Goals:

1. Identify key messages related to housing needs and solutions for target audiences
2. Identify tactics for communicating those messages to target audiences
3. As appropriate, provide guidelines for creative execution of key strategies and tactics

The overall objective of the project is to inform and engage a variety of stakeholders (local leaders, business leaders, etc.) and the general public in the need for and potential of housing solutions as a driver of economic opportunity.



# Goals

## **Mission of the Communications Committee:**

**We will create a common understanding regarding housing options, and the region will be inspired to implement innovative solutions.**

## **Goals**

- A. Stakeholders (community leaders, business leaders and citizens) throughout the region are aware of the benefits of community housing solutions**
- B. Stakeholders know specific steps they can take to improve housing options**
- C. Supporters of housing solutions have effective resources to build public support**

## **Achieve these goals by following these steps:**

- 1. Upgrade a set of communications tools for Housing North:**
  - Visual identity and web site**
  - Press release, frequently asked questions, presentation deck and other communications materials**
- 2. Recruit and activate volunteers throughout the region in support of a communications campaign**
- 3. Initiate a broad regional communications campaign to have as many communities in the region become “Housing Ready Communities”**

# Messaging

# Four Steps to Persuasion

## **1. Establish values and common ground**

- A. Begin with statements of values that engage the audience
- B. Help them understand the issue in the context of these values

## **2. Connect the problem to these values**

- A. Why is today different from yesterday?
- B. Be factual but not “fact-full”
- C. Make it personal with relatable stories
- D. Tie the problem directly to audiences – this is “US” not “THEM”

## **3. Show solutions that will work**

- A. Lay out a reasonable path to get there
- B. Show examples of solutions that inspire and allay fears

## **4. Tell audiences what they can do**

# Words to Emphasize

- While our communities may need low-income housing, supportive housing, senior housing and housing for formerly homeless individuals, it is generally productive to lead with the need for “homes” for young families and middle class working people

## Emphasize

- Home(s)
- Work
- Young Families
- Working People
- Middle Class

## Deemphasize

- Affordable Housing
- Low-Income Housing
- Housing as a Right
- Deserving
- Public Policy

## Use More Sparingly

- Housing
- Housing Options
- Housing Alternatives
- Community Housing
- Workforce Housing

## Bringing It All Together – Elevator Speech

In Northern Michigan most of us believe that if you work hard and save you should be able to live in a safe home. We want communities where our children and grandchildren are able to live or return.

But Northern Michigan is becoming a more and more difficult place for young families and working people to live. Not enough new homes are being built. Homes for rent are being pulled off the market for short term rentals like Airbnb. For these and other reasons, housing costs have surged past local incomes and there is a real shortage of homes. Teachers, health care workers, first responders and other middle class workers young and old are not able to live in our communities. They have to drive from farther and farther away to work or they leave our region altogether. We run the risk of creating communities where only the most wealthy can afford to live.

This shortage of homes can be solved! By working with developers, making common sense updates to zoning and helping employers and citizens to create new housing options, we can ensure that our communities remain places where all people can live, work, raise families and thrive.

# Homelessness Prevention and At Risk Populations

- Sometimes housing isn't ultimately about creating opportunities for "young families and working people" to live; sometimes we really are focusing on the needs of those in literal homelessness or who are at risk
- In this case, the focus should be on creating "housing options" so that all members of the community have an opportunity for a safe a secure home:
  - *"Disrupting poverty is our #1 goal...We are continually sharing the message that 'safe affordable housing is necessary to have a fruitful life.' That's why we need to create options so that all people in our communities, across the income spectrum, have housing opportunities. We tend to create mixed income communities (some market rate, some subsidized) and we hold that up as the model of what healthy communities look like."*  
*Melinda Clemons, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.*



*Willow Terrace, Ukiah, California, Rural  
Communities Housing Development Corporation*

# For selective audiences, housing shortages can be cast as environmental, infrastructure and/or public health challenges.

- Housing is an environmental challenge
  - *“There’s nothing environmental-friendly about any of this. The long commute creates pollution. It blocks guests from the ski hill. It wears out the road. It’s the exact antithesis of all the ideas Aspen was founded on—about renewal and escaping from the world.” – Outside Magazine Online*
- Housing impacts critical infrastructure
  - *“We have some of the worst roads in the nation. Potholes and road wear and tear are all made worse when working people need to commute 30 miles from the closest home they can find to afford.”*
- Social determinants of health
  - *“Aging housing stock creating unsafe housing conditions for children and families.”*
  - *“Housing is a vaccine that helps protect children from poor health outcomes.” – Barbara Poppe*



Communications Taglines are opportunities to create short and memorable messages around which to build more detailed communications.

## Welcome Home

**Pros:** Anchors a positive vision for the future. Implies we are welcoming back young people and others who have had to leave the region. Short and memorable.

**Cons:** Is less explicit than some in terms of approach and desired outcomes.

## Homes for Our Communities

**Pros:** More explicitly states the goal of the campaign.

**Cons:** Less emotionally resonant and memorable than some.

## Homes for Everyone in [Northern Michigan] (substitute community name)

**Pros:** Explicitly states the goal of the campaign. Speaks to a wide and inclusive audience of beneficiaries. Speaks to a goal. Adaptable.

**Cons:** Less memorable than some. Could trigger some audiences by implying housing as a right without context.

## Make it Home

**Pros:** Anchors a positive vision for the future. Action oriented language that speaks to a goal. Short and memorable.

**Cons:** Is less explicit than some in terms of approach and desired outcomes.

A Tagline can easily be supported with secondary messages and images that explain the goals and context of the campaign.

## Welcome Home

Housing options for Northwest Michigan.



*Note: Images are provided as examples only. Not rights-free.*

# Examples of key messages.

OVERALL CAMPAIGN:  
**Welcome Home**  
 Housing options for Northwest Michigan.

## Steps to Persuasion

## Key Messages (external)

<b>Establish Values and Common Ground</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We want communities where hard working people can afford to live.</li> <li>• We want our children and grandchildren to be able to live here if they choose.</li> </ul>
<b>Connect the Problem to These Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of long term trends, there is a real shortage of homes.</li> <li>• Many middle class workers young and old are no longer able to live in our towns and rural areas.</li> <li>• We risk creating communities where only wealthy elites can live.</li> </ul>
<b>Show Solutions That Will Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through common sense policies we can create new housing options.</li> <li>• Housing Ready Communities are already making a difference in our area.</li> <li>• There are many creative solutions that businesses/citizens can use to help.</li> </ul>
<b>Tell Audiences What They Can Do</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local leaders, business people and citizens can all play a part.</li> <li>• Visit _____ .org to find out more</li> </ul>

# Customizing Messages By Community

- It is difficult to be too prescriptive about audiences, because so much depends on the unique character and history of the community and the current values of audiences
- In general, communications pieces such as PowerPoint presentations, emails and other easily customizable external communications should be ‘modular’ with building blocks that can be assembled based on the audience
  - A strong overall story
  - Data on local housing conditions for some audiences (e.g. planning commissions, some township boards)
  - Stories and examples, by community (e.g. Leelanau Township’s struggles to hire firefighters)
  - Environmental frames for environmental groups
  - Stressed infrastructure and tax frames for county level groups
  - Social determinants of health frames for health care and social services groups
- Marketing communications materials (e.g. buttons), social media advertising and the like should focus on a strong central message

# Tactics

# An Approximate Campaign Timeline

- The following is a loose campaign timeline
  - Prepare for the Campaign (Spring/Summer 2019)
    - Commit to measurable goals and an action plan
    - Recruit volunteers, advocates and visible stakeholders
    - Secure funding
    - Create campaign materials
    - Create training materials for volunteers
  - The “Welcome Home”<sup>\*</sup> Campaign (Fall, 2019 through Summer, 2020)
    - Work the plan
    - Encourage/Enforce message discipline
  - Evolve Into the Next Phase (Fall 2020 and Beyond)
    - Convert energy, wins, volunteers, etc. into a more permanent infrastructure

*\* Working Title Only*

# Volunteer Recruitment

- Line up as many of the following people as possible before Fall while completing other steps to prepare for the messaging campaign
  - Committee Chairs and Committee Members – Committee Chairs will be people who are willing to be accountable for each of the approaches (PR, Endorsement, etc.) throughout the region; Committee Members may be focused on more specific tasks or communities.
  - Visible Stakeholders – will be champions who are known and respected in the community, not self-interested and not typically advocating for housing-related issues. These include faith leaders, members of the military, first responders, educators and current and past leaders of local institutions (major employers, higher education institutions, health care systems).
  - Volunteers – will be people who are willing to complete one or more individual actions (write letters to the editor, attend public meetings, secure endorsements, etc.) on behalf of the effort
- Ideally, the Housing North Communications Committee evolves into a steering committee to oversee work of many throughout the region

# Tactics Overview

- All tactics recommended have the potential to reach each of the primary audiences of the campaign

Tactic/Vehicle	Audiences		
	Community Leaders	Employers	General Public
<b>Endorsement</b>	Secure endorsements from featured employers, grass tops leaders and some unexpected advocates		
<b>Website</b>	A tool for local media and campaign volunteers and supporters; should have all materials and talking points; celebrate successes; minimize all else		
<b>Public Presentations</b>	Need a set of slides including facts and stories that can be used to build custom presentations to local elected groups, chambers of commerce, service clubs, etc.		
<b>PR &amp; Media</b>	Generate periodic press releases on campaign progress, key events and milestones; repurpose national/statewide stories; create letter-to-the-editor campaign; communicate through affiliate groups with own lists (e.g. chamber)		
<b>Social Media</b>	Repurpose all PR and Media communications; celebrate events, volunteer accomplishments, public appearances and milestones		
<b>Campaign Buttons</b>	Saturate local communities in advance of any big decision; important to create a critical mass if using this tactic at all (sparse presence implies weak support)		
<b>Yard Signs</b>			
<b>Radio (if funded)</b>	Can be a relatively efficient way to reach audiences that are traditionally less supportive of housing initiatives		

## PR & Media

- “Free Media” is an essential tool for telling stories and connecting them back to broader communications goals
- The goal should be to go well beyond free calendar listings for events; instead, the goal of PR efforts is to secure regular feature stories in a variety of communications outlets
- Key building blocks include:
  - A current media and affiliate group list – affiliate groups would include other local organizations that publish content such as the Petoskey Chamber of Commerce, Benzie County Rotary, etc.
  - A current fact sheet on the organization that includes messaging points from this Communications Plan
  - An updated 1-paragraph ‘litany’ similar to the elevator speech
  - A schedule or plan of upcoming press releases and media events
- Housing North should pursue feature stories for at least the following:
  - The launch of the campaign
  - Success stories or milestones of new communities signing on
  - Key events and public appearances that stimulated community conversations
  - Local “takes” in response to national and statewide stories on housing, housing shortages and housing solutions

Thank You!