

Community Teamwork Letter to the editor – February 10, 2022

We have to talk about housing.

Over the years, many cities have put together plans to end homelessness. They've talked about different models, they've talked about prevention, and how to improve shelters and programs. There's been a lot of talk about ending homelessness - I know, because I've been in those meetings. If we're going to talk about ending homelessness, we have to talk about housing.

Housing ends homelessness. More than any other intervention, service, or program, housing ends homelessness. If we are truly committed to ending homelessness we must be committed to housing.

We believe that access to safe, affordable housing should be available to anyone who needs it, and that we as a community thrive when everyone has somewhere they can call home. Our most vulnerable citizens deserve to enjoy the same benefits that many of us take for granted - a hot meal, a warm bed, and a place to call our own. The Greater Lowell region has a proud history of supporting communities in need, and of improving the lives of vulnerable people. We are asking you to join us as we make the case to create and expand housing that is affordable, accessible, and safe.

We believe that housing is healthcare. Every year, we spend millions of dollars treating illnesses that are exacerbated by homelessness. From asthma to diabetes to depression and substance use disorders, every illness is harder to manage when you don't have a home. We believe that housing creates significant improvements in the cost of healthcare while dramatically improving quality of life. On average, a woman experiencing homelessness will die 30 years sooner than her housed neighbors. For many, housing really is a matter of life and death.

We have to talk about housing, and how the urgent creation of affordable, accessible units can happen in our region. We believe that the timely development of at least 300 units would make substantial inroads on ending homelessness in the region. Housing creation is necessary, and the need is immediate. We believe that we should be exploring a variety of housing options in a range of areas, and that no idea should be off the table. We must be bold, and we must be innovative. We must be committed to making change happen.

We are asking all of you to join us in this effort - from bankers to builders - we need your help. Municipal leaders and business owners; neighborhoods and communities of faith; developers and investors who are committed to making a difference - creating change will take all of us.

We are asking you to join us in this commitment. We are asking you to talk about housing - to be creative, compassionate and determined as we figure out how to meet this unprecedented goal. We need all hands on deck, and all ideas on the table - creating 300 units isn't easy, but it's not impossible. We have to talk about housing, and it has to be now. The need has never been greater.

For more information, please email us at talkabouthousing@commteam.org.

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