APPENDIX 15

COMMUNITY OUTREACH GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are designed to assist developers of affordable and special needs housing in obtaining community input and support for supportive housing projects. These guidelines are not meant to be a rigid checklist, but rather a flexible approach that can assist developers in building and maintaining a constructive relationship with community and political stakeholders.

Six Steps to Building Community Support

The approach consists of six steps:

1. THE DEVELOPMENT TEAM MEETS EARLY TO RESEARCH, ASSESS AND PLAN IN FIVE KEY AREAS.
2. PREPARE A POLITICAL STRATEGY THAT COORDINATES ALL YOUR WORK TOWARDS EDUCATION PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND GETTING THE POLITICAL SUPPORT YOU NEED.
3. PREPARE A STRATEGY TO BUILD ACTIVE COMMUNITY SUPPORT FOR YOUR PROPOSAL.
4. PREPARE A STRATEGY TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND DEAL WITH ACTIVE OPPOSITION.
5. BE AWARE OF AND TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT THE LEGAL RIGHTS OF THE INVOLVED PARTIES.
6. PREPARE A PUBLIC RELATIONS/MEDIA STRATEGY TO INFORM DECISION-MAKERS AND THE PUBLIC.

These steps are described in detail below:

1. Plan meetings to research, assess and plan strategies in five key areas.
   Schedule two or more meetings of the entire development team together with local advocates and assign responsibility for organizing the meetings (e.g. inviting key people) to a staff member.

   At the first meeting, assess the following:
   • The organization’s reputation, capacity to attract broad community support, and its previous experience in dealing with local government, opponents, and the media.
   • What local government approvals are required, who will decide, what is the process and criteria for decisions, and an expected time line.
   • The government and community’s current knowledge of and support for supportive housing, the organization’s work, and the current proposal.
   • Full analysis of the neighborhood surrounding the proposed site (history, problems, assets, etc.)
   • Likely concerns neighbors might have; the neighborhood’s experience with similar programs and the potential for support or organized opposition.
• Potential legal issues associated with the development proposal, including the legal rights of all parties.
• The media approach to the proposal.

Based on these assessments, at later meetings determine:

(a) strategies toward the local government and community, potential supporters, potential opponents, and legal issues (steps 2-5);
(b) staffing required to implement these strategies; and,
(c) any consequences for the proposal’s time line, funding needs, or site selection.

• Each strategy should have a clear plan of action: who will do what, when, how.
• Efforts to implement these five strategies will be going on simultaneously.
• Timing issues are critical and must be decided after consultation with persons most familiar with the local government and the relevant neighborhood.
• Expect to change and improvise your plans as you go along. You won’t regret your planning because it will help you manage the process and avoid surprises.
• Most importantly, draw on the collective experience of others to gain further insight into the strategies for community acceptance.

2. Prepare a political strategy.
• Get to know the local government and its relevant policies. There are ‘key leaders’ in every community, but they don’t always have the same jobs or titles. To find them always ask: "Who else should I talk with about this?"
• Identify solid supporters, committed opponents, and those that are uncertain.
• Determine education, advocacy efforts needed to keep supporters, gain uncertain votes.
• Coordinate efforts with supporters, concerned community members and the media to gather support.
  Document everything and ensure that all information being provided in writing at public hearings or smaller meetings accurately and positively presents the proposal.

3. Prepare a strategy to build public support.
• Active, vocal community support for the proposal will help get political support, counter opponents, tell the accurate story to the media (if needed) and, when appropriate, say hard things that must be said.

• Identify and prioritize actual and potential supporters, including tactical allies. Think widely about potential allies before contacting potential opponents.
• Plan recruitment of supporters and what you want them to do.
• Support allies with background information, housing tours and up-to-date information.
• Mobilize supporters at critical points (e.g. using a database and fact sheets.)

4. Prepare a strategy to address community issues.
• Notification and community out-reach decisions should be designed to surface and deal effectively with legitimate concerns and for positive presentation of the proposal.
• Consider alternative methods for community outreach (e.g. door-to-door canvassing, open-house forums or small house meetings) instead of the large open community meetings.
• Use an issue-based strategy for working through local community concerns.
• Find out the probable basis of the concerns before fashioning a response (e.g. misinformation, fears about impacts, expectation to participate, prejudice, or issues unrelated to your proposal.)
• Prepare appropriate responses to each kind of concern (e.g. education, reassurance by trusted authority, appropriate forum for participation, negotiation, clarifying legitimate/illegitimate issues.)

5. Prepare a public relations/media strategy.
• Plan ahead in order to be able to respond effectively to any negative media coverage you receive or believe you will receive.
• Designate and prepare spokesperson(s) including former clients and supporters.
• Develop message(s) for target audiences (e.g. decision-makers).
• Prepare brief, easily-faxable, fact sheets about the organization, the proposal, the supporters, efforts to resolve legitimate community concerns and other information to support the proposal.
• Invite reporters for a tour of existing facilities and to meet staff and clients.
• Follow-up on any coverage received with thank yous and corrections.
• Develop on-going relationships with media (to the degree resources allow).

6. Prepare a legal strategy.
• Be aware of the legal rights of the prospective tenants’ as well as the community so that you can identify potential legal issues.
• Maintain constructive relationships to avoid legal issues.

Additional Outreach Principles

Low-keyed contact with neighbors with the support of local allies is the most effective form of outreach. The most effective form of low keyed contacts are either person to person or small group “house’ meetings.

In small meetings, the goal is to "humanize" the issue, give it a face that the audience can understand and empathize with, depolarize the potential residents/clients and the program to help remove them as the issue. If possible have potential residents/clients attend and tell their story. Trying to convince people about the merits of an issue they oppose on an intellectual basis with facts, laws and details does not affect their "feelings" about the issue.

The team should reflect the cultural diversity of the community and the clients.
If the project is intended for a special needs population, the PROVIDER and NEIGHBORHOOD should discuss the following non-exclusive list of issues:

- Organization/Agency history of housing/services offered.
- Residents/Clients to be served by this housing/service; numbers, general daily activity and schedule.
- Special characteristics of the resident/client population (e.g., mental illness or recovering substance abusers), likely length of stay in the facility, and types of staff or support services, available and mandatory, whether on or off site.
- The PROVIDER’S history and reputation - Characteristics of success and failure within the program, in general terms, e.g., possible outcomes for clients and how the program responds to each possibility.
- The neighborhood and characteristics of the area that might be of concern to NEIGHBORS and PROVIDER alike.
- Mechanisms for communication between the PROVIDER and its NEIGHBORS. The provider should offer a 24-hour contact number if one exists, or best after hours contact available. The NEIGHBORHOOD should identify persons who can act as a contact. The security of knowing where to call to get a response is important. Discuss how to maintain ongoing communications, e.g., repeat visits to community meetings or written updates for newsletters.
- Names of interested NEIGHBORHOOD organizations and how to contact them.
- Development of a community advisory committee if needed. An advisory board is an excellent vehicle for mutual education and effective communication.