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Lehigh Valley AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Client

Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC), located in Allentown, PA. LVPC's jurisdiction includes all of Lehigh County and Northampton County.

Project Description

This assignment involves an assessment of affordable housing in a high growth area of Pennsylvania. As the housing market in New Jersey continues its surge, more and more families are relocating across the border to the Lehigh Valley in search of affordable sales housing. From here, it is an easy commute to jobs in New Jersey. This migration and commutation pattern has placed pressure on undeveloped land, highways and school districts. M&L measured supply and demand characteristics. We interviewed public housing authorities, non-profit housing developers and other practitioners in an effort to assess the capacity of the region to increase the supply of affordable housing. We surveyed new industries that have relocated to the area to determine how housing factors affected their decision to move to the Lehigh Valley. We also surveyed young professionals to obtain their input on housing preferences and ownership aspirations.

Challenges

There are two distinct housing markets in the Lehigh Valley. The inner city areas of Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton have seen increased demand for affordable housing, especially from Hispanic households that have migrated into urban areas. The suburban fringe and outlying rural areas have seen dramatic increases in the value of sales housing. There is a feeling on the part of some that the suburban communities have not done their fair share to provide affordable housing, especially in light of the fact that many of the region's lower income service jobs are located along major suburban highways.

Solution

Defined what is meant by the term "affordable housing" in the Lehigh Valley. Recommended land use planning measures aimed at encouraging affordable rental housing in suburban locations. Identified the need to expand local capacity to develop affordable housing. Assisted housing leaders in both counties in prioritizing affordable housing activities into a five year strategic plan.

Benefits

- Each county can apply CDBG, HOME and Act 137 Affordable Housing Trust funds to priority projects
- Improved understanding of fair housing issues, especially in suburban municipalities

Planning and Development Consultants