

# Why you want affordable housing in your community

**Q**uick, what do you think of when you hear the term “affordable housing”?

Probably not award-winning design. Neighborhood renewal. Critically short supply.

Or, increased property values. Saving your taxpayer dollars. Transforming landmark buildings — and lives that are at risk.

Chances are, you have a few misconceptions about affordable housing. We all do. Because we associate it with the dismal, institutional-looking units we used to call “projects.” They were an eyesore. Poorly constructed or retrofitted and often far away from public transportation, health care services and grocery stores.

It is no wonder the tenants who needed affordable housing the most were the least likely to stay in those gloomy buildings. Or get the health care and treatment they needed to recover from illness or addiction. Or be empowered to better their lives.

In 1992, our two organizations, DePaul and SWBR, joined forces to create affordable housing with on-site support services that people would *want* to live in. Be proud to live in. And be motivated to improve their lives in.

## Affordable housing is health care

People need stable housing to stabilize their lives. They need easy access to health care and social services to stick with a treatment plan. They need a clean, bright environment to build a sense of self-worth — and feel worthy of pursuing a job, education, sobriety, or better health.

That’s why we embed support services within our housing developments. For example, depending on the residents’ needs, we connect them with mental health care, addiction counseling, diabetes education, and job training and employment assistance.

And we’ve seen powerful results in the form of improved outcomes. The synergy between feeling worthy and having easy access to services improves compliance and commitment. Helps people get ahead. And keeps them from falling into homelessness or landing in an emergency room.

## Affordable housing is upward mobility

The road to homelessness can be short. People working in low-paying jobs often don’t



### VIEWPOINT

Gillian Conde and Gibbons Bylines

have the resources or support systems to take care of their physical and mental health or pay for child care — let alone think about upward mobility through education and job training. When a disproportionate amount of income goes to rent, people live on a razor-thin edge. One illness, broken down car or canceled babysitter may result in homelessness.

Serving people is our mission. Providing affordable supportive housing is how we fulfill it for the working poor. At each of our housing developments, there’s an on-site team available to connect tenants with transportation, emergency child care, even prescription pickups and nutritional guidance. A helping hand that helps residents keep up with health care appointments, well-child visits, work and school.

Better design leads to better outcomes for all. Affordable housing has historically been built with tight margins and limited budgets. Forced to cut corners, developers may choose to compromise quality and aesthetics. It may have saved money up front, but the communities and residents paid a high price down the road. With potential vacancies, crime, homelessness, and blight leading to higher taxes, crowded emergency rooms, and strain on social services. So it’s no wonder many of us have negative impressions of affordable housing.

But with the benefit of hindsight, and our commitment to combatting homelessness and passion for community revitalization, we design high-quality, energy-efficient, carefully researched housing to enhance neighborhoods — and lives.

And it goes beyond attractive, well-constructed, sustainable buildings. It involves a sensitivity to the obstacles people with hearing or vision loss or physical disabilities experience in everyday life. We remove the barriers they face through customized features like special

colored light notification systems, lowered counter heights, and more elbow room. Features that enhance comfort, safety, and communication. We provide accommodations that give control and empower — individual thermostats, private bedrooms, and bathrooms.

It’s a level of detail that comes from listening to potential residents. Understanding their vulnerabilities, pain points, and challenges. And thoughtfully designing homes from the ground up to make life easier for them. To give them a leg up. And every chance to get ahead.

## Who doesn’t want their neighbors to thrive?

It can be a challenge to get people in the surrounding areas to support our developments. Their first reactions are very mixed — understandably. But after we show them what our safe, affordable supportive communities are all about, they suddenly want to be part of the solution.

Everyone wants their neighbors to do well, especially if they’re on a fixed income or struggling with illness or disability. Everyone wants to get rid of vacant, eyesore structures and replace them with beautiful housing. Especially if the old structures are a focal point for crime or drain on property values.

When we show neighbors pictures and describe our vibrant, engaged communities, we often witness an a-ha moment. They realize affordable housing is community renewal. It enriches neighborhoods and builds community pride. It brings value and enhances lives — including their own. Because we all rise when we lift each other up.

For example, Skybird Landing in Geneseo honors the nearby National Warplane Museum. Its communal buildings and apartments feature murals and photographs reflecting aviation themes, honoring the museum’s annual air show, and celebrating Geneseo’s rich history.

Carriage Factory Apartments is another example. We gutted and then renovated a blighted, historic structure and brought the more than 100-year-old Cunningham Carriage Factory back to life. What was once a historic landmark had become a vacant, dangerous building and then a biohazard. Now it’s a safe, clean, modern home for 71 families. Complete with free Wi-Fi, laundry, security guards, on-

site mental health and social services — and an original Cunningham antique carriage in the lobby.

The development transformed an irreplaceable building. A piece of Rochester’s history. And helped transform the lives of hardworking residents who previously spent more than 30% of their income on rent in other housing.

## We can’t afford not to welcome affordable housing right now

Even in the best of times, homelessness has been a serious problem in our area. Rochester has struggled for years with a shortage of affordable housing and services for people battling mental illness and addiction. With appropriate places for seniors to age in place. And then came COVID.

**COVID-19.** Crowded, unsanitary conditions are dangerous during the regular flu season. Increasingly so now. With unemployment, mental illness and domestic abuse at historic high levels, housing insecurity is escalating. And the floodgates are about to break open when the moratorium against evictions is lifted.

## Fifth year of a five-year grant cycle

We are in the last year of a five-year Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI) grant cycle. The funds have allowed us to develop housing and provide services for people who were homeless with special needs, health conditions or other life challenges. We’re confident New York State still recognizes the need for affordable supportive housing and a new cycle will begin. And you can help increase the chances by rallying around and welcoming affordable housing in your community. You will be in good company.

“We believe that quality, affordable housing is the backbone of a strong community.”

— *Miriam Zinter, Mortgage Officer, Community Preservation Corporation*

“Affordable and accessible housing for all is essential to the strength of our communities.”

— *Adam Bello, Monroe County Executive*

“Everyone deserves to have a community where they feel welcomed and the opportunity to have a place they call home.”

— *Rob Ortt, Senate Republican Leader*  
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### ECONOMY TRACK

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bridges, highways and other public structures — and research and development.

The president-elect has also said he would raise \$3.4 trillion in additional tax revenue over a decade to help pay for it, Penn Wharton found. He has proposed raising the corporate income-tax to 28% from 21%, reversing half of Trump’s cut from 35% in 2017. Biden would also raise income and payroll taxes for people making \$400,000 a year or more — about 2% of the population.

Yet Biden may be the first president since George H.W. Bush not to have both the House and Senate controlled by his party during at least his first two years in office. Whether that becomes true will depend on the outcome of two Senate runoff elections in Georgia in January. But most observers expect Biden to face a GOP Senate, which would likely block much of his agenda. Republican senators would fight Biden’s tax increases and at least limit the size of a new economic stimulus package.

“The outcome of the Senate race, arguably, is the most important consideration as far as likely tax legislation is concerned,” said Robert Willens, a professor of finance at Columbia

University.

Biden’s spending proposals include \$2 trillion over four years to counter climate change, a reversal from Trump’s focus on supporting oil and gas drilling. He wants to spend money to retrofit homes and buildings to make them more energy efficient and building out an infrastructure for electric vehicles.

In many areas, Biden can operate through executive orders or regulation. He could also reverse much of the administration’s approach to legal immigration, which has cut the annual number of new arrivals to about 600,000 from 1 million. Most economists say the effects of Biden’s policies would be negligible in the short run but would expand the nation’s long-run economic output by accelerating population growth.

Biden also plans to rejoin the Paris Agreement on behalf of the nation and has said he will sign executive orders to fight climate change. He aims to stop climate-damaging emissions from power plants by 2035 and to reach net-zero emissions in the economy overall no later than 2050.

The president-elect could also reverse some of Trump’s executive orders by imposing tougher fuel economy standards, compelling coal plants to reduce emissions or restoring re-

quirements that strengthen the oil and gas industry’s reporting and reduction of toxic chemicals.

On trade, Biden will jettison Trump’s go-it-alone style in confronting China. Instead, the president-elect says he will seek to build alliances with Europe and Japan to confront China’s government subsidies, intellectual property rights violations and market restrictions, among other trade concerns.

To maintain those alliances, Biden is all but certain to drop his predecessor’s inclination to target America’s allies by threatening tariffs on car imports from Europe, or imposing tariffs on steel imports from Canada and Mexico. Still, Democrats in Congress are suspicious of China, and trade tensions will likely persist.

Trump has sought to ban Chinese apps TikTok and WeChat and has taken steps to root out Huawei from the small space it occupies in U.S. telecom networks. He has done so while pressuring other countries not to use Huawei in their next-generation 5G networks.

Though Republican and Democrats are both suspicious of Huawei, TikTok could get a reprieve under Biden. Robert Atkinson, the president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, which is funded by U.S. tech companies, said the TikTok ban was

“much more of a Trump issue” that Biden might drop.

The president-elect could continue the government’s rising efforts to curb the outsized power of the tech industry. The Trump administration launched what could be a landmark antitrust case against Google that will likely continue.

And, like the Trump administration, Biden has also taken aim at Section 230, a law that is foundational to the modern internet and gives tech firms liability protection from lawsuits for what users post. The president-elect has said it should be revoked. Trump and other Republicans have baselessly asserted that the social media companies were censoring conservatives. Democrats criticize the law because they think social-media companies are failing to suppress misinformation and hate speech.

Atkinson said he also sees relations between the White House and business returning to a more normal, predictable state under Biden, after Trump’s willingness to loudly condemn companies that criticized him.

“If they would ever pressure a company, it would be very quiet,” Atkinson said. “Biden is not going to use the bully pulpit to name and shame American companies.”