

## Urban expert urges inclusionary zoning laws (2.09.05)

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Urban expert urges inclusionary zoning laws

Neighborhoods need to have a mix of affordable housing if they are to be healthy

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When urban expert David Rusk analyzes a city or region, he breaks down numerous statistics, but essentially, he said, he looks at neighborhoods. What did he find in Green Bay? "The economic segregation in the city is increasing," said Rusk. Using a common economic segregation index of 0 to 100 (100 representing total segregation), the index in Green Bay in the 1970s was 25. In the year 2000, it was 33. "It's not Milwaukee at 50 (index), the most economically segregated city in the country, said Rusk, "but there is reason for concern."

Rusk, a former New Mexico legislator and mayor of Albuquerque, is an independent consultant on urban and suburban policy. He has spoken and consulted in more than 120 U.S. communities, and has advised the government of South Africa on Johannesburg, Capetown and Durban. Last week, he presented "Playing the Prevent Offense" in Green Bay, sponsored by JOSHUA (Justice Organization Sharing Hope United for Action) and others including the Affordable Housing Institute of the Catholic Foundation of the Diocese of Green Bay. Rusk, the author of *Baltimore Unbound*, *Cities Without Suburbs* and *Inside Game/Outside Game*, said several factors contribute to economic segregation.

"There are many cases, based on the economy in this country, where there is the loss of a higher paying job," he said. "The self-sufficiency standard is \$39,660 for a family of four. In a single income family, where a high paying job is lost, the family may now fall below this mark. There is also a rise in the immigrant population. Eighty-five percent of the net increase in the male working population in the 1990s was immigrants. That's a significant amount of labor resources. We need to make sure they can afford to live in the community so they can continue to work in the community."

While fostering healthy neighborhoods with safe, affordable housing is a chief concern, Rusk said economic segregation also affects education. By reviewing the number of subsidized meals served at a school, he can determine the economic segregation, and equate it to third grade reading scores. "I will tell you that school's test scores plus or minus six points with 95% accuracy," he said. "I will tell you the academic outcomes of that school. It's important who the kids are, but more importantly, who the kids classmates are. Kids learn from kids. They learn skills, attitudes and aspirations. Children from low-income families learn best when they are surrounded by middle-class classmates."

What can be done to reverse an increase in economic segregation?

Rusk supports inclusionary zoning laws, which require a certain percentage of any development be affordable housing. More than 135 U.S. cities and counties have adopted inclusionary zoning laws, including Madison in January of 2004; Rusk served as a consultant there. "A basic inclusionary zoning law states that if (you are) building 10 units or more, 15% must be set aside for affordable housing," explained Rusk. "Builders earn cost offsets, so they can still turn a profit." The image of affordable housing is also important for inclusionary zoning laws to work, he said "The standard affordable housing apartment complex in a middle to high income neighborhood is not the answer," he said. "Inclusionary housing needs to be as architecturally compatible as possible." Rusk illustrated with photos from Montgomery County, Maryland. Two buildings, across the street from one another, looked similar, yet one was a single family home, while the other was a multi-family affordable housing unit. "Neighborhoods featuring inclusionary housing have shown no increase in social problems," said Rusk, "and there has been no adverse impact on market price of homes or the resale value."

Rusk acknowledged that some will always oppose inclusionary zoning. Green Bay is an "inelastic" city in terms of growth. The city's last annexation, Preble, dates back to the 1960s. A push for inclusionary zoning in surrounding communities, in addition to Green Bay, is important, he said. "People need to set aside their fears and look at the facts," he said. "Look at the experiences of other communities. Mixed economic communities work just fine."

"The suburbs and their schools may look like Green Bay and its schools of the 1970s, but that's not the world their children are going to live in as adults," he continued. "People of all economic means are essential to the functioning of your community. Think about the elderly parent and the person who cares for that parent at a nursing home center. Those jobs are usually not high paying jobs. If that person is good enough to care for your loved one, that person is good enough to live in your community."

When JOSHUA, which includes Nativity of Our Lord, St. Bernard and St. Matthew parishes, and the Sisters of St. Francis

of the Holy Cross as its founding congregations, was formed in May of 2004, it marked affordable housing as its top focus. Faith-based groups are powerful in promoting community change, said Rusk. "When people of faith act in the great faith tradition of our society, the politicians pay attention," he said. "I've worked with these groups and have seen it work. Montgomery County, Maryland, is an example. It's a wealthy suburban county. There was a coalition of 40 churches that was instrumental in inclusionary housing there." "JOSHUA is eight churches of 150 churches in Brown County," said Dick Vogels, chair of the JOSHUA Housing Task Force. "We would like to see all of them under one umbrella, one voice, one action, working together."