**Affordable Housing and Opportunity Neighborhoods**

Thursday afternoon, 1:45 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Decades of housing, land-use, and transportation policies have led to highly segregated metropolitan areas throughout the United States, both in terms of racial and income inequality. Lower-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods with greater shares of minority residents are often hampered by low access to opportunity. While there is no formal definition of an opportunity neighborhood, such neighborhoods would likely have high-quality schools, access to transit, available jobs, fresh food options, and low crime levels.

Subsidized affordable housing can be a platform to create opportunities for low-income households. However, locating or preserving affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods can be challenging because these areas tend to be more expensive and existing residents may protest with cries of “not in my backyard!” These challenges exist for cities whether housing is relatively high- or low-cost.

One way to address these issues is through the Fair Housing and Equity Assessments (FHEA) that several NNIP partners have engaged in recently. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has awarded Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants to a number of places with NNIP partners, and the assessment is a requirement for those grants.

The FHEA seeks to address similar issues of opportunity, access and affordability, using a three-step process of data analysis, deliberation, and decisionmaking. NNIP Partner in several cities have been involved in the first two steps through their analysis of local data holdings and in working on community stakeholder engagement in order to determine priorities and recommend policies that can be enacted to ensure equitable regional development.

HUD has provided nationally available datasets in a variety of domains (including education, job access, and health hazards, among others) but encouraged grantees to use local data wherever possible. As the debate moves forward, regions will use these data and deliberations and will be tasked with making tough decisions about where to site affordable housing, how to provide better access to opportunities in jobs and education through transit, and encourage economic development in areas hard hit by the housing crisis.

This session will be chaired and moderated by **Max Weselcouch** from the Furman Center at NYU. Partners will share lessons about working on affordable housing issues and working to move and keep people in opportunity neighborhoods (about 10 minutes each).

**Jeff Matson** (Minneapolis) will describe the FHEA being completed by the Metropolitan Council. The ultimate goal is for the FHEA and a dialog about equity to be placed centrally in the region’s current long-range plan, Thrive 2040. Several local partners are assisting with a three step process of data analysis, deliberation, and decisionmaking. Jeff will explain the role that these partners have played and the progress made thus far.

**Eleanor Tutt** (St. Louis) will discuss the Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance’s role in an affordable housing gap analysis commissioned by the Behavioral Health Network of Greater St. Louis (BHN). The analysis will help identify the need for safe and affordable housing options for persons impacted by mental illness and/or substance abuse. In addition to research, RHCDA has led stakeholders in data-informed discussions about what qualities might define opportunity neighborhoods in the context of behavioral health, where persons with behavioral health needs are currently living within the region, and what barriers might be causing discrepancies between stated preferences and actual neighborhood choice.

**Phyllis Betts** (Memphis) will relate the Center for Community Building and Neighborhood Action’s role and approach to the Airport City planning process, which conceptualizes Airport City as a not-so-obvious but nevertheless existing community of opportunity that merits (and requires) sustained effort to maintain and grow opportunities. Unlike strategies designed to move people into opportunity neighborhoods, the challenge that exists in Memphis is preserving these high-quality neighborhoods in light of economic and other difficulties.

After the panelists present, **Max Weselcouch** will moderate a short plenary discussion and questions for the panelists (about 15 minutes). We will use the remaining time for table talk so that everyone can participate in the discussion and then have a short report out. Possible discussion topics:

* What are examples of work that has been done or in progress around affordable housing and opportunity neighborhoods in other cities?
* What affordable housing strategies can low-cost cities learn from high-cost cities and vice versa?
* How do we talk about these issues with the broader public without evoking emotions typically associated with gentrification debates or NIMBYism?
* Are there potential cross-site activities or projects that relate to this area?