



A New Narrative for Housing: Playbook for the Greater Washington Region



The Moment is Now!

Greater Washington is where history is made. Where government, corporate, nonprofit, philanthropic, faith and community leaders step up to confront difficult challenges *because they are hard*. Where our residents come together to solve problems by drawing on the ingenuity that is baked into the diversity of their individual backgrounds and experiences.

There has never been a more important moment for Greater Washington to focus that powerful problem-solving energy on solutions to housing. With population growth, displacement, homelessness, and the economic impacts of COVID-19 looming large, prosperity for our region depends on decisive action now to make sure our housing stock meets the needs of the future. If we fail to act – or settle for half-measures – we’ll lose the very engine that makes this region strong: our people.

To succeed, Greater Washington must remain a diverse place where all people have decent, affordable, accessible places to live in thriving communities. We must work collaboratively, over the long haul, to replace outdated, inequitable housing systems that are undermining the success of our neighborhoods, industries, small businesses, and community organizations.

This playbook is a powerful tool to build the long-lasting public support we need to help Greater Washington remain a vibrant, livable place for everyone. We invite you to help us in this effort.



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Strengthening Our Narratives through Messaging Research

This is a critical moment for anyone who values housing in Greater Washington. It is a moment where your neighbors are trying to make sense of what's happening around them, to their own prospects for success, and for the success of their community overall.

This is an especially important time for people like you who understand the central role that housing plays in Greater Washington's success. You are being called to be interpreters and guides: to help people connect to this issue, to help them see their stake in advocating for more equitable housing outcomes, and to mobilize them to act on the values they hold about the dignity of all people.

This is a moment when our storytelling matters a great deal. In order to bring forward the new champions we need to achieve a more just future, we must communicate powerfully the kind of region we are today and the region we want for tomorrow. And we need those new champions to see themselves in our vision of the future and to want to be a part of it.

The messaging research outlined in this playbook is meant to strengthen our narrative storytelling. It will help us connect our vision to the hopes and dreams – and worries – that we know Greater Washington residents have. It will help connect their individual truths to the larger truth about how we all benefit from living in a more just world.

Our Messaging Strategy Must Do Three Things

1.

Understand the People We Are Trying to Mobilize and What Motivates Them to Action

Making the case for housing requires that we have some idea of the beliefs, aspirations, fears, and hopes of the people we are talking to. That's why we've done months of research – talking to people across Greater Washington and hearing from organizations working to advance housing solutions.

Because there are a wide variety of different audiences and organizations working to expand housing in Greater Washington, we've outlined high level, general messages that can be tailored for use in specific narratives to different groups and audiences.

2.

Make Clear Messaging Recommendations from the Research

Messaging research allows us to use good social science to connect to different audiences most effectively. It helps us anticipate backfires in how we communicate as well as see new pathways to better practice.

We only win if we are changing people's orientation to the world they are seeing. The research we've conducted in Greater Washington has looked closely at the ways we can effectively do that.

Review the guidance here, use what helps advance your work, and share this research widely with others who are advocating for better housing in Greater Washington.

3.

Help People Deploy the Recommendations in Their Own Narratives

Messaging research should never replace your expertise or your truth as a community builder and organizer. Look critically at the messaging advice in this playbook (and in other guides) for tips, tools and language that can help you tell your story.

The messaging advice in this playbook will give you tools to make you an even better storyteller – sharing narratives that inspire people to action.

Tell your story and let the research we've done help!

First, We Listened!

More than 250 residents in the region participated in our community voice sessions. They were recruited through a professional recruiting firm to achieve a diversity of perspectives.

- Ages: 20 to 74
- Household Income: \$35K to \$250K+
- Racial/Ethnic Diversity
- Education: high school to post-grad
- Occupational mix
- Mix of renters and owners
- Mix of progressives and conservatives
- Mix of couples, singles, families and single parents
- Range of housing situations, housing histories and perspectives
- Diversity of political affiliation, community involvement
- All registered voters





Strategic CaseMaking™ Recommendations for Greater Washington

Making the Case for Housing in Greater Washington

1. **Be intentional about building a collective regional or place-based identity into your narrative**, onto which a broader appeal for support can be built
2. **Powerfully connect housing** to the top concerns of Washingtonians
3. **Elevate the urgency to tackle housing as a public concern** by showing how housing positions the region to better adapt to change
4. **Shift Washingtonians into investment mode** and out of a charity mindset regarding housing solutions
5. **Use data to highlight the possibilities for wide-scale improvement**, not to remind people of the “housing crisis” they are so accustomed to hearing about
6. **Position housing as a powerful shaping force** that can determine whether we thrive or merely survive



**Put in the
“big rocks”
first:
Trust, Stake &
Belonging**

**Connect to
people’s
aspirations for
the future.**

Making the Case for Housing in Greater Washington

Center equity
as part of
EVERY
housing
conversation!

Make sure that
EVERYONE
can see themselves in
your vision of
success!

7. **Motivate Washingtonians to do the hard work of systems change.** Use metaphors to explain how improving those systems could help everybody and show evidence that change is possible and that the hard work is truly shared
8. **Take the time to introduce and center equity effectively** into EVERY conversation about housing
9. **Tell the “comeback” story** often and position Washingtonians as the heroes, working with the support of institutions of conscience
10. **Help Washingtonians visualize what success looks like** and how the outcomes we are after will help THEM. Be explicit about the metrics of success, explain how things will get better as a result of our sacrifices and ask them to hold you accountable for the results
11. **Be intentional in sharing the value proposition of housing and community development organizations** as having a strong track record of creating/preserving housing as well as giving voice to the concerns, expertise, and resources of the communities they serve

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a single green puzzle piece. The hand is positioned over a wooden table where many other colorful puzzle pieces are scattered. The background is blurred, showing other people's hands and faces, suggesting a group activity. A red rectangular bar is visible in the top left corner.


Understanding the Recommendations

1. LEVERAGE THE POWER OF A STRONG “WE”




1. LEVERAGE THE POWER OF A STRONG “WE”

DON'T

-  Don't underestimate the cynicism Washingtonians are experiencing about the possibility that the housing system in their region can be reshaped in their favor

DO

-  Focus on building the most important elements first: trust, stake and belonging

1. LEVERAGE THE POWER OF A STRONG “WE”

Be intentional about **building a collective regional or place-based identity into your narrative**, onto which a broader appeal for support can be built

WHY IT MATTERS

- **Connect Washingtonians to a stronger collective identity that helps them feel united in purpose.** In our community voice sessions, participants did **not** voice a strong regional or place-based identity. Identity is important, not only does it signal a sense of shared fate with others, but it denotes a sense of belonging. Without that broader sense of identity, it is difficult to effectively land a “WE” statement successfully, on which a larger narrative for collective action can be built.
- **As part of defining this identity, help people connect their neighborhoods/communities to others in the region.** What is often challenging about support for affordable housing is that people who are stably housed do not see it as THEIR problem to solve. Make the case that they have a stake in expanding affordable housing— no matter the

particular county, city, or neighborhood in which they live or work in the region. Most importantly, share why the leadership of neighboring communities have a stake in working together on housing issues.

- **Be clear about the opportunities of working together or the perils of a “go it alone approach”.** Remind people that we either work together and rise, or we ignore the collective strength of the region and we become more fragile.

1. LEVERAGE THE POWER OF A STRONG “WE”

Be intentional about **building a collective regional or place-based identity into your narrative**, onto which a broader appeal for support can be built

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- In Greater Washington, we enjoy vibrant neighborhoods and a dynamic economy—built on quality of life, a highly skilled workforce, and cultural resources—that give us a strong competitive advantage, nationally and internationally. Our local businesses attract dedicated employees, our colleges and universities recruit high-caliber talent, and our towns and neighborhoods boast strong and welcoming communities. **Our homes are the foundation of our flourishing communities – they fuel the engine of our region’s economy.**
- The same way that you can’t build a house without a foundation, you can’t sustain a strong regional economy, a talented workforce or the health and vitality of families, without a place for everyone to live. A home is one of the most basic human needs and too many Washingtonians do not have one or they have one that is neither affordable nor accessible to their jobs, transit corridors or other activity centers. **Housing is the missing ingredient to our region’s prosperity, and the smartest investment we could make is to add it back in.**
- What happens to the people in one community or neighborhood in our region affects the people in neighboring communities. **Right now, we’re undermining our regional economy by leaving whole parts of our region without the diverse mix of housing that the people who live and work here need and deserve.**
- **The choice is ours – we rise to the occasion to meet the challenge and prioritize housing in our region, or we resign ourselves to the siloes that got us here.** Let’s choose to chart a path forward together, that enables all of us to truly benefit from the prosperity that our region is experiencing.
- **Our region prospers most when everyone prospers.** By failing to locate new housing or to preserve homes that people from all walks of life can afford around transit and business corridors, we are undermining our region’s success and recreating divisions that weaken our collective strength. We need a regional strategy that helps build the collective strength of the place we all call home.

2. CONNECT TO WHAT PEOPLE CARE ABOUT



2. CONNECT TO WHAT PEOPLE CARE ABOUT

DON'T



Don't assume that educating Washingtonians about the housing challenges facing Greater Washington will motivate stronger interest

DO



Powerfully connect Washingtonians to the issues of greatest concern to THEM: *infrastructure, transportation, education and health*

2. CONNECT TO WHAT PEOPLE CARE ABOUT

Powerfully connect housing to the issues of **greatest concern to Washingtonians:** *infrastructure, transportation, education and health*

WHY IT MATTERS

- ***When we connect housing to the aspirations of people in our communities and across the region, they are more likely to lean forward because we have connected their “why” to ours.*** In our community voice sessions, people told us energetically that they wanted the infrastructure around them to “operate better.” They told us that they wanted a transit system that better connected them to the resources across the region. And, they told us that they didn’t want to sacrifice their children’s education to stay in the neighborhoods and communities they loved. When we tell them how housing can help deliver on THEIR aspirations, we get a different conversation.
- ***Reframe this conversation so that people get what their stake is in improving housing across the region.*** Affordable housing narratives typically start with some conversation about poor or struggling families and their inability to afford rent/mortgage based on what they earn. Starting there allows people who do not perceive “affordable housing” as THEIR problem to simply check out of this conversation. In our community voice sessions, people did not see a connection to “affordable housing” because they didn’t believe they would ever actually directly benefit.

2. CONNECT TO WHAT PEOPLE CARE ABOUT

Powerfully connect housing to the issues of **greatest concern to Washingtonians:** *infrastructure, transportation, education and health*

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- The investments in housing that our region needs today are as important as any road, bridge, or transit system. Some call these “infrastructure” investments but we simply call them the things that power our economy and keep us connected and healthy. In the same way that we need these other forms of infrastructure to operate better, we need better and more affordable housing options. **Let’s face it – with better and more affordable housing, we all operate better.**
- **No matter who you are, success in life starts at home.** When we have safe, secure places to live, parents earn more, kids learn better, we’re healthier and happier, our communities are stronger, and our region has the building blocks to thrive.
 - We all thrive when we can live near our job. Less time on the road or the train means more time for our health, our family and our community.
 - We all thrive when families have a decent place to lay their heads at night—whether they are renters or homeowners. A stable home anchors the ladder for future success.
- We all thrive when our children have a secure home. Research indicates that kids are more likely to succeed in school and have better job prospects in the future when they don’t suffer the stress of wondering where they will sleep.
- We all thrive when those of us who need health care resources can be supported where we live. People with secure homes can more consistently access the care they need.
- We all thrive when Washingtonians have strong pathways to building wealth through homeownership. Homeowners can build and pass on wealth, which can help break a cycle of poverty and generate resources to invest throughout the community.
- We all thrive when we ensure our seniors are integrated into our local communities and can choose a place to live that meets their physical, cognitive and social needs.

3. NAME THE POWER OF THE MOMENT



3. NAME THE POWER OF THE MOMENT

DON'T



Don't assume Washingtonians get the urgency of this moment to solve the larger challenge of affordable housing in the region

DO



Take seriously the need to raise the urgency of tackling housing as a broad public concern and show how housing positions the region to better adapt to change

3. NAME THE POWER OF THE MOMENT

Raise the urgency of tackling housing as a broad public concern and show how housing positions the region to better adapt to change

WHY IT MATTERS

- **Lifting up the adaptive challenges facing the region will build a sense of urgency** by pulling people out of the current moment and forcing them to consider what we need to do to be ready to take advantage of the opportunities of the future. Some of those challenges include COVID-19 and the need to prepare for future health pandemics; the need for environmental sustainability (no one wants to see our region under water because we did not act to innovate/change how we build and power our homes, create communities and re-use materials, etc.); the need to prepare for the tech-heavy economy that is emerging and the workforce it requires.
- **Take great care when lifting up Greater Washington's challenge as "regional growth."** In the community voice sessions, people felt a sense of urgency about and responded to that challenge, but they also reacted negatively to having to act because "newcomers are moving to the region."
- **Use an adaptive challenge as your "villain" in the story rather than poor people, developers, policymakers or other common antagonists.** Instead of vilifying developers or policymakers, poor people or rich people, positioning the adaptive challenge as our "villain," as the focus of our angst, is an important part of building a stronger sense of collective identity.

3. NAME THE POWER OF THE MOMENT

Raise the urgency of tackling housing as a broad public concern and show how housing positions the region to better adapt to change

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- Regions function best when they benefit from strong collaborative, adaptive leaders. Today, we need those leaders (community, corporate, philanthropic, nonprofit and government leaders) to **show up powerfully to help solve the region's toughest challenges. Housing is at the top of that list. It is urgent and it is a priority.**
- As we look ahead to our future, one thing is certain. **If we do not plan today for the housing needs of the people in our communities – the people that make this region what it is – we will lose what we value about living here.** Times have changed:
 - Technology is automating the jobs many of us depend on to pay rent or mortgages
 - The demographics of our region are changing rapidly, forcing us to rethink the types of housing we need versus what is being built today
 - Our environmental concerns are elevated, forcing us to rethink how we adaptively re-use materials to help sustain our planet
- Our values around equity and inclusivity are stronger, meaning that we have no interest in policies that recreate racially and economically divided neighborhoods across our region
- The simple truth is that we haven't built enough homes to keep up with the demand over the last decade. This means we now have more people trying to find homes they can afford near transit, their jobs, and good schools. **The consequences of our inattention on this issue is that it is driving up costs for everybody and we simply cannot afford to ignore this issue anymore. It costs all of us too much.**
- By failing to locate new housing or to preserve homes that people from all walks of life can afford around transit and business corridors, **we are undermining our region's success and recreating divisions that weaken our collective strength.**

4. SHIFT PEOPLE INTO INVESTMENT MODE



4. SHIFT PEOPLE INTO INVESTMENT MODE

DON'T

- ✗ Don't assume that people's empathy is enough to garner support for housing policies or to mobilize them to action

DO

- ✓ Shift Washingtonians out of a charity mindset and into an investor mindset

4. SHIFT PEOPLE INTO INVESTMENT MODE

Shift people out of a charity mindset and into an **investor mindset**

WHY IT MATTERS

- ***The language of “investment” moves people out of a charity mindset.*** So often we expect people to be willing to provide resources to those most in need out of a sense of empathy, compassion and charity. When we “invest,” we do so because we expect dividends and other gains to come from those investments that we have a stake in. In addition, because “infrastructure” investments take a long time to mature, we push people’s expectations about when they’ll see a return on their investment much further out. That’s exactly what housing is – an investment in our community that pays strong yields over the long term – strong communities, healthier people, educated workforce, economic development, and much more. The language of investment helps us to reset the conversation!

- ***This narrative repositions our listeners as part of the story and assigns them the “work” of making “smart investments.”***

Once we shared the larger adaptive challenge in our community voice sessions, we could get people to embrace the task of deciding the broader goals within which we should make “smart investments.” There was genuine energy and excitement around several broader

investment goals, but two rose to the top: (1) diversifying the mix of housing options available, and (2) bringing opportunity back to all neighborhoods. People were genuinely excited about the prospect of getting something of benefit out of the investment in housing – beyond the feelings of good will. Our task is to amplify this excitement by sharing more about the creativity and diversity that Washingtonians would have access to, as we work to expand housing across the region as well as to amplify the desire to see the opportunities that come from that expansion be widely distributed across the region. Positioning the “smart investment” strategy as widening the diversity of housing options (for seniors, for young families, etc.), is **especially important** in parts of the region where the goal is to grow support for more density.

4. SHIFT PEOPLE INTO INVESTMENT MODE

Shift people out of a charity mindset and into an **investor mindset**

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- *The investments in housing our region needs today are as important as any road, bridge, or transit system. **Some call these “infrastructure” investments but we simply call them the things that power our economy, keeping us connected and healthy.** Housing is one of the smartest investments of this kind because it pays dividends that our region desperately needs in times like this – it strengthens our resources for wellness, it improves our competitive advantage in a national economy that is rapidly changing, and it helps us end the long legacy of disinvestment in neighborhoods that we can no longer afford to leave behind.*
- ***Like roads and bridges, homes are building blocks—assets that will be around for decades.** By investing in the affordability and accessibility of homes across our region, we will seed better outcomes in education, health, and economic opportunity. Homes are our starting place.*
- *Our investments to expand and improve housing across our region also pay the added dividend of improving our schools, helping them to better educate our children by improving the housing stability of the parents who live and work here. With better and more affordable housing, we all operate better. That’s why we’re committed to the effort to make housing our priority!*

5. USE DATA TO HIGHLIGHT SOLUTIONS

SPREAD THE WORD.
We are working together to expand and diversify the mix of homes available across our region, so that we all live better.

New Ways to Build

Inventive design and materials are making homes more affordable.



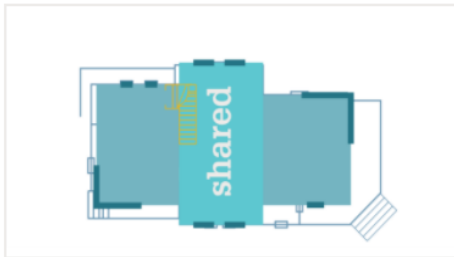
ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

Built on the same lot as the primary home, these units add affordable supply and generate a new income source.



HOMES FOR LESS

Auburn University's Rural Studio created the "\$20,000 home," blending beautiful design with lower cost building materials.³



FLOOR PLANS FOR TODAY

Most homes are built for nuclear families—two parents and kids—but only 20% of households fit that definition.⁶ Updated floor plan designs would better match current needs.

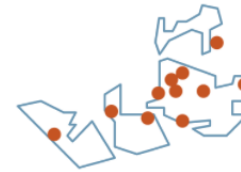


SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Fannie Mae launched the Sustainable Communities Innovation Challenge to help connect communities to quality economic, health, and educational opportunities.⁷

Elected officials are helping to tackle the affordable housing issue by adopting measures that could **increase supply**.

Zoning regulations



New zoning regulations are increasing the affordable housing supply.

Minneapolis recently ended single-family zoning.

"Single-family zoning has been that sacred cow of urban planning. And it's a cow we don't need anymore. Zoning needs to be adapted to the realities that we're dealing with today."
—JACOB FREY, MAYOR, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Development & transit



Development close to transit cuts commute costs for low-income workers and provides easy access to job opportunities.¹²

"A working family—even one whose rent or mortgage payment is affordable—cannot prosper long-term without access to transportation or health care near that home."
—JEFFERY HAYWARD, EVP AND HEAD OF MULTIFAMILY, FANNIE MAE

Tiny homes



Regulating tiny homes can help the trend go mainstream—and increase supply.

Maine was the first state to create tiny home construction guidelines.¹³

Parking requirements



Eliminating required parking for new housing increases construction and lowers costs.

San Francisco was the largest U.S. city to eliminate minimum parking requirements for housing.¹⁴

5. USE DATA TO HIGHLIGHT SOLUTIONS

DON'T

X Don't use data to tell Washingtonians about magnitude of the housing problems they face or the “housing crisis” that they are so accustomed to hearing about

DO



Use your data to tell the story of how many people, businesses and/or communities in the region could be helped by our investments in housing

5. USE DATA TO HIGHLIGHT SOLUTIONS

Use your data to tell the story of how many people, businesses and/or communities in the region **could be helped by our investments in housing**

WHY IT MATTERS

- People have become accustomed to hearing about housing issues through the lens of “crisis” and we use our data effectively to tell that crisis story. With so many other issues in “crisis” – health care, climate change, racial justice, voting rights, and on and on, ***crisis language actually makes it more likely that people will “turn off” before we even have a chance to make our case.*** Our task is to “slow brain” the conversation using data that is solutions oriented. The idea here is to get people excited about what is possible for us to achieve as we elevate housing as a priority, make smart housing investments, and innovate so that our housing system operates better.



5. USE DATA TO HIGHLIGHT SOLUTIONS

Use your data to tell the story of how many people, businesses and/or communities in the region **could be helped by our investments in housing**

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- **We have a long track record of preserving existing homes and working to keep them affordable.** In a typical year, around 20% of all new rental homes built in the region receive some sort of assistance to make them affordable. With even more focused effort and support, we could improve and scale up the assistance available to people across Greater Washington.
- **In our region, we've made great strides in preventing families and individuals from losing their homes.** A regional plan, launched in 2019, to expand the diversity, availability and accessibility of homes in our region would help put our region back on its feet. **If each community chips in, we could reduce homelessness among families by up to 50% and nearly eliminate veteran homelessness. That's not all that is possible. We can do so much more, but we need your help to do it.**
- **In 2019, an average of nine Greater Washington families a day lost their homes to eviction. That was nine too many.** Since evictions are both costly and inhumane, we need a better approach. From a business standpoint, we know that eviction prevention costs much less than evictions, factoring in lost rent, vacancy and turnover costs, and legal fees. For every \$1 invested in eviction-prevention services, our community realizes a return of \$4.34. These savings include decreased use of homeless shelters, improved educational outcomes, and lower healthcare costs. Moreover, because evictions in our region are strikingly concentrated in specific areas, our investment in prevention might significantly eliminate (or at least, slow) the negative consequences of past eviction policies that disproportionately affected households of color, and families in low-income areas. **We all benefit when our systems operate better, when we implement innovative solutions that put people first, and when smart investments are made to improve housing stability in our region.**

Note: The data shown here are examples only.

6. POSITION HOUSING AS A SHAPING FORCE



6. POSITION HOUSING AS A SHAPING FORCE

DON'T

X Don't ignore the way that Washingtonians see housing as an outcome of negative actions and decisions happening in other sectors

DO

✓ Position housing as a powerful shaping force that will determine whether we thrive or merely survive

6. POSITION HOUSING AS A SHAPING FORCE

Position housing as a powerful shaping force that will determine whether we thrive or merely survive

WHY IT MATTERS

- ***This narrative puts housing back in the driver's seat!*** It is difficult to get people to prioritize housing because they don't see it as a driver of outcomes that matter. They see jobs, education and a host of other things as drivers of their success. Our task is to consistently position housing as a driver of outcomes that shape the quality of our lives. If housing is a driver, then fixing it becomes necessary for our success. Help people see that an investment in housing can be the catalyst for a better region in other areas of our lives, like jobs, talent retention, health, infrastructure, education, and social justice.
- ***This narrative reframes the conversation about housing into one about people's aspirations – connecting it to the positive things that people aspire to be or want to have.*** By starting with the positive outcomes that housing determines, drives and shapes, we help connect people to things they actually want – economic mobility, longer life, freedom, new businesses, etc.
- ***This narrative highlights the consequences of inaction and triggers loss aversion in our favor.*** If housing is a “predictor” of outcomes, we need to highlight the consequences of ignoring the housing needs of people in our region. Here, our narrative is clear about the challenges that we face if we continue to put housing on the backburner.
- ***This narrative makes it clear that the negative consequences of not prioritizing housing as an issue are borne by ALL of us, not just the people who are struggling to find affordable housing.*** Here, we project the negative consequences of our inaction and inattention to housing onto the broader collective. If the negative consequences of not providing more affordable housing across the region continue to be seen as only a problem for some but not others, there's no collective stake in solving this issue, especially by those who see themselves as having stable housing already.

6. POSITION HOUSING AS A SHAPING FORCE

Position housing as a powerful shaping force that will determine whether we thrive or merely survive

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- *Let's face it. The availability and affordability of quality homes across our region determines so much of our future. **That's because where we live shapes every aspect of our lives.** It affects how we connect to jobs, schools, cultural events and resources as well as how we grow our talents, skills and opportunities for advancement.*
- *Having a home in a thriving neighborhood means everything – it predicts our ability to support our families in the long-run. It predicts longer life expectancy – giving some in our region a decade more to spend with their loved ones than others. It often shapes our aspirations and affects our ability to plan, to start a new business, or to pursue a professional degree.*
- *Whether we are renters or homeowners, having a “home base” or a place to dream, aspire, plot and plan our direction, is key to the success of people across our region.*
- **No one wins if housing becomes so unaffordable in our region that people have trouble holding onto their jobs.** No one wins if our businesses can't count on the focus, ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of our workforce. No one wins if our teachers can't afford to live in the communities in which they teach, and parents have to travel further away from home to their jobs. We must fix what is happening in housing so that all of us get to pursue the lives we envision.
- *Your zip code or the place where you live, whether you own or rent, powerfully impacts your shot at success. No one should be denied their “shot” at creating the lives they envision simply because we failed to grow the availability of accessible and affordable homes in our region.*

7. MAKE THE SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS APPEALING



7. MAKE THE SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS APPEALING

DON'T

- ✗ Don't assume that because Washingtonians see the problem as being about the failure of systems, that they also see the solution as being about fixing housing systems

DO

- ✓ Motivate Washingtonians to do the hard work of systems change

7. MAKE THE SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS APPEALING

Use metaphors to explain how **improving systems could help everybody** and show evidence that change is possible and that the hard work is truly shared

WHY IT MATTERS

- *We need to remind people that personal finance and budgeting, no matter how creative we get, is unlikely to solve what we are experiencing in housing. The challenges in housing have very personal outcomes but ultimately are macro-level issues.* To keep people from getting stuck on individual-level solutions, like financial literacy, we need to be intentional about positioning this as a systems issue. We can do that by reminding people of how they defined the problem in the first place, using a metaphor to explain how our existing systems could be made to “operate” better and how the work of redesigning those systems could be spread across many groups, communities, neighborhoods, organizations or corporate entities.
- *We must counter the prominent bedtime story – “I was lucky enough to buy my home when this area was affordable” – by reminding people that when good policies are put into place, luck doesn’t need to be in the equation.* The question becomes how can we ensure that **all** Washingtonians feel “lucky” to live here because we have done the work to put systems in place that help them take care of their families, advance their careers, feel connected to all parts of our region, and take care of themselves and loved ones?

7. MAKE THE SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS APPEALING

Use metaphors to explain how **improving systems could help everybody** and show evidence that change is possible and that the hard work is truly shared


SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- *You shouldn't have to be "lucky" to find a decent place to live in our region. Seniors shouldn't have to move away, and empty nesters shouldn't be trapped in homes that have become too large for them to maintain simply because few options exist for them to downsize. Millennials who work in our region shouldn't have to leave to own a home simply because so few options exist for them to purchase one here. Families shouldn't be crammed into studios made for students or single adults simply because our rental housing stock is focused on single adults living as roommates. **When we make better housing policies and our housing system operates better, we don't leave the survival of so many people to chance or "luck."** Our systems should help us plan for and provide the critical things that people actually need to live, work and thrive here.*
- *COVID-19 and the protests around the country for racial justice have made it clear – we need our systems to operate better. That includes our housing system. COVID-19 especially has created great urgency for us all to rethink the importance of our homes, our neighborhoods and our resources for wellness. The pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of the current housing system—fragile for tenants who are struggling to socially distance and access online resources; fragile for some landlords who are struggling to operate remotely and collect rents; fragile for our economy, which needs healthy workers who have a place to be safe but still engage in everyday activities.*
- *If we want to have a diverse region – with people from all walks of life, backgrounds, cultures, expertise and careers – we have to work to ensure that there is space for them. That's why we need to get excited about the work we are doing to diversify the mix of homes in our region. We benefit so much from the contributions of our diverse workforce, now we need systems in place that explicitly work to expand options for our workforce to live.*


CENTER EQUITY IN EVERY CONVERSATION



DON'T

-  Don't assume because Washingtonians can quickly name many of the equity issues inherent in our housing struggle, they will support solutions to housing that center equity

DO

-  Take the time to position equity effectively as part of the larger story of why we need to fix housing systems

CENTER EQUITY IN HOUSING CONVERSATIONS

Take the time to introduce and center equity effectively in **EVERY** conversation about housing

WHY IT MATTERS

- ***Equity is a large and animating concern of the people who live in this region.*** Our task is to amplify and attach housing to their existing conversations around equity.
- ***You can't change what you don't acknowledge. We must acknowledge the exclusionary policies that have worked to the detriment of many groups of people across the region, and position efforts to address housing as being intended to tackle equity concerns.*** A narrative that is convincing on the issue of equity must acknowledge that many of the policies and investments of the past have made it more difficult for residents to hold onto the homes and communities they hold dear. This narrative allows us to acknowledge the past and position the push to prioritize housing as explicit equity work.
- ***This narrative locates the racial and economic disparities IN POLICIES AND SYSTEMS, not in the individual failings of people or their lack of budgeting skills.*** Having a narrative that effectively addresses equity must be embedded in a broader discussion about systems, including policies, investments, programs, and services. This narrative works because the focus of the failure is centered in systems as an explanation for negative conditions of people with low incomes with respect to housing. This helps avoid the unfortunate backfires that can happen when we raise issues of the vulnerability of some groups in our community but fail to explicitly connect that vulnerability to harmful intentional policies of the past.

CENTER EQUITY IN HOUSING CONVERSATIONS

Take the time to introduce and center equity effectively in **EVERY** conversation about housing

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- *We simply cannot ignore how we arrived at this moment. **Our work to expand, improve and diversify the mix of homes across our region is a critical part of an intentional effort to advance equity and inclusion in our region.** We have to acknowledge the harm and mistrust that past housing policies created – racially and economically segregating many parts of our region, denying homeownership opportunities to people who work for and deserve those opportunities, displacing people from neighborhoods that they have culturally cultivated, and reinforcing economic inequities through wholesale disinvestment in neighborhoods that desperately needed critical resources for wellness. The result is that people of color are over-represented among people experiencing homelessness, and those most impacted by the lack of affordable housing and jobs and health disparities. We cannot undo the past, but we can redesign the policies of the past. We can also make investments in housing so that people from all walks of life have affordable places to live and are able to enjoy the benefits of our growing, prosperous region.*
- ***We refuse to leave behind entire neighborhoods, communities and groups of people as our region thrives. The investment in housing is a way to create thriving, diverse and inclusive communities across our entire region.** Our success in this effort will be judged in part by our ability to foster greater social, racial, and economic inclusion. That's why we are making an intentional effort to measure (with data and metrics) our ability to expand housing opportunities to a wide range of people across our region. **We want to measure equity concretely and to show a real commitment to addressing the inequities of the past. We do not plan to take old inequities into the future of Greater Washington. We see and envision a different, more equitable way forward.***

8b. CONNECT HOUSING TO OTHER EQUITY ISSUES

Attach housing to constructive narratives in other sectors and social movements that hold promise for expanding our coalition

WHY IT MATTERS

- ***Don't miss the opportunity to respond to other equity concerns that are stoking people's passions in this moment.***

Three very important animating concerns emerged as we were doing this work: (1) health equity in response to COVID-19; (2) racial justice in response to Black Lives Matter protests; and (3) economic equity, as recession fears start to emerge in real-time. These concerns are likely to endure for a long time, so connecting housing to these conversations will be helpful.

- ***Telling stories of interdependence is one of the most powerful casemaking techniques we can deploy to connect housing constructively to this moment.*** Vivid and authentic stories about the ways in which we are all connected, our fates are intertwined, and our prosperity shared are all important to lift up. This is

especially important as we try to lift broader support (policies, investments, services) for those Washingtonians most in need. When people are reminded consistently of their deep connection and reliance on others who are also in need, it helps them to see their stake in helping others.

- ***Where applicable, seize the moment to attach housing solutions to messaging already in circulation about the health, racial and economic justice movements.*** For example, in health equity the messaging around zip code as a predictor of health outcomes is very easily and usefully applied to housing. The same kind of connections are useful on racial and economic equity issues.

8b. CONNECT HOUSING TO OTHER EQUITY ISSUES

Attach housing to constructive narratives in other sectors and social movements that hold promise for expanding our coalition

SAMPLE LANGUAGE


- *COVID-19 reminds us how reliant we are on each other for our survival. Whether it is the doctors and nurses at our hospitals, the home health aides who care for our aging parents, or our children's teachers who soldiered on through distance learning, we need each other. **Our health depends on their health; likewise our housing stability often depends on the housing stability of a great many workers across our region.***
- *No matter who we are or why we came to Greater Washington, having a safe, stable place to come home to is the foundation of our health and happiness. Home is where we celebrate our good times and recover from the rest. But today, because many of our systems have not been designed to benefit everyone, too many of us are left merely surviving in unhealthy environments or under the threat that one unforeseen problem will have us out on the street. Far too many neighborhoods lack the critical resources that would allow us to build wealth, connect to resources for wellness, and pursue our aspirations. For people to be and stay well both physically and mentally, for children to grow and elders to flourish, we need to ensure that all of us have housing we can count on. **Our region prospers most when we all prosper.***
- *Your zip code or the place where you live powerfully determines many health outcomes. Our homes keep us healthy – they are among our greatest resources for wellness. Since where you live can determine your chances of being healthy and happy, we need to do more to ensure that our communities provide ample opportunities for people to do and be well.*

9. TELL THE COMEBACK STORY




9. TELL THE COMEBACK STORY

DON'T

-  Don't discount the "bedtime" story that Washingtonians tell about growing up or living in communities where prosperity was possible

DO

-  Tell the "comeback" story with Washingtonians as the heroes

9. TELL THE COMEBACK STORY

Tell the “**comeback**” story often and position Washingtonians as the heroes, working with the support of institutions of conscience

WHY IT MATTERS

- ***Tell the comeback story over and over again! It reinforces the asset framing and helps overcome the fatalism that many people bring to housing conversations.*** Remind people that Greater Washington has been home to important and historic wins on the issues of fair housing and civil rights. Remind people that, despite its own history of housing injustices, this region has also been a place where many people have been able to build successful lives. Tell stories that remind people of their aspirations to educate their children, find good jobs, enjoy the cultural assets in this region, build wealth, and experience joy.
- ***Pivot around the most common bedtime story that often obstructs people’s agency around housing – “once upon a time, this region was affordable.”*** In

our community voice sessions, people narrated the story of how this region “used to be” over and over again. We must pair those stories with the language of adaptation (i.e. “but the world around us has changed”), so that it moves people forward.

- ***Provide receipts! Name specific challenges that the region has faced and solved over the last 20 to 30 years, whenever possible.*** The ability to point to our successes in solving big challenges will help people overcome their cynicism that we can solve housing challenges and could go a long way toward giving Washingtonians the confidence that we can do this again.

9. TELL THE COMEBACK STORY

Tell the “**comeback**” story often and position Washingtonians as the heroes, working with the support of institutions of conscience

SAMPLE LANGUAGE


- *The Greater Washington region has always been on the front lines of struggle for civil rights, opportunity for all, and social justice for the nation. Many of the historic legal battles for fair housing and other civil rights related to housing have been fought right here, in our backyard. And despite our own challenges with redlining and other exclusionary practices, this region has been home to many families of modest means who have been able to send their children to some of the nation’s best public and private schools, graduating into good jobs, and eventually into their own homes. We have a strong legacy as a place that seeds opportunity. If we want to preserve that legacy, we need to make sure that the housing we need to support Washingtonians is in place over the long-term.*
- *Once upon a time, it was possible to work almost any job full-time in this area and find someplace to live within your means. But the world around us changed, bringing new technology and different kinds of businesses, changing the workforce and demographics of our communities. In response, the region has become more expensive and the opportunity for people of modest means to stay connected to the communities they love in our region has become much more difficult. If we don’t make intentional investments and meaningful policies that allow people who live here to be able to afford to stay here, we’ll lose the legacy of being a region that is committed to equity, opportunity and inclusiveness. That’s why we’re working to ensure that the policies, programs, investments and services needed to ensure that we maintain a diverse mix of homes to serve the diverse mix of people who work here are in place today. We know how to do this. So let’s do it.*

10. DESCRIBE WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE




10. DESCRIBE WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

DON'T

 Don't use big numbers to tell Washingtonians more about how many units we need or population growth across the region

DO

 Help Washingtonians understand what success looks like and how it will help them

10. DESCRIBE WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Be explicit about the metrics of success, explain how things will get better as a result of our sacrifices, and ask Greater Washingtonians to hold you accountable for the results

WHY IT MATTERS

- *It has been more than 50 years – almost a full generation – since our country has had a major, concerted transformation of our housing system focused on equity and justice. Remind people of what that push needs to look like and what success could look like.* Most of all, tell them what their participation in a broader movement around housing would look like. Be clear about what you need and want them to do in order to be good partners with you on this issue.
- *Given the mistrust that people have in leaders and institutions about this issue, it is critically important that the words we say – our narrative – be accompanied by a results framework that carves out relevant metrics.* Those metrics need to show that we are measuring our success not just by the number of homes we can build, but by the way those homes are sited, made available to residents and help to shape their neighborhoods.

10. DESCRIBE WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Be explicit about the metrics of success, explain how things will get better as a result of our sacrifices, and ask Greater Washingtonians to hold you accountable for the results

SAMPLE LANGUAGE


- *We are working to create a region where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring because we have made appropriate homes available to those who need it. That may sound like a dream to many in our region, but cities around the country are eliminating various forms of homelessness with common sense policies, strong cross-sector and community partnerships, and people first approaches. Now it's our turn.*
- *Other parts of the country have moved faster and more aggressively than we have in recent years to address affordable housing. [Show examples.] These are just a few of the examples of how other parts of the country are rising to the challenges of the current housing dynamics in bigger ways. And we can do the same, by using common sense policies and innovative solutions. It is possible to prevent homelessness and provide affordable housing for more families in our region. **This is something we can win.***
- ***Imagine what it would be like to easily find and afford a great home to rent or buy in a great neighborhood near your job or anywhere in Greater Washington.** Imagine what would it be like to get home earlier from work, to be connected to places all across the region via great access through reliable transit system, to rely on the great schools for your children, and to pay rent or mortgage at no more than 30 percent of your earnings. Imagine that everybody in the region got chance to have these experiences. **That world is not only possible, it is what we're working toward. Take action with us!** Get involved. Advocate for housing solutions. Volunteer with organizations working to create and preserve more housing. Contribute ideas or resources.*

11. SHARE YOUR TRACK RECORD




11. SHARE YOUR TRACK RECORD

DON'T

-  Don't assume that Washingtonians trust your good faith efforts to help them

DO

-  Understand their concerns about predatory behavior in housing and share your track record in advancing equitable solutions

11. SHARE YOUR TRACK RECORD

Be intentional in sharing the value proposition of housing and community development organizations as having a strong track record of creating/preserving housing as well as giving voice to the concerns, expertise, and resources of the communities they serve

WHY IT MATTERS

- ***To be successful, we must directly counter the distrust, cynicism and apathy among residents of Greater Washington. These are impediments to action, and without some intentional messaging to bolster people's trust and belief that systems change is possible, they will not lean in.*** Take the time to position the work of the organizations working toward housing solutions as having a long track record in the region. Share and highlight the value of these organizations as well as the ways in which

they have helped to improve housing in the region. People do not trust that larger organizations (employers, government leaders, banks, developers and others involved in expanding housing) are working to benefit everyday people. Without an intentional effort to be credible and position these organizations as true community partners, you won't get the buy-in that you need from broader public audiences.

11. SHARE YOUR TRACK RECORD

Be intentional in sharing the value proposition of housing and community development organizations as having a strong track record of creating/preserving housing as well as giving voice to the concerns, expertise, and resources of the communities they serve

SAMPLE LANGUAGE

- *Greater Washington has a well-earned reputation for collaborative and efficient investments in homes. We have a long track record of preserving existing homes and keeping them affordable. We need to maintain these crucial investments, but they fall short of addressing the demand for homes across our region. That's our role – to make sure that we grow the region's investment in diverse, accessible, and affordable homes.*
- *Making sure that communities have the resources they need—like good homes that families can afford, places to get health care, dependable public transportation, and good schools—requires giving voice to community residents to co-create solutions with us. When the communities we serve can't speak the language of banks and government agencies, it makes it hard for them to be heard and makes it likely they will be ignored. They may very well lose important opportunities to create affordable housing for people who need it most. That's why our leadership is critical to the success of efforts to expand housing options in our region.*
- *Even the most well-intentioned efforts, if not well-aligned and coordinated, can fail to deliver the intended results. We need stronger and more robust partnerships among government, business, builders, lenders, nonprofits, philanthropy, and community leaders to make additional affordable homes a reality. That's where our work begins – we offer critical support and resources that strengthen the alignment of people involved in creating innovative housing solutions across the region. We work across sectors, across communities, across different levels of government and bring resources to grow our region's response to the housing challenges we face today. With our help, we can ensure that there is stronger alignment, coordination and scale for solutions that are truly moving the region in the right direction.*



Do's and Don'ts Checklist from the Strategic CaseMaking™ Research

DO'S AND DON'TS CHECKLIST

Use this checklist every time you develop materials, presentations, or talking points to support housing in Greater Washington.

DON'T



Don't underestimate the cynicism Washingtonians are experiencing about the possibility that the housing system in our region can be reshaped in their favor



Don't assume that educating Washingtonians about the housing challenges facing Greater Washington will motivate stronger interest



Don't assume Washingtonians get the urgency of this moment to solve the larger challenge of affordable housing in the region



Don't assume that people's empathy is enough to garner support for housing policies or to mobilize them to action



Don't use data to tell Washingtonians about the magnitude of the housing problems we face or the "housing crisis" that they are so accustomed to hearing about

DO



Build the most important elements in first: trust, stake and belonging



Powerfully connect Washingtonians to the issues of greatest concern to THEM: *infrastructure, transportation, education and health*



Take seriously the need to raise the urgency of tackling housing as a broad public concern and show how housing positions the region to better adapt to change



Shift Washingtonians out of charity mindset and into investor mindset



Use your data to tell the story of how many people, businesses and/or communities in the region could be helped by our investments in housing

DO'S AND DON'TS CHECKLIST

DON'T



Don't ignore the way that Washingtonians see housing as an outcome of negative actions and decisions happening in other sectors



Don't assume that because Washingtonians see the **problem** as being about the failure of systems, that they also see the **solution** as being about fixing housing systems



Don't assume because Washingtonians can quickly name many of the equity issues inherent in our housing struggle, they will support solutions to housing that center equity



Don't discount the "bedtime" story that Washingtonians tell about growing up or living in communities where prosperity was possible



Don't use big numbers to tell Washingtonians more about how many units we need or population growth across the region



Don't assume that Washingtonians trust your good faith efforts to help them

DO



Position housing as a powerful shaping force that will determine whether we thrive or merely survive



Motivate Washingtonians to do the hard work of systems change



Take the time to position equity effectively as part of the larger story of why we need to fix housing systems



Tell the "comeback" story with Washingtonians as the heroes



Help Washingtonians understand what success looks like and how it will help them



Understand their concerns about predatory behavior in housing and share your track record in advancing equitable solutions



Putting It All Together: Practice Examples

THE SMARTEST INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT IS HOUSING

The smartest investment we can make in our region's future is securing a foundation of strong communities and stable homes for all Washingtonians.

In Greater Washington, we enjoy vibrant neighborhoods and a dynamic economy—built on quality of life, a highly skilled workforce, and cultural resources—that give us a strong competitive advantage, nationally and internationally. Our local businesses attract dedicated employees, our colleges and universities recruit high-caliber talent, and our towns and neighborhoods boast strong and welcoming communities. Our homes are the foundation of our flourishing communities—they fuel the engine of our region's economy.

Our homes are the first, and perhaps the most critical infrastructure, we have. As we look ahead to our future, one thing is certain. We won't get very far if we don't focus on innovating how we build and maintain our infrastructure, and how we grow that infrastructure to meet the dynamic needs of our economy and our workforce.

If we do not plan for the housing needs of the people in our communities – the people that make this region what it is – we will lose what we value about living here. No one thrives if we price out young adults who have the talent and skills to strengthen our businesses. No one thrives if businesses leave the region because they can't attract and retain a workforce. No one thrives if families struggle to put a roof over their heads.

Where we live matters. It is connected to every aspect of our lives.

Success in life starts at home for all ages and all people. When we have safe, secure places to live, parents earn more, kids learn better, health and well-being improve, communities prosper, and we all thrive.

- We all thrive when families have a decent place to lay their heads at night—whether they are renters or homeowners. A stable home anchors the ladder for future success.
- We all thrive when we can live near our place of work, reducing the time and expense of commuting and leaving more time for community, health and family.
- We all thrive when our children have a secure home. Research indicates that kids are more likely to succeed in school and have better job prospects in the future when they don't suffer the stress of wondering where they will sleep.
- We all thrive when those of us who need health care resources can be supported where we live. People with secure homes can more consistently access the care they need.
- We all thrive when Washingtonians have strong pathways to building wealth through homeownership. Homeowners can build and pass on wealth, which can help break a cycle of poverty and generate resources to invest throughout the community.
- We all thrive when we ensure our seniors are integrated into our local communities and can choose a place to live that meets their physical, cognitive and social needs.

WE NEED THE ECONOMIC WIN THAT HOUSING CAN PROVIDE

We generate \$10.7 billion in new investments and 35,000 jobs for every 10,000 new homes we build in Greater Washington. We need the economic boom that housing can deliver!

Now more than ever before, we need the economic relief that an investment in growing the diversity, availability and accessibility of homes in our region would bring. Housing is one of the smartest infrastructure investments we could make to ensure our future and it has the added benefit of helping us bring economic vitality at a time when we need it most.

Over the next ten years, we know that Greater Washington will fall short of the number of homes we need to meet the demands of our job market. Our work has to start by strengthening the partnerships needed to scale our capacity on all fronts - with legislators, local businesses both large and small, lending institutions, nonprofits and community residents - to get us back on track.

The shortage of homes will require some upfront costs, but we have an opportunity to create long-term benefits from this investment in our region. Increased construction brings good jobs, produces additional revenue, and can stabilize home prices on the open market so we can further target public resources to areas where the private market doesn't work effectively. In our region, we will realize an estimated \$10.7 billion in investments and support more than 35,000 jobs for each 10,000 additional homes we build.

Such a significant increase will be difficult to achieve without policy changes that allow and encourage increased production, such as regulatory reform, widespread implementation of best practices, and economic incentives. But even without an accelerated effort to build housing, we would still need to innovate our solutions and systemic responses to solve for the challenges we face on the housing front.

Fortunately, there are policy reforms already underway and innovative solutions that are now emerging. In addition, some counties are already making progress toward reducing costs. Several counties have reduced building permit fees for affordable projects and offer density bonuses and financial incentives for the inclusion of affordable housing units. Reduced parking requirements and higher-density zoning are two other ways to reduce the cost of housing and we are moving in that direction. Alternative approaches to building codes, such as performance-based standards, offer further flexibility without lowering safety expectations. These and other policy considerations are important efforts to develop thoughtful and effective responses to the housing challenges our region faces.

Left to its own devices, the market will not effectively solve the shortage of homes. Without a significant increase in production and preservation of affordable homes, Greater Washington will remain behind the curve.

We're in a moment of opportunity to expand the alliance of partners across all sectors and from around Greater Washington to invest today in the future of our region. Now is the time to take action to build Greater Washington's future. If not today, when?

OUR HOUSING MARKET IS OFF TRACK BUT WE CAN GET IT MOVING AGAIN

If you've lived in Greater Washington for any length of time, you already know that finding and affording a place to live is a challenge.

Unless you are lucky enough to know a friend of a friend of a friend, the price to rent a 1- or 2-bedroom apartment almost anywhere in our region outpaces what most people earn. Similarly, the serious cost and limited options of homes for homebuyers can send anyone into full scale depression. We all know that a growing shortage of homes is pushing prices beyond the reach of many individuals and families. New housing construction has not kept pace with household growth since the Great Recession, as evidenced in the short supply of homes for rent or sale, almost across the board in our region.

A healthy housing market has a four- to six-month supply of homes for sale. In Greater Washington there is just over a X month supply. In the rental market, a healthy vacancy rate is 5 percent. In Greater Washington today, the regional rental vacancy rate is about X percent and as low as X percent in the accessibility corridors where there is greater access to transit and commerce.

Healthy vacancy rates give families options in the marketplace and the ability to move to a different location or size of home as their needs change. When vacancy rates are too tight or the supply of homes is too low, prices rise across the board and families may be stuck in homes that don't work well for them.

This market dynamic affects everyone. Renters are rushed to apply for the first available place, even if they can't afford it, reducing their disposable income for other critical needs, such as food, transportation, and education. Young families face difficulties finding and buying a first home because starter homes remain occupied by families who can't afford to size up. Senior citizens may also lack the option to downsize or move to a home more appropriate to their current needs. Millennials and Baby Boomers are competing for homes in the moderate price range, particularly in walkable, transit-connected communities where home prices are rising fast.

These price increases are notable. Across Greater Washington, home prices have increased X percent in the last year alone. Homes in Virginia and Maryland are now X percent more expensive on average than in neighboring states. Meanwhile, rents have increased X percent. As home prices rise, more and more families lack regular and secure access to a home and are at risk of homelessness. In some cases, newcomers to our region, coming here for work, are moving into temporary accommodations, hotels, or crowded and unsafe housing because decent places to live are fully occupied. These challenges can impact families, individuals, and newcomers across the region and in communities of all sizes.

Left to its own devices, the market will not effectively solve the shortage of homes.

The consequences of a limited supply are illustrated by sharp trends our region is facing today. Without a significant increase in production and preservation of affordable homes, Greater Washington will remain behind the curve. This issue is urgent, it affects all of us, but it is solvable. Let's prioritize what we need to get back on track and get the homes we deserve!

WE ARE ALL BETTER OFF WHEN MORE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HOUSING BECOMES AVAILABLE

The need for more homes that are affordable to people who live and work in our region is urgent. The good news is, we know how to do it.

Greater Washington has a strong history of investing in affordable homes, but current conditions make this an important time to invest more. Our homes are the foundation of our flourishing communities – they fuel the engine of our region’s economy.

Greater Washington has a well-earned reputation for collaborative and efficient investments in homes. In a typical year, around 20 percent of all new rental units built in the region receive some sort of assistance to make them affordable. We also have a long track record of preserving existing homes and keeping them affordable.

We need to maintain these crucial investments, but they fall short of addressing the demand for homes in today’s communities across our region. Here’s what we need:

[specific bullet points on what kind of investments we need]

Other parts of the country have moved faster and more aggressively than we have in recent years. [Provide examples.] These are just two examples of how other parts of the country are rising to the challenges of the current housing dynamics in bigger ways.

Where you live matters because it forms the foundation for economic mobility, academic success, and healthy living. We all thrive when we come together with the conviction that success in life starts at home. We need stronger and more robust partnerships among government, business, builders, lenders, nonprofits, philanthropy, and community leaders to make additional affordable homes a reality.

Our future depends on our ability to adapt to a changing economy, plan for the workforce we need, and make smart investments. There is no smarter or stronger investment we can make than in planning for Washingtonians to have good homes in thriving communities across this region. Stable homes correlate to positive outcomes in health and education. Affordable homes enable workers to relocate for jobs, invest in their individual futures and put more income back into the region’s retail and commercial businesses.

Homes are essential infrastructure for economic prosperity, just like roads and schools, and we can’t have vibrant communities and a thriving economy without them.

IMPROVING OUR SCHOOLS MEANS BUILDING AND PRESERVING AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN OUR REGION

Times have changed in Greater Washington since I roamed the halls of my high school.

Everything about our schools has changed – the technology, the curriculum, the dress code, even the reading and writing techniques! Did you know that there are now more than 600,000 students in our schools? That adds up to almost 100,000 educators and support personnel needed to teach them things like math and manners!

Our region is growing rapidly. In 2025, in just five short years, we expect to have 800,000+ students enrolled in schools across our region. And that's not even counting the college students! Frankly, it's harder than ever to find, recruit and train talented educators and support staff to work in our schools but ironically, our biggest hurdle isn't finding committed people. Our biggest hurdle – H-O-U-S-I-N-G! It's helping our teachers find and secure affordable places where they can live in our region. So let's be honest, we're facing big teacher shortages if we don't figure out a way to get better housing options for our students, teachers and support staff!

The simple truth is that we haven't built enough homes to keep up with the demand over the last decade. The consequences of our inattention to this issue is that housing prices have gone through the roof for everybody and have left our teachers to fend for themselves. Just ask any teacher, school counselor, cafeteria monitor, substitute or janitor if the cost of owning or renting a home here has caused them to consider taking their talents elsewhere.

That fact will have big implications for everybody who lives here – even for those of us without young children at home. The inability to educate the next generation of leaders, employees, doctors and lawyers, teachers and janitors will have long-term consequences on the economic competitiveness of our region.

Simply put, **no one wins if our educators are so unstably housed that they leave at the very time when we are facing already impossible recruitment odds. The longer we put off solving this issue, the greater our losses will be, to the detriment of everybody.** Whether you have children in our schools or not, we all have a stake in what happens to our children, no matter where we live in the region.

The good news is that there are innovative ways to address the housing and teacher shortages that are projected. By working together to expand housing options in our region, we also have a better shot at attracting the best, most passionate teachers to work with our kids. But we have to act fast and with decisive action. [Insert call to action.]

So when someone you know asks how we can improve our schools, spell it out for them: H-O-U-S-I-N-G! If we act now, we get to ensure the economic viability of the region and the future our children deserve. If we fail to provide the housing that we know would help, we resign ourselves to failing schools and more challenging times ahead. Look around your neighborhood and ask, could my children or grandchildren's teachers afford to live here? If not, ask what you can do to help!

ESSENTIAL WORKERS NEED HOMES TO CONTINUE TO SERVE IN THE ESSENTIAL ROLES

FOOD. WATER. MEDICINE. BLANKETS. HOME?

These are the essential elements we think about for emergency response and relief. But to get those supplies where they're needed—and to identify who needs them most—essential workers, governments, and health practitioners need something else: the housing that keeps them showing up for work.

The availability, affordability and accessibility of housing in Greater Washington will be in increasing demand, as the world around us changes. With climate change leading to more frequent, more severe natural disasters, and other emergencies like COV-19 reinforcing the need to stay close to our homes, we need a plan to ensure our health and wellbeing. People rely on their homes and its connectivity in their everyday lives, no matter where they live in our region. But are we making smart investments in housing to ensure that the people who live and work here, can afford to stay here?

[data point to be developed:] The number of homes for essential workers in our region has increased by 640,000 units since 2000 according to the 2015 Greater Washington Workforce Housing Needs Assessment. Yet, the percentage of these workers who can afford a place to live here has steadily declined – at the very moment when we need them the most.

Can you imagine Greater Washington without the people who keep us safe? Can you imagine Greater Washington without our resources for wellness and mental health, the organizations that strengthen the community and preserve the legacy of our region?

Why should we be concerned with affordable housing? There are many reasons to be concerned about affordable housing in our region but one of the best is simply that it helps retain our talented essential workforce – not only when disasters strike but over the long-term. We need to support affordable housing in every community across our region because we recognize that the health and housing stability of essential workers is directly related to ours.

And when natural disasters, viruses or any other emergencies occur, the essential workers who keep us safe will have a home to stay powered up for the challenge. We all benefit when people across our region have access to the homes that keep them safe. And, we undermine our own health and wellbeing when we fail to provide what all of us need to thrive.

We value our history and the heartbeat of the neighborhoods that make up our region, yet the heart of our communities can be found in our people. It's our friends, co-workers, and neighbors who keep Greater Washington running, make it a great place to live, help us retain our workforce, support the business that are growing our economy, and shape the future of our region.

Let's choose to imagine a day where all of the essential workers in our region aren't shuffling to find places to live; aren't flipping into and out of homes because of rising costs; aren't separated from their loved ones; or sleeping on floors, on our sidewalks, in front of our stores, or in cars or garages or storage units.

The housing problem in Greater Washington is no laughing matter. If you're connected to this region in any way, it's a guarantee that you know somebody who's been adversely affected by the severe shortage of affordable places to live here. These are the people that make Greater Washington what it is, and they struggle to find, afford, and hold on to suitable places to live. The solutions aren't easy, but they exist. We've done a great job of conserving our open space and our history. Now let's put that energy into preserving our greatest asset – our people. Let's make smart investments in housing to ensure that the people who live and work here can afford to stay here.

THE ROAD JUST FORKED IN OUR EFFORTS TO END HOMELESSNESS. IT'S TIME TO DECIDE WHO WE WANT TO BE.

Envision with us a Washington Region where everyone has a safe place to go to regroup from the stress of the day. To laugh over a shared meal, to study for exams, to take medications, to exercise, to get a good night's sleep. To be well. How would our region feel? Strong? Vibrant? Caring? Alive with the potential of all its residents? Ready for the future?

A more just future is ahead of us, if we choose it. The solutions to homelessness aren't hard but they all start the same way, housing! As we have done in decades past, we need to decide to invest in housing. And we need to decide to invest in the wellbeing of our people. Those are human choices. And they are also policy choices. Choices by leaders from our city councils to our mayors, county executives to Congress and the White House who recognize that we are stronger and healthier as a nation when everyone has a home.

As we welcome a new Presidential administration, now is our moment to double down on that more just future. To harness the decade of progress that has already been made and the urgency and innovation that we've seen across the region these last nine months in response to COVID-19.

Ending homelessness has never been partisan politics. Both Republicans and Democrats across the region and country -- including in Congress, and in state houses, and mayor's offices -- support the evidence behind our solutions. There is broad agreement that we need to invest in more housing, make rents more affordable and wages more livable, and reimagine and rebuild the web of supports that people used to be able to count on when times got tough.

Those priorities make everyone's life easier, and they also work to end homelessness. We know that because they are already working in dozens of communities across the country -- including those right here in our region -- that have made a commitment to ensure our military veterans have a place to call home. More than 80 communities have achieved the criteria set out by the federal government for ending Veteran homelessness, and 12 have been recognized by nonprofit changemaker Community Solutions for achieving a similar "functional zero" designation. Both designations are rigorous and offer proof that ending homelessness is possible.

Let's be clear: There is no magic wand that will ensure that everyone in the Washington Region has a home tomorrow. Our current housing scarcity was seeded over 40 years ago, when different leaders decided to gut our national investments in housing. And it's exacerbated by the historical and persistent structural racism that blocks Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color from wealth and opportunity. And then, of course, there's the pandemic. All those things will take time to fix.

But we have the roadmap to a future where America is stronger and healthier for everyone through housing justice. It's been coming together slowly over the last 20 years, spurred by both creativity and rigorous research in communities in our region and across America. And the last nine months of COVID have only reinforced that local leaders, working in solidarity with people with expertise from their own lived experience, can accelerate change when given enough resources to do it.

Those leaders in cities and towns across America now have leadership in Washington that supports their vision for a more just world. That listens to their needs, provides steady, unwavering support behind what we already know works, and marshals the resources to get the job done.

Communities are poised and ready for an Administration and a Congress that prioritize housing for everyone. They also need our support. Let's give it to them.

IN THE FACE OF A PANDEMIC, HOUSING SAVES LIVES

By now, we all know the drill. Cover your mouth. Wash your hands. Keep your germs to yourself. Stay home when you're sick. We've all been taught those lessons from our caregivers and teachers since we were young. That's how we in the Greater Washington Region have kept each other safe, healthy, and ready for opportunity for decades.

But there are many people in our community who aren't able to keep their loved ones – and all of us – safe from COVID-19, no matter how well they follow the rules. Because we have failed to address our region's sky-high housing costs, people across the area are living with too many people under their roofs. As COVID spreads, that means that more and more of us are unable to keep our germs to ourselves simply by staying home.

The rigors of quarantine can be hard on any household. In overcrowded spaces, with no room for the kind of deep separation that is required to keep the virus at bay, we're infecting the people we love at alarming rates. In our region, the communities with the highest rates of overcrowded housing are also those with the highest rates of COVID infection. And due to historical and present-day injustices in our economic and housing policies, overcrowding is worse in our immigrant communities and communities of color, where more people are working the high-risk essential jobs we need to keep our economic engine going while having less access to good health care.

The key to the continued wellbeing of the Greater DC region is clear: We must invest in a healthy future by investing in affordable housing. If we fail to make these investments now, we're undermining our ability to overcome the next big health challenge that comes our way.

We know that affordable housing works to reduce COVID infections in our community because it already has. According to research, households living in affordable housing programs in Greater DC are four times less likely* to be infected with COVID than their neighbors with similar demographic and employment profiles.

Part of the reason for that success is because people who live in affordable units don't need to crowd additional people in to help pay the rent. Many affordable housing developments also have residential services personnel who can help troubleshoot problems for residents as they come up. For example, if residents are experiencing food insecurity because of COVID-related job losses, residential services can connect them to food or income supports in the community so that they can stay put until their employment situation is resolved.

Let's be clear: keeping us all healthy through housing is a long-term proposition. We'll need to be smart AND bold to ensure our significant investments yield the best outcomes for our essential workers and for all of us. Luckily, in Greater Washington, we've never shrunk from a challenge.

We know how to keep each other safe, keep our economic engine running, and vaccinate our economy against future challenges. We need to invest in housing. And we will. Join us.

*Data shown are examples only.

We Welcome Collaborators!

To become more involved in this effort,
contact any member of our regional partnership:

- The Greater Washington Partnership
- AOBA-Metro
- Housing Leaders Group of Greater Washington, including these members:
 - 2030 Group/Buchanan Partners
 - Citi Community Development
 - Enterprise Community Partners
 - Greater Washington Community Foundation
 - Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
 - Urban Land Institute-Washington
 - Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers

