

PRESS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Northern Suburbs Can Advance Economic Development and Equality by Adding Housing Near Transit

*Quality of Life, (e)Quality of Place Finds Area Falling Behind in Equitable Transit-Oriented
Development; Provides Roadmap for Communities Seeking to Reverse this Trend*

Winnetka, IL, December 11, 2014 – Chicago’s northern suburbs can increase economic development and diversity by adding mixed-income housing near transit and by reversing a recent decline in affordability, according to a new guidebook released yesterday by Open Communities and Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT).

Quality of Life, (e)Quality of Place takes a close look at northern suburban downtowns, many of which experienced declines in mixed-income housing close to CTA and Metra stations, or transit-oriented development (TOD). Mixed-income TOD improves local economies by boosting neighborhood property values, increasing diversity, and expanding employment opportunities for those who don’t own cars – and providing alternative, affordable mobility options for those who do.

“Mixed-income TOD presents tremendous opportunity to attract and support new residents, give long-time residents room to raise children or conversely, to downsize, increase tax bases, and promote more sustainable and fully accessible lifestyles in the northern suburbs, which have always been destinations for families seeking excellent education and quiet, peaceful lifestyles,” said Gail Schechter, Executive Director of Winnetka-based Open Communities. “Our report and guidebook can help municipal leaders, planners, and developers further enhance their communities by showing them ways to be inclusive and strengthen local economies, thereby meeting the challenges of the 21st century.”

The guidebook finds that for moderate-income households in the Chicago region, housing and transportation costs exceed 56% of income. With the supply of rental units near transit under threat, those households face new obstacles. For example, in downtown Evanston, 850 new owner-occupied units came alongside a decline in 400 affordable rentals, pushing some residents away from an easy walk to transit and jobs. These developments restrict their marketing to “empty nesters” and “young professionals” which violates the fair housing rights of families with children and people with disabilities.

Quality of Life, (e)Quality of Place offers solutions. It includes a list of policy recommendations and financing sources communities can use to create a sense of place and become regional destinations.

Communities can establish zoning incentives to encourage mixed-income units or create financing and acquisition tools to lower the cost of development. They can move from TOD vision to implementation with targeted infrastructure investments. They can adopt fair housing policies that attract a diverse range of people, cultures, and abilities, which will help make their communities stronger.

“As communities like Highland Park have taught us, mixed-income TOD succeeds when it appeals to neighbors’ vision of a community of choice,” said Kyle Smith, Economic Development Program Manager at Chicago-based CNT. “Residents in a mixed-income TOD can choose between housing units of all sizes and prices and can walk, bike, or take transit to a variety of jobs. There’s great potential for that throughout Chicago’s northern suburbs.”

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About Open Communities

Open Communities, formerly Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs, is a nonprofit organization that advocates for fair and affordable housing in 16 northern suburbs of Chicago. Our mission is to educate, advocate and organize to promote just and inclusive communities in north suburban Chicago. We are a leading voice for housing, economic and social justice in north suburban Chicago, working to promote inclusive communities that are welcoming to all. We work with current and prospective residents and local groups to promote economically and culturally diverse communities in north suburban Chicago. We provide fair and affordable housing counseling services, community education, advocacy, and organizing for welcoming communities.

About CNT

CNT is a leader in promoting more livable and sustainable communities. CNT’s research, strategies, and solutions are implemented across America and around the world to create more equitable and resilient communities. Our nearly 40 years of work in transportation and community development, water, energy, and climate have inspired a generation of new approaches and earned the highest of honors.