



Applied Information Resources Newsletter

Spring, 2020

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Applied Information Resources is a non-profit, public policy research and community information organization dedicated to:

- Citizen education on public issues.
- Assisting human service organizations in evaluating their programs, and
- Providing the best possible information to decision makers responding to changing human and urban needs.

Applied Information Resources

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Documenting An Old Crisis Reinforces The Need For An Adequate Local Response

by Bill Woods

Cincinnati confronts a major affordable housing crisis. A recent study by LISC found that a 40,000 affordable housing unit deficit exists in this city and Hamilton County. What caused this crisis, and what can be done to effectively address it?

Today's affordable housing crisis did not emerge overnight. In fact, the problem has been critical since the mid-1980s, and it has simply grown worse over time. While less and less money was allocated to public housing programs during this thirty-five year period, the shrinkage of affordable housing units exacerbated homelessness and poverty.

Much of AIR's research since its founding in 1981 has focused on homelessness and housing. When it conducted Cincinnati's first homeless study in 1986-87, AIR found that housing related issues comprised the number one cause of homelessness among families. It also acknowledged "public welfare and housing pro-

grams" we are diminishing and the city was experiencing a loss of affordable rental units.

A follow up report by AIR in 1989,

"Cincinnati's Community Based Housing Efforts," dealt exclusively with this loss and what to do about it. "Almost all of Cincinnati's low-income neighborhoods," noted the report, "had a net loss of housing units from 1980 to the present." Depicting the major cuts in federal housing assistance programs in that decade, the authors concluded: "Until housing advocates succeed in persuading Congress to restore a strong federal role, the initiative for low-cost housing efforts has to come from non-profits, philanthropy, and state and local governments."

By the time AIR researched its second homeless study in 1993, it included a section on the lack of affordable housing as a major reason for the



further growth of homelessness in Cincinnati. "There are numerous factors involved in the housing crisis confronting the homeless," reads the report, "but most of these factors relate to the clients' lack of income and the absence of affordable units." The study cited that federal funding for publicly assisted housing programs shrank from \$30-billion in 1981 to \$8-billion in 1987. It noted that in Cincinnati, less than 30-percent of the households that qualified for some form of federal housing help received it.

In addition to the second homeless study, AIR undertook a project for the Greater Cincinnati Foundation that focused exclusively on the affordable housing dilemma and how best

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to address it.

This 1993 study emphasized the need for local responses to this growing "crisis." "Cities such as Cincinnati," reads the GCF-report, "we're simply not prepared when the federal government slashed funding for housing assistance by over 70-percent in the 1980s. Communities have been playing catch-up ever since, and local leaders have been slow to admit that the affordable housing buck stops here.

This review of AIR's research in the 1980s and 1990s reveals the longevi-

ty of the affordable housing crisis in Cincinnati. Although a number of factors created this crisis, the steady loss of federal funding for housing assistance over the years remains a primary reason. This longevity and the severity of the crisis today finally prompted Advocates For Affordable Housing and the Homeless Coalition to draft the proposed Charter Amendment that would require the City to adequately fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Even a well-funded Trust Fund would not be a panacea. It would, however, provide a substantial resource

that with other funds could begin to address the crisis. Passage of the Amendment would finally require the City to accept the fact that at least a portion of the 'affordable housing buck stops here.' So once normal life returns to Cincinnati, look for the volunteers who will ask you to sign a petition to place the Charter Amendment proposal on the November ballot. Or better yet, become a volunteer yourself!

Applied Information Resource Initiatives

by Ed Burdell

Income Inequality

A meeting of the Economic Justice Roundtable will be scheduled this spring although the timing is subject to the vagaries of our current virus situation. The Roundtable is an opportunity for the organizations working on new business startups and their funding; wage stagnation; raising the minimum wage; health insurance cost and availability; affordable housing; jobs programs to share stories of progress and frustration. A chance to learn from one another and find avenues of collaboration. This is a long list, but certainly not complete. The meeting is also open to individuals who have an interest in the topic.

Changing Housing Patterns

As new development occurs in our region, particularly the older areas, we have an opportunity to improve on the established housing patterns. Historically we have grown as a segregated community. Federal programs and private lenders reinforced this after WWII and subsequent suburban development has continued this design. Now, as land becomes scarce and

public involvement becomes critical, we show consider how best to build inclusive, diverse communities. One tool is the Fair Share Housing Allocation model. First considered in community planning circles almost 30 years ago, housing allocation models identify what neighborhoods are over stocked with subsidized and affordable housing and which do not have such housing. This provides a template for municipalities to request developers to include affordable housing in each design. An alternative approach is to require developers to contribute to the housing trust fund.

We intend to work with other interested organizations to pursue this. The fair share housing allocation model is one of the many recommendations in the soon to be released LISC county wide housing study.

The Peaslee Rubric

Designing an Environmental element for possible inclusion in the Peaslee Rubric. The Peaslee Rubric is the well thought out format to assist a community to ob-

jectively evaluate development proposals. It contains a number of elements such as community impact, related employment, diversity inclusion and affordability. It includes an environmental piece, but it is directed at inner city projects, hence it concentrates on energy usage components. This would be broadened



to include more natural resource items and impact on adjacent properties and connecting public and natural systems.

We plan on working with Sierra Club, Hillside Trust, as well as the Peaslee authors. Interested organizations and individuals will be invited to join us.

CONTRIBUTIONS HELP AIR, INC. WITH COMMUNITY WORK

AIR depends on individual contributions to support our work. We are a charitable 501(c) (3) organization and your contributions help fund such projects as campaign finance reform, political reform and studies in racism and community organizing in Cincinnati. We invite you to assist us as AIR takes on community issues and challenges.

\$1000 \$500 \$100 \$50 \$25

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You can now donate online at www.airinc.org

Community Issues Forum-Where Are you?

WE SHALL RETURN – For the loyal Community Forum followers who have missed 4-5 consecutive Forums, we will soon be announcing our plans to restart operations. Christ Church Cathedral’s building will remain closed at least through the end of May. When we can return to a place based event, we have spaces which will permit

appropriate social distancing.

Meanwhile we are going to venture into live streaming. One advantage of this is we can then post the entire forum for viewing at any time. More details as soon as we have them. We are certain that there is no shortage of issues and we would like to hear your suggestions.

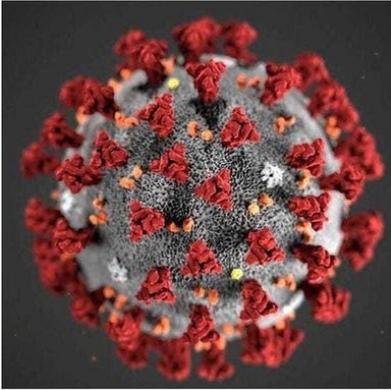


One of the challenges of today’s events is that like the magician’s stock in trade, distraction with the obvious leaves the audience unaware of what else is going on. Please help us find the important topics we should focus on.

CORONAVIRUS REFLECTIONS by Bill Woods

Scary! Weird! Strange! Lonely! Tragic! Otherworldly! Unsettling!

These are just a few words that neighbors have used to describe what we are all now experiencing. It is safe to say, none of us, unless we are over a hundred-years old, have lived through anything like the Coronavirus Pandemic. In a sense, the whole world has been brought to a halt. Everything we were doing before the middle of March has been put on hold.



For activists this period of time is particularly challenging. Instead of doing something, we are told that the best thing we can do to save lives and to bring COVID-19 under control is to stay home and do nothing. It is

requiring us to draw on inner resources that aren't normally needed in our day to day lives. On a positive note, neighbor's that you hardly spoke to in the past are reaching out and asking whether you are coping and in need of supplies.

Then there is the issue of public leadership and government responses. State Governors such as Andrew Cuomo of New York and Mike DeWine of Ohio have been the leaders who have stepped up to the plate to protect their citizens and to provide health services to those threatened by the virus. These Governors led the way in establishing the stay-at-home mandates and other health regulations. Governor Cuomo's daily briefings, which provide factual and sensible updates about the crisis in New York and New York City, offer a positive contrast to the briefings offered by President Trump.

Congress has also taken swift action. Overcoming the current polarized political environment, the House and the Senate negotiated and voted in a bipartisan fashion to enact three laws that provide funding to address the economic crises created by the Pandemic. This legislation allocates financial assistance to individuals, state governments, and small and large businesses. More Congressional action will undoubtedly be needed.

It's a good thing that Congress and state and local

officials have by and large been there for their constituents. The response from the Trump Administration not only came far too late, but it has failed to adequately supply the states with essential supplies such as respirators and masks. In terms of guidelines and information about the virus, several health experts such as Dr. Anthony Fauci have been strong voices for reason and science within the Administration's Coronavirus Task Force. However, President Trump undercuts the advice of these experts with his adlib-remarks at the daily briefings.

It becomes more and more clear that this Pandemic and its impact on economic, social, and political institutions increases the importance of the November election. One simple way to accomplish this goal is to copy the voting system of the state of Washington. Voting in Washington is now all done by mail. Registered voters automatically receive a ballot by mail, and they simply mark their choices and mail it back to the Board of Elections. Even though Washington was in the midst of the Pandemic when it held its primary, it's voting took place easily and efficiently.

Although we may experience a break in the spreading of COVID-19 by late spring or early summer, health experts are warning that we could experience a second round of the virus this fall. Knowing this possibility now gives public officials plenty of time to put in place voting procedures that cannot be disrupted by the threat of the virus and the need for social distancing. Citizens, however, cannot assume that such steps will be taken.

Activists must get behind citizen groups such as Common Cause and the League of Women Voters that are already advocating to insure easily accessible and safe voting procedures that will prevent any interruptions in this November's election cycle. Powerful opposition to their initiatives already exists. Although no evidence or research supports his claim, the President is publicly attacking voting by mail as "a terrible system that leads to widespread voter fraud."

Meanwhile, Republican legislators in a number of states continue to promote legislation that makes it more difficult for people to vote. Thus, major grassroots efforts on voting rights and election protection will have to be mounted in the coming months. Therefore, if the best we can do now is stay home and practice social distancing, we can also stay informed and prepare for needed civic action in the summer and fall.