

Greater Cincinnati's Affordable Housing Crisis- LISC(The Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Greater Cincinnati) Takes Up The Challenge

By Bill Woods

Greater Cincinnati finds itself in the midst of an affordable housing crisis of major proportions. An organization that has both documented this crisis and promoted initiatives to address it is The Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky (LISC). At the Community Issues Forum at Christ Church Cathedral on [March 21st](#), **Paola Garrido Estevez**, Special Projects Associate for LISC, reviewed LISC's research, initiatives, and current effort to promote an affordable housing strategy for Cincinnati and Hamilton County.



The fact that Cincinnati and Hamilton County combined have an affordable housing deficit of 40,000 units was announced in a LISC study in 2017. A follow up project, "100-Percent Housing," collected information about thousands of vacant units in Greater Cincinnati in an effort to use these vacancies as one way to decrease the affordable housing gap. Currently, LISC has taken up the cause of advocating for an affordable housing strategy for the city and county. Using a power point presentation, Estevez discussed these efforts.

Besides coming out with the shocking number of 40,000 units of affordable units needed, LISC's 2017 study, "Housing Affordability in Hamilton County," researched the complex factors creating this crisis. The poverty rate, noted Estevez, has increased markedly, while available affordable units continued to decrease. Since 2000, the number of Hamilton County Households in poverty grew by 40-percent.

The Federal Government through HUD has long been the major source of funding for housing for families and individuals in poverty, but at the same time that area poverty grew, money for all types of subsidized housing shrank dramatically. Cincinnati and Hamilton County now have 500 fewer federally subsidized units than they did fifteen years ago. Meanwhile, the bulk of private construction both in new housing and rehabs have primarily been for more expensive developments. Thus, for every 100 of the lowest income households in Greater Cincinnati, only 28 units of affordable units are available.

The 2017 LISC study could be characterized as "the bad news report," but Estevez went on to describe the organization's effort a year later to examine how thousands of vacant units in Cincinnati and Hamilton County could be utilized to close the affordable housing deficit. This



initiative, "100-Percent Housing," initially used a team of four surveyors to confirm actual vacancies and to examine housing conditions. This twelve week effort found 5,161 vacant units in Cincinnati and 1,352 in the rest of Hamilton County. A majority of these units were also in good condition. The next task, Estevez declared, was to bring together housing stakeholders in the city and county to plan initiatives that would turn these vacancies into available affordable housing. This work continues.

Establishing an affordable housing strategy for Cincinnati/ Hamilton County is LISC's new priority. With a housing crisis of this magnitude, emphasized Estevez, City and County Governments, plus the other major housing stakeholders, must buy into a long range strategy to seriously address it. LISC has convened two meetings with various groups to collaborate on what should go into such a strategy, but it now plans to do more background work and research before holding further sessions. Estevez said that LISC seeks to collaborate with other neighborhood and housing partners in all its initiatives.