

# As American Cities Grow, New Urbanism Must Be Inclusive

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Steven Fulop Become a fan Mayor, Jersey City Email RSS

Mention affordable housing and too often it conjures up the thought of failed housing programs from the '50s and '60s. Not only does this fly in the face of reality of what's happening in our cities today but it does a disservice to the residents of recently built affordable homes. Simply stated, affordable housing means bringing income diversity to neighborhoods, rather than isolating communities from one another.

Traditionally, affordable housing was something that was only built in certain areas -- typically less desirable -- of most cities. However, it's important that all residents, including working families, enjoy the opportunity to live throughout city neighborhoods.

Let's remember, cities across the country have reversed decades of population decline and are now growing. Once places people couldn't wait to leave, cities are now where more and more people want to live, work, and play. This isn't an accident. The high-rise apartments and closely located brownstones that represent many American cities are now recognized as integral to community living.

What's more, long drives from remote suburbs to offices in cities have taken a toll on commuters. Urban dwellers are finding there is a correlation between shorter commutes and happiness, and this realization is helping to make cities across the United States a focus for growth.

Populations in cities have reversed decades of loss by growing in the last 10 years. Coming out of the Great Recession, the number of urban residents has rapidly increased. And these residents are likely to have a better quality of life. In fact, a recent book by Charles Montgomery, *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design*, argues the way cities are built powerfully influences moods and behavior and, done correctly, will lead to happier lives.

And in rebuilding our cities, they must be not just for the wealthy but for working families as well. This new urbanism must be inclusive. That's why developing policies to ensure economically diverse neighborhoods is so important. In Jersey City, for instance, we created an Affordable Housing Trust Fund policy that establishes criteria for and incentivizes the development of affordable housing throughout Jersey City, particularly in areas where affordable housing has been under-developed.

The new policy also creates an independent project application checklist and review committee for the distribution of funds, thereby ensuring a transparent process. The checklist for funding to build affordable housing awards points for projects based on certain criteria, such as location, project readiness, diversity in ownership or management, and developer's ability to engage minority-owned businesses. More points are awarded to those projects that are to be built in areas where affordable housing has been under-developed. Additionally, Jersey City now requires that any market-rate, commercial or industrial project that receives a five-year tax abatement must contribute to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

The policy is working as projects are underway in many City neighborhoods that include affordable units -- for both sale and rent.

Still, more must be done to create better texture through income diversity in our cities. There's no denying that affordable housing policies can be controversial where powerful interests debate one another. But

there can be no denying the upswing in urban living must be inclusive. The social fabric of our cities is a major part of building a Happy City.

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*Steven Fulop is Mayor of Jersey City, NJ.*