

# **SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT HOUSING ALLIANCE, INC.**

## **Strategic Plan: 2007-2010**

### **Introduction**

The Southeastern Connecticut Housing Alliance (SECHA) rose out of the Blue Ribbon Panel for Housing and the 2002 study commissioned by the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (and others) that showed a region in crisis with respect to housing. As an off-shoot of the Panel, SECHA was established as a Connecticut, non-stock non-profit corporation in order to provide a regional approach to help deal with the shortage of affordable housing. Our role is to bring together diverse housing constituencies to address imbalances that have caused and that result from the housing shortage. SECHA relies upon the business, government and non-profit sectors as supportive partners in its mission and direction. SECHA seeks to work closely with municipalities, employers, government agencies, developers and financial institutions.

### **Mission**

To facilitate affordable and workforce housing opportunities in southeastern Connecticut through the leveraging of resources and to promote, support and facilitate efforts to create a diversified affordable housing stock in the region.

### **Vision**

SECHA believes that the regions' workforce is entitled to quality affordable housing as well as a real choice in selecting that housing. The people that constitute our growing job base, thereby strengthening our economy, are entitled to affordable, safe and decent housing within reasonable commuting distances from their jobs. Our vision of the SECT community includes the workforce upon whom we rely, not only because our economic health is contingent upon employers' access to an adequate workforce, but also because diverse and integrated communities are healthier and more sustainable. Our vision is to help provide the region with solutions to this regional challenge.

### **Guiding Principles**

- **Everyone should have access to decent affordable housing.**
- **Just as our community is healthiest when its job base is diverse, a diverse housing stock contributes to a strong and resilient community.**
- **Those who work in southeastern Connecticut should not have to live elsewhere.**
- **The challenge of affordable housing is also an opportunity. We must capture this opportunity to improve our community.**
- **Production of affordable and workforce housing is best accomplished with incentives and assistance rather than penalties and regulations.**

### **The Environment**

As SECHA works to achieve its vision of healthy communities, we must do our work within an ever-changing and challenging environment. Political, economic and regulatory trends provide both barriers and opportunities. The factors that we believe will have the most influence on our work over the next three to five years are described below. We have designed our program and product to be most effective and successful within this context.

In recent years, the federal, state and local political environment surrounding the issue of affordable housing has become more challenging. In Connecticut there is no government structure in place that can adequately deal with regional issues. Each of Connecticut's 169 municipalities, who's only taxing authority is on property, competes with its neighbors to expand its commercial and industrial tax base and eschews residential development that could increase school enrollments (costs). Under intense budget pressure, suburban towns claim that affordable housing threatens their finances, "quality of life," and the environment while urban jurisdictions claim they cannot sustain additional services traditionally associated with affordable housing. The only existing political jurisdiction with a stake in solving the affordable housing crisis is the state government.

Nevertheless, there are trends that offer hope and guidance for the future. Statewide and regional organizations have achieved real successes. In numerous communities affordable housing developments have won the support of local officials and residents. The media has helped to focus attention on housing needs across the state. The Connecticut General Assembly has protected housing resources in the state budget and has approved a program of incentives for towns to permit affordable housing development. The breadth of support among legislators and employers offers an opportunity to build an expanded political coalition to advance the affordable housing agenda. To succeed in the current political environment, SECHA must encourage this alliance to become more active, vocal and effective. It is critical that both the public and policymakers understand that housing is linked to economic growth and employment opportunities, and to the sustained health of our state.

### **Funding Realities**

While public and private sector resources are available, the process to access these monies is often difficult. More must be done to promote innovative and creative measures to meet Connecticut's financial needs associated with housing. Due to scarce or difficult-to-access resources, housing authorities struggle as federal funding is reduced. HUD financed developments are underfunded with respect to operating expenses and capital needs. Escalating market rents have imposed rapidly rising costs on HUD's existing portfolio of renters' subsidy programs. Under this pressure, HUD has reduced the number of renters (vouchers) being served. We have seen threatened and real cuts in government funding for a broad range of housing programs including rental subsidies, homeless shelters, homelessness prevention, housing counseling, and fair housing.

While developers have expanded their capacity and the capital markets seek such investments, public subsidies have been unable to attract private resources. It is clear that neither the public nor the private sector funding can solve the problem alone. Rather, success will depend on the effective leveraging of one with the other. There is evidence that, as the demand for high-end residential construction gives way to a strong market for more affordable housing, incentives for private sources of investment can be effectively provided with public investment.

### **Organizational Funding**

In addition to seed money provided by the Dime Bank, Pfizer and Mohegan Sun, SECHA has received State funding as a result of a request by the Governor's Commission on Economic Diversification of Southeastern Connecticut. Together the private and State funding leveraged the strong support of the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG). Reflecting broad support in the region among municipal leaders, the SCCOG voted in April 2007 to provide administrative oversight for the full-time position and to cover the costs of employee benefits. A Memorandum of Agreement between SCCOG and SECHA was executed on April 25, 2007. As an initial sponsor of the 2002 Housing Study, SCCOG has long been a leader on housing issues, but there is now a direct and financial relationship between SECHA and the SCCOG. We are aware that the SECHA mission of capacity building and advocacy must translate into tangible and measurable success if funding is to be extended

## **Strategies for 2007 and beyond**

The following three core methodologies guide our programmatic goals that are outlined below. SECHA will work closely with partners and allies to coordinate our activities, avoid duplication of effort, and to ensure the best use of available resources.

### **A. Collaboration**

Equipped with adequate skills and resources, stakeholders need to coordinate their combined efforts to affect change. Through collaboration among its diverse membership and community connections, SECHA will build capacity within the region to increase affordable housing.

### **B. Advocacy**

SECHA recognizes the need to create informed policymakers, activists and communities in order to improve public and private housing programs and policies. SECHA will foster support and leadership for affordable housing.

### **C. Management**

Our internal capacity to provide value for the community and advance SECHA's goals requires us to effectively monitor the organization's governance, marketing and communications as well as its financial stability.

## **Programmatic Goals for 2007 and beyond**

### **A. Collaboration**

SECHA will strive to be the premier convener for housing issues in southeastern Connecticut, bringing together the full diversity of voices that can effect change. Housing organizations and constituencies require skills and must possess the internal capacity to be effective. To support this capacity building, SECHA will:

- Promote awareness and coordination of stakeholders' efforts in the region.
- Support the development of organizations including grassroots organizations, employer associations and resident groups to support and accomplish construction of affordable housing
- Analyze current education, training and technical assistance programs and identify target audiences for education and training. SECHA will provide reliable sources of information to assist and improve the work of the municipalities, tribes, developers, and other participants.
- Offer technical assistance that builds capacity and increases effectiveness among the partners.
- Promote expanded financial resources for affordable housing development and help devise and implement a more streamlined process for accessing these resources.
- As appropriate, serve as the clearinghouse for financial resources.
- Identify, document and disseminate best practices.
- Conduct relevant research and make results available to the broadest spectrum of participants.

### **B. Advocacy**

At the local, regional, state and federal level, SECHA must work with officials, advocates and consumers to identify issues, solve problems and define stakes. We will communicate relevant messages to key public audiences to build their understanding and support. To establish a supportive public policy, SECHA will advocate directly to:

- Identify key messages and methods of communication.
- Promote land use and planning policies that are conducive to affordable housing development, including smart growth initiatives.

- Promote strategies that preserve existing affordable housing stock, including public housing and governmentally assisted, privately owned housing.
- Analyze residential development capacity across southeastern Connecticut and, as appropriate, encourage appropriate development of affordable housing on a project-by-project basis.
- Protect and expand resources for housing development, rent subsidies and housing services.
- Identify and advocate for specific initiatives at the federal, state and local level and within the private sector as appropriate.
- Educate people and empower them to advocate on their own behalf. SECHA will promote coordination among advocates through our partnerships and networks. Recruit and involve new allies, including expanded outreach to the business community.
- Assure that housing is a consideration in broader policy discussions such as: economic development; tax reform; employment; transportation; healthcare and education.

### **C. SECHA Operations**

SECHA will enhance its own infrastructure to assure that the organization can effectively carry out its scope of work and successfully achieve its programmatic goals. Towards this end, the Board of Directors and staff will continually evaluate and address governance, communications, as well as financial stability.

#### Governance

- Assess and, as needed, modify its bylaws and operations to enhance effectiveness. Assessment will include a review of best practice standards in governance, integrity of mission and relevancy of the daily operations.
- Articulate standards for the Board and its individual members in the context of acceptable legal and ethical obligations of a governing board.
- Determine the composite of skills and characteristics required within the Board and recruit new Board members accordingly.
- Determine the appropriate board committees and working groups to help perform the tasks set forth in the Strategic Plan.
- Monitor and evaluate progress under the Strategic Plan and Annual Workplans.

#### Staff Management

- Assess staffing needs and necessary skill sets. Organize and provide staff with clear tasks. Provide job descriptions.
- Regularly review marketplace compensation information to assure that SECHA is able to acquire and maintain top quality personnel.
- Enhance professional development opportunities for staff by creating a plan of opportunities and allocating finances to support the plan.

#### Communications

- Position SECHA as an exceptional convener, trusted educator and vigorous advocate for affordable housing.
- Craft relevant messages to key audiences, building their understanding and enhancing their ability to support well informed decision-making and action.
- Analyze the SECHA strategy for electronic communications, including website and e-mail, make improvements as necessary.

#### Financial Stability

- Continually seek to further diversify and expand SECHA's funding base with a focus on long-term sustainability.
- Continually monitor availability of and apply for appropriate new and increased government grants.
- Solicit charitable gifts from individual and corporate groups. Particularly examine fundraising opportunities with lender giving programs and with large employers.
- Continually monitor availability of, and apply for appropriate foundation grants to support SECHA.
- Seek out new fees for service and other appropriate earned-income strategies.
- Enhance charitable contributions by seeking best practice in fund raising development.

### **Strategic Plan Implementation, Progress and Evaluation:**

The SECHA Board of Directors shall, at a minimum, conduct an annual review of the Strategic Plan to better facilitate its implementation; to update its progress; and to evaluate successes and failures. The Director of SECHA serves at the pleasure of the Board as chief executive officer of the corporation, and is responsible for general management and day-to-day operations. The Board and Director will continually strive to fulfill SECHA's mission, behave in accordance with its principles and established policies, and carry out its Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan will be incorporated into all areas of governance and management work as follows:

- The Board will make the Strategic Plan available to members, the general public and to fellow participants and advocates, including, but not limited to, funding sources, and others who have participated in the strategic planning process.
- Staff and working committees will use the Strategic Plan to direct their efforts.
- Implementation of the Strategic Plan is one of the principal criteria for evaluating the annual performance of the Director and staff.
- Upon adoption of the Strategic Plan, the Director, in consultation with the Board, will prepare an Annual Work Plan for the coming year in conformance with the Strategic Plan. The Annual Work Plan will be presented to the Board at a Board meeting for its comments and approval.
- Annually the Board and staff will jointly set priorities for the new fiscal year. This priority setting will use the multi-year Strategic Plan and progress reports as the basis for dialogue. In general, this dialogue will focus on the following:
  - Progress to date on the multi-year Strategic Plan;
  - Changes in the environment that must be considered to establish priorities for the new fiscal year;
  - Organizational changes within SECHA that must be considered to establish priorities for the new fiscal year;
  - Changes or adjustments to the Strategic Plan and operational priorities.