“Columbus has a huge economic segregation problem. Move to PROSPER is one example of how to tear down the invisible walls of segregation.”

Great Advice Kicks Off Building Inclusive Communities Initiative

Rick Kahlenberg, Senior Fellow with the Century Foundation, was in Columbus this Fall to kick off the Building Inclusive Communities in Central Ohio initiative with a day of virtual roundtable discussions and a Columbus Metropolitan Club Forum. Rick, who has been called the intellectual father of the economic inclusion movement, shared sound advice about inclusive communities with the Central Ohio region.

In order to become a region where all families have the opportunity to decide where they would like to live, work, play and raise their families, Rick says we need to 1) eliminate exclusionary zoning (which is zoning that artificially increases the cost of housing by mandating large homes on large lots or not allowing multi-family housing); 2) adopt Source of Income non-discrimination legislation throughout the region to allow veterans, senior citizens and others to benefit from fair access to housing; 3) adopt inclusionary zoning to require 10-20% of new housing units to be affordable; and 4) support and expand innovative rental support / mentoring programs like Move to PROSPER that help by “catapulting people over the invisible walls of housing segregation” that have been erected in Central Ohio over the past century.
Local roundtable and forum speakers provided sage advice as well. **Calvin Cooper**, CEO and Co-founder of Rhove, observed that San Francisco and Columbus have the same, very high rent burdens for their populations. Calvin seeks to democratize real estate ownership and sense of belonging in communities by providing everyone the opportunity to invest in real estate development projects with the attributes they want to see realized. “We know that when you have ownership, you care more, you invest more, you volunteer more, and you show up.”

**Steve Francis**, President and Lead Strategist at Franchise D&I Solutions, led a roundtable discussion about the importance of neighborhoods for our region’s workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. He shared that DEI first requires access, raising an important point about access to housing choices throughout our region to improve inclusiveness in every community. Steve advised that people need to take intentional action to make advances with regard to children, schools, and neighborhoods.

Columbus Communities Coalition for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion co-founder **Catherine Kennedy** suggested that people who want to achieve inclusive communities need to work to obtain local input, encourage grass root efforts, and insist on change locally with their city councils and other officials.

**Judy Sonnett**, Managing Partner, The Center for Leadership and Innovation observed that businesses are not seeing enough progress in their DEI efforts. Kids’ exposure to diversity in their neighborhoods and schools is critical for the future workforce.

In an afternoon roundtable, **Kerstin Carr**, Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission’s Director of Planning & Sustainability, noted that there is too much misinformation about multifamily housing. She pointed out that Millennials and Gen X’ers want to live in walkable, mixed income, mixed use communities with green space, trails, and other quality of life amenities, and recommended that our region incorporate affordability into these new developments.

**James Chaffin**, Vice Chair, WeRISE Westerville, emphasized the importance of communities being ready for change, sharing that this is one of the reasons for the creation of his grass roots organization to facilitate conversations about the importance of racial and economic diversity in neighborhoods, schools and housing. James encouraged local organizations to share success stories about mixed income neighborhoods because people tend to listen to and trust information from people they know. James also noted that these changes are critical -- if changes aren’t made now to accommodate an inclusive future, younger people will move away to other places that share their values and welcome diversity.

Unfortunately, only a limited number of residents speak out, and they don’t necessarily represent the views of most residents in the
community, said **Matt Gregory**, President, Building Worthington’s Future. He recommended that residents communicate with their local public officials about updating zoning laws to encourage multiple types, sizes and price points of housing. Matt noted that local office holders need to lead—they need to be ready to make decisions that not everyone will like. Matt shared that there is a demand for inclusive growth, and tough decisions need to be made for the greater good of the community.

**Lori Ann Feibel**, Bexley City Council President, advised that communities need to “Put policy behind what we know is right.” She observed that “diversity is asking people to the party; inclusion is asking them to dance; and when we ask a diversity of people to dance, we all learn new steps.”

“Don’t lose the moment” is the advice from **Carlie Boos**, Executive Director, Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio. She suggested that Franklin County should commit 30% of the current federal recovery funds toward affordable housing, rental support and other housing inclusivity opportunities.

A wealth of great advice from all our experts to kick off Building Inclusive Communities in Central Ohio!

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**About Building Inclusive Communities**

*Building Inclusive Communities* is an initiative to advance understanding of the need for inclusive housing in our region, especially as we address inclusivity in the workplace. Central Ohio has been the only region in Ohio experiencing population growth for several decades, while housing production at all price levels has not kept up with demand. On September 29, 2021 we held a series of conversations to begin a year-long dialogue about how Central Ohio can become a region where everyone has the opportunity to decide where they would like to live, work, play and raise their family. The initiative continues through September 2022.

We are partnering with additional organizations for future programming. If your organization is interested in joining our initiative to co-create programming, please contact Kathy Fox at CommunityStrategyPartners@gmail.com.

**Our Sponsors and Partners**

**Sponsors:** Move to PROSPER; The Columbus Foundation; Harvard University Loeb Fellowship Collaboratory and Grant Program; City of Worthington; Cardinal Health; YWCA Columbus; Humana; OSU Center for Real Estate; OSU Women & Philanthropy; ACLU Ohio; United Way of Central Ohio; Nationwide Children’s Hospital; Columbus Communities Coalition for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; NAI Ohio Equities; Partners; MORPC; Urban Land Institute Columbus; League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus; Legal Aid Society of Columbus; Franklinton Board of Trade; Erase the Space; and OSU’s The Women’s Place.

Additional Sponsors & Partners are welcome. Contact Kathy Fox at CommunityStrategyPartners@gmail.com.