

Regional Policy and Research Summer Internship Project 2016

Pre-Application Best Practices in Affordable Housing Development

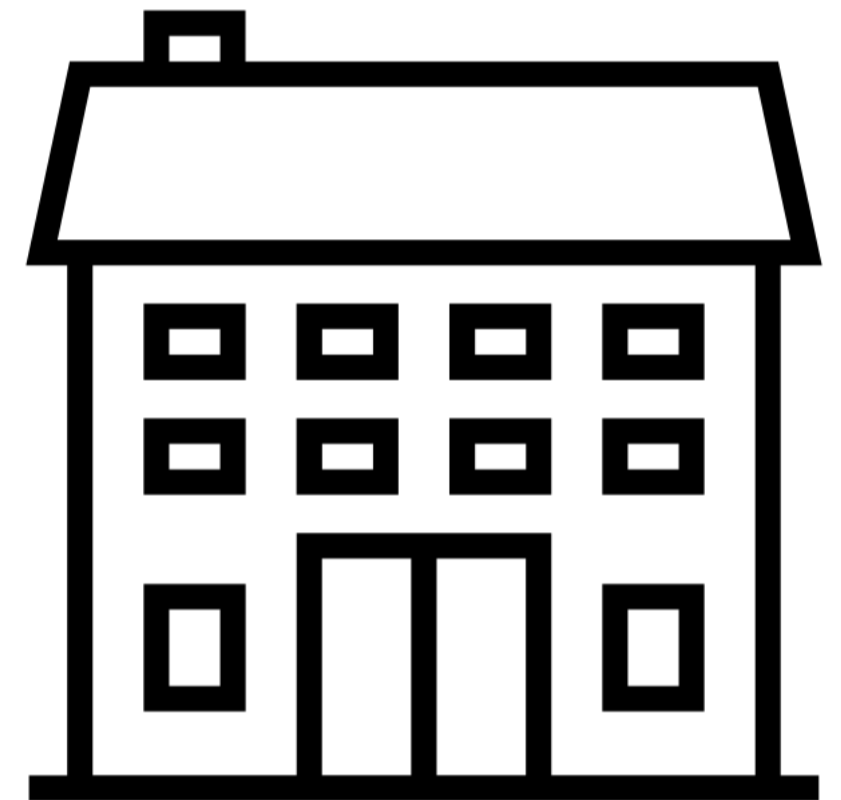
09/15/2016

Land Use Advisory Committee



Affordable Housing Development

- The Minnesota Challenge to Lower the Cost of Affordable Housing
- CURA: local government practices and policies affect the cost of new development
 - 39 interviews with developers and city/county planning staff
 - 12 best practices recommendations



Administrative Processes & Delays

“nearly every developer mentioned delays in these processes as major and widespread problems while virtually every city viewed their processes as efficient and effective”

Three phases of project approval:

- Developers exploring feasibility of a project; discussions with city staff or elected officials may shape a planned project
- Staff and then public official consideration of the application takes place
- Inspections subsequent to issuance of building permits

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The Pre-Application Phase of Project Approval

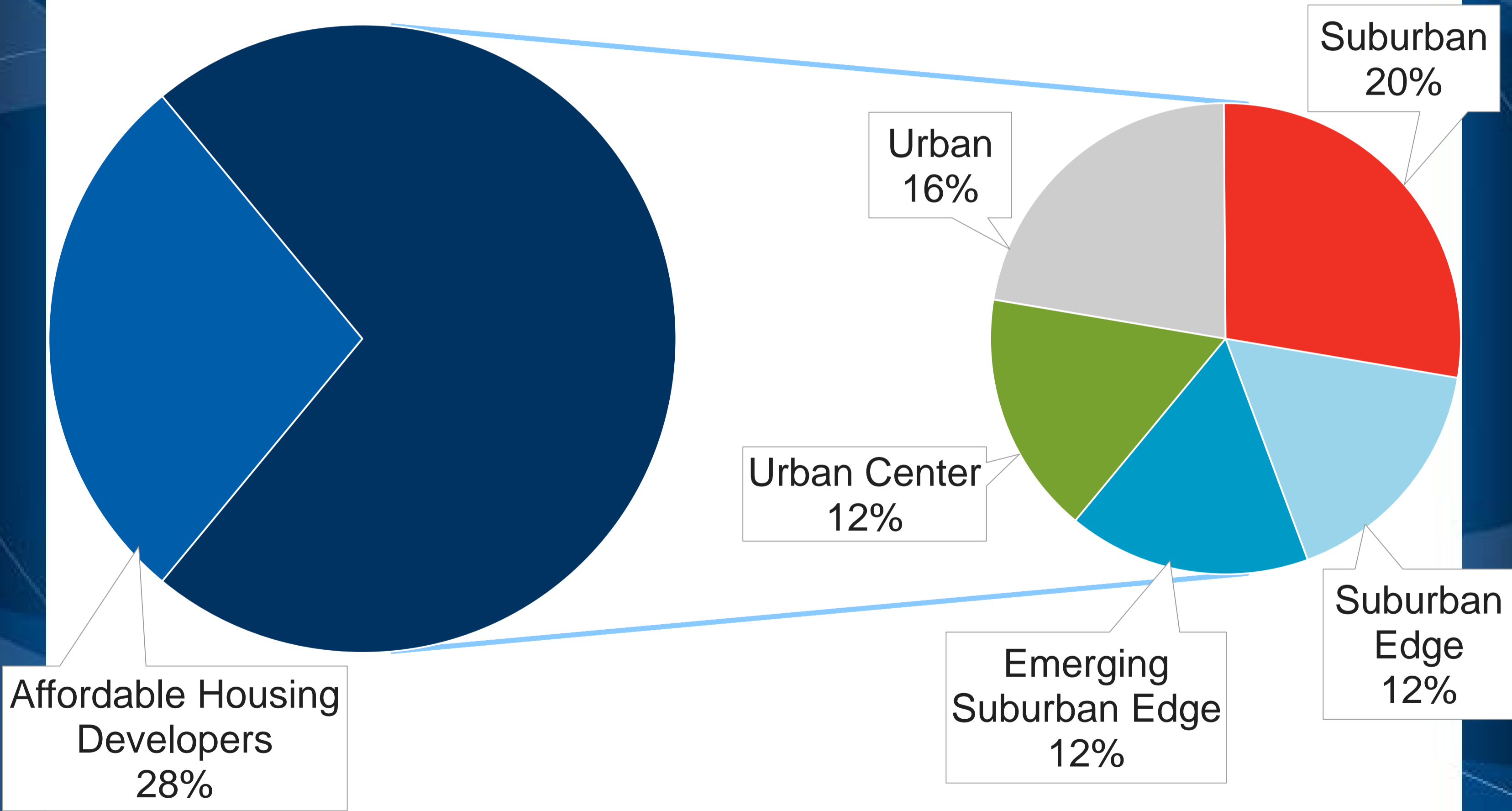
- Examining this period is important to reconcile the different experiences expressed by developers and city staff
- Requirements can be less clear, more informal and can vary from place to place
- This ambiguity can be costly and frustrating for developers and cities alike

Research Questions

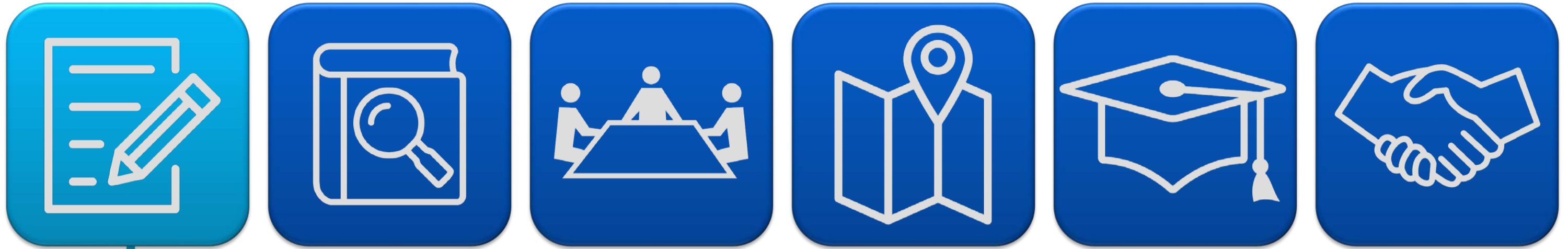
- Where are the headaches for new project proposals?
- What are things cities are doing pre-application to overcome these headaches?
- When cities support and pass development projects, what can be done to prevent a long, drawn out process?



25 Interviews with Cities and Affordable Housing Developers



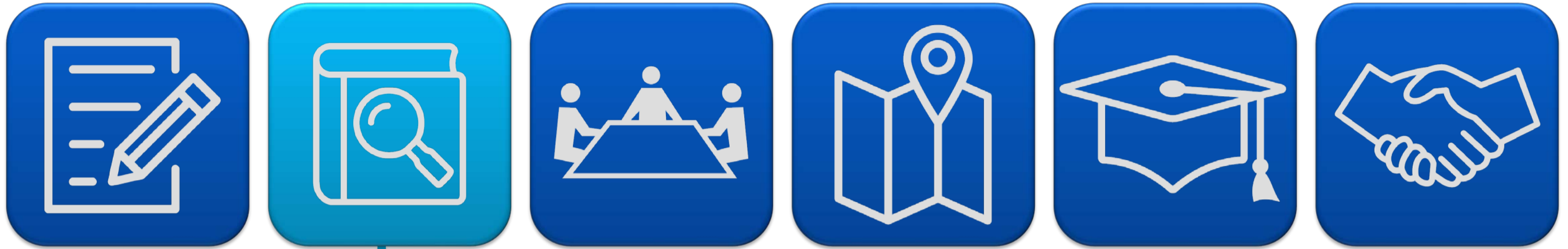
Recurring Themes



Put Policies In Place

- Articulating informal practices in writing can help create a predictable environment while still allowing flexibility
- Allows for easy sharing of practices with other staff and decision makers
- Internal documents that outline these practices should be created, used and updated consistently

Recurring Themes



User-Friendly Development Guide

- Application review processes are made simpler when a written development guide or checklist is made available to developers
- Timelines, design standards, funding resources, relevant forms and pertinent contact information is given at the front end of discussions
- Visual representations work better than blocks of text

Recurring Themes



Development Review Committee with all Relevant Parties Present

- Staff representation from departments such as Planning, Engineering, Forestry, Inspections and Fire & Safety
- Review and feedback in the same room at the same time allows reviewers to talk amongst each other as well as to the developer

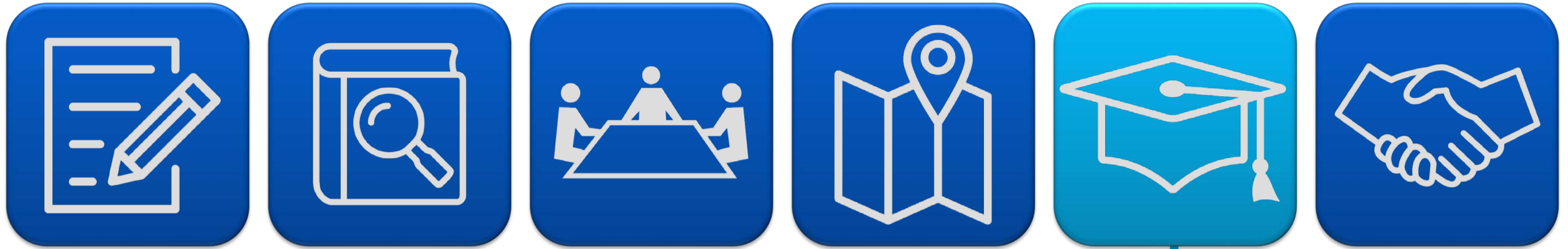
Recurring Themes



Potential Sites on File

- Scarcity of available land and high land costs can make finding the right site for affordable housing particularly difficult
- An internal inventory of sites and teaming with developers to find the right one is a proactive way to expedite review processes
- Allows cities a more active role in shaping new projects

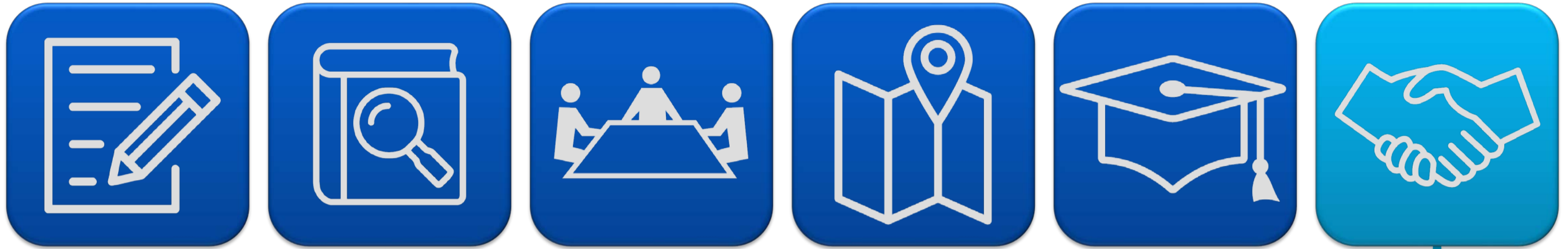
Recurring Themes



Education on Affordable Housing

- Decision makers and the community at large
- Most valuable outside of specific project consideration, in a low-stakes, low-pressure environment
- Ongoing conversations, tours of developments with an unfamiliar product type or funding source, Housing Advisory Committees are all options

Recurring Themes



Build Relationships Early

- Establishing good working relationships at the outset of a project sets the tone for collaboration and trust throughout its duration and into the future
- Early, direct conversations are worth the time investment
- City staff & elected officials, city staff & developers, developers & project neighbors

Questions?

For More Information:

Alex Kleppin

651-602-1314

alexander.kleppin@metc.state.mn.us

