

IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The City of Forest Lake is a community that struggled with their first affordable housing development. In 2005, the City denied a proposal for an affordable housing project, resulting in a lawsuit from the developer. As part of the settlement, the City approved the project in 2007. This settlement brought positive changes to the community resulting in various plans and projects to meet the community's housing need. Through planning, partnerships, and funding, this City is setting an example of how to implement an affordable housing plan with an average of one affordable housing development per year since 2009.

Planning for affordable housing includes frequent communication between community members and City staff. To start, the City completed a Housing Study to research the existing market, housing conditions, type of existing units, commute shed, and growth trends. The study assisted in identifying housing gaps and connecting residents to better opportunities. The City also created a Citizens Affordable Housing Task Force, made up of residents appointed by the City Council. The Task Force assessed the City's existing Comprehensive Plan and developed a new Housing Chapter. The Housing Chapter adopted stronger goals, policies, and implementation steps that focused on how to create affordable housing. Other changes made to the Comprehensive Plan were the inclusion of **Mixed Use** in prominent commercial corridors, along with identifying potential areas for higher residential densities. The City also reduced lot sizes within the zoning ordinance to create more flexibility for affordable housing and the ability to better respond to the market conditions. Higher densities were added to the areas with existing infrastructure along transportation corridors and near the Rush Line. For example, the downtown area has residential densities of up to 29 dwelling units per acre.

In addition to these studies and comprehensive plan changes, the City adopted an **Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance** to encourage the development of affordable housing within Forest Lake by offering incentives to encourage a diverse supply of housing opportunities for low to moderate income households. The City also allows **Accessory Dwelling Units** in Single Family Residential units with a fee of \$50.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT

COUNTY: Washington
POPULATION: 5,321

Forest Lake:

- has implemented an average of one affordable housing project per year since 2009.
- created a Citizens Affordable Housing Task Force to assess City's Comprehensive Plan.
- partnered with Washington County HRA to build additional affordable housing and meet their need.

CONTACT THE CITY:

Donovan Hart,
Zoning Administrator
(651) 209-9734
donovan.hart@ci.forest-lake.mn.us

OTHER RESOURCES:

- Livable Communities Demonstration Account (LCDA)



Trailside Senior Living- The City started the implementation of Affordable Housing following a challenging lawsuit that resulted in positive changes.



Mill Pond Workforce Housing- The City formed a Citizens Affordable Housing Task Force to assess the Comprehensive Plan for the Housing Chapter.



Headwaters Workforce Housing- The new Housing Chapter adopted stronger policies and strategies to create more affordable housing in the community.

WHAT MAY HELP OTHER COMMUNITIES?

Good Resources

The City of Forest Lake added more flexibility to their ordinances and zoning to help attract more development. The flexibility includes no setbacks in the downtown area, more focus on design and change to the culture of acceptance to welcome more diverse projects. The City utilized funding tools such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to fill funding gaps and provide more housing unit counts. Other [incentives](#) include project-specific fee waivers (e.g. park fee and building permit waivers), trade-offs, density and tax bonuses.

Education/Opportunities

City's time and staff investment in public engagement during the comprehensive planning process from the early stages was an additional effort that helped raise participation and awareness from the community. The City launched a citywide education process with the help of Twin Cities Public Television on [affordable housing](#) to familiarize people with benefits of affordable housing in the community.

Close staff interaction with residents, along with the task force's role and conducting the Housing Study, provided opportunities for the City to better understand the community and its needs to draw more development interest to the area.

Partnerships/Participation

Developing the right partnerships helped the City's implementation process. The City partnered with Washington County HRA to build additional affordable housing to meet their housing need. Forest Lake is also a participating community in the [Livable Communities Demonstration Account \(LCDA\)](#) program and received funding from the Metropolitan Council, as well as other financing from local banks. Forest Lake has been able to raise their housing performance score from 20 in the early 2000's to a score of 69 in 2014, placing them among the top 3 participants in Washington County. Most recently, the City offered support in the form of development flexibility and reduced park fees for a 36-unit affordable housing project expected to break ground in fall 2015.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

- Trailside Senior Living was awarded "Property Excellence- Best New Development- Affordable Housing" in 2012 Multi Housing Achievement in Design, Advertising, and Community Support (MADACS) Awards.

DOUG BORGLUND; FORMER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Understanding the community and its needs is key to successful decision-making.



Forest Lake added higher densities along transportation corridors with existing infrastructure to optimize development. The City also joined Transit Taxing District to provide additional transit options.

September 2015