

DISCHARGING RACIALLY RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS AND OPERATIONALIZING EQUITY

Minnesota's history of housing discrimination is well-documented. For decades, racially restrictive covenants were legal tools used to intentionally exclude people of color from the housing market and inhibit them from buying homes in certain neighborhoods. These racist practices not only created segregated communities that continue to exist today, but also produced significant racial disparities across all aspects of life including wealth, education, and health outcomes.

Despite the 1948 Supreme Court ruling that declared racial covenants unenforceable, communities of color continue to feel the impacts of these actions and some racial covenants still exist on the deeds of many Minnesota homes. In response to this reality, the City of Golden Valley's Human Rights Commission worked with pro bono attorneys in 2019 to [help homeowners discharge racial covenants on their properties](#). Several months after starting this work, Golden Valley, the Minnesota Association of City Attorneys, the University of Minnesota's Mapping Prejudice Project, Edina Realty Title, and Minneapolis Area Realtors co-founded the [Just Deeds Coalition](#). Since its inception, this initiative has evolved into a region-wide, cross-sector coalition working to achieve racial justice, drive systems change, and operationalize equity within all city policies and practices.

WHAT MAY HELP OTHER COMMUNITIES?

Essential First Steps: Acknowledge, Accept Responsibility, and Educate

Acknowledging the existence of systemic racism and government's role in creating and upholding these systems of oppression is a key first step to joining the [Just Deeds Coalition](#). As a result of this acknowledgement, participants must also be willing to accept that it is their responsibility to create change and repair harm.

Education is another foundational step in this process. Participants must work to counter the narrative that frames racism as something of the past and asserts that people no longer benefit from racist systems such as racially restrictive covenants. Also, while education is essential to this work, it cannot stop there. Participants must ask themselves, "Now that we know better, how will we do better?" They must hold themselves accountable by pushing past the discomfort and use this knowledge to engage in difficult conversations and create sustainable, transformative change.

The Outcomes: New Conversations and New Collaborations

Just Deeds opened the door to new conversations around race, equity, and social justice among Golden Valley's Planning Commission members. As a result, these conversations have started to shift the ways in which they think about and evaluate local policies and practices such as the City's zoning code.

Through Just Deeds, the City has also had the opportunity to develop new connections and build strong relationships across jurisdictions, sectors, and the region. By collaborating with these new partners, the City has been able to leverage the knowledge and experiences of others to make greater progress toward achieving shared goals.

Since joining the Just Deeds Coalition, the City has also seen increased participation from community members not previously represented in its engagement processes.

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT

COUNTY: Hennepin
POPULATION: 22,552

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AWARDS AND RECOGNITION:

- Just Deeds and the MN Association of City Attorneys received the 2021 MN Lawyer Diversity and Inclusion Award.
- The MN Association of City Attorneys received the 2021 Public Lawyer Diversity Award from the Public Law Section of the MN State Bar Association for its work as a Just Deeds Founding Member.

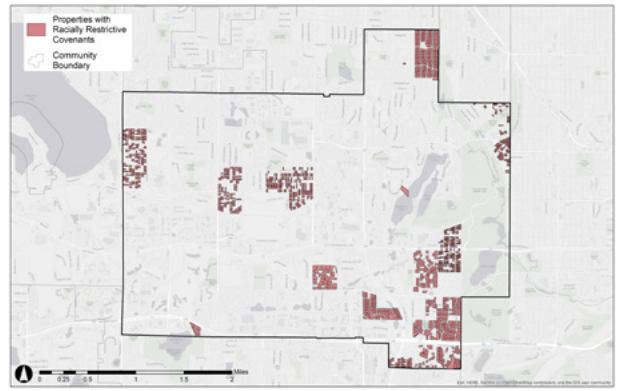


Just Deeds is a region-wide, cross-sector coalition working to achieve racial justice, drive systems change, and operationalize equity.

Measuring Progress

Engagement is the City's primary measure of success. Staff evaluate progress by using indicators such as how many requests to discharge deeds they have received, how many presentations they have given, how people have received and engaged with their presentations, and what policy work or discussions have local governments been participating in or leading. The City also collects testimonials from community members and organizations about their experiences discharging racial covenants.

Feeling challenged is another key indicator that the City is on the right path. If the work is not difficult, they ask themselves if they are truly taking action and making a difference, or if they are simply engaging in performative activism. The City acknowledges that this work can be mentally taxing, but understands it is a test of their commitment to achieving racial justice and systems change. However, they find that staying grounded in their values helps them to move forward and keep fighting.



This map shows the properties within the City of Golden Valley with racially restrictive covenants. It was created using data from the University of Minnesota's Mapping Prejudice Project.

Next Steps

The City plans to build on current efforts by continuing to collaborate and develop relationships with other Just Deeds communities committed to this work. They strongly believe in the power of collaboration and wish to expand the coalition to include more municipalities, as well as other organizations outside of the public sector.

The City also plans to expand its programming by providing learning opportunities to residents, workplaces, City commissioners, and employees. Using the knowledge and experience gained through Just Deeds, the City strives to operationalize racial equity by integrating it into all City policies, programs, and decision-making processes, especially those related to planning and zoning, infrastructure, and public services. Through this work, the City hopes to create a community where all people feel welcome to live, work, and recreate.

Resources for Community Involvement

Local governments interested in joining the Just Deeds Coalition can use the [Cities Tool Kit](#) to get started. This guide outlines the expectations and benefits of being a Just Deeds member, as well as provides sample resolutions, memos, and PowerPoints to start the conversation with local policy makers and commissions. Communities can also contact [Just Deeds](#) to request a speaker to address local neighborhoods, schools, or community groups.

Communities in Hennepin County can review the University of Minnesota's [Mapping Prejudice Project](#) to begin identifying racially restrictive covenants within their jurisdiction. Those outside of Hennepin County can reach out to the [Mapping Prejudice Project](#) to learn more about how to start identifying these covenants within their own community.

In addition to providing resources for local governments, Just Deeds provides [resources for community members](#) to educate themselves and learn to [facilitate conversations about race](#) within their own communities.

Just Deeds Coalition Founding Members



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LOCAL PLANNING
HANDBOOK

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