



# THE MN CHALLENGE

To Lower the Cost of Affordable Housing



## PERSUADING THE COMMUNITY THROUGH AN OPINION ARTICLE

This opinion article is suitable for your community newspaper, community-based online news forums or other communications channels.

The article in its current length (about 625 words) is suitable for most community newspapers. However, the BEST approach is to localize the article. It also can be customized. The left column below is the main article. The right column has some editing and customizing tips. For example, the article can be shortened to about 450 words by deleting the first three paragraphs, as indicated. This might make it suitable for some newsletters (e.g., some faith communities publish articles of this nature) or other channels.

If you customize the article, keep the length the same or shorter. Most community newspapers in the Twin Cities suburban area (including the Sun Current, Sun Post, Sun Sailor, etc.) are published by ECM. **A complete list of publications is available at <http://ecmpublishers.com/publications>.** Link to the newspaper in your community, search under “contact” and send the article to the listed editor. Make sure to include your name, a daytime phone number and an email address.

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THE PRINCIPAL ARTICLE	CUSTOMIZING OPTIONS
<p>When a developer with the credentials and history of Ron Clark speaks about the future housing needs of Twin Cities communities, public officials and citizens alike would do well to listen.</p> <p>“Twenty or 30 years ago, everything was focused on family housing,” said Clark in a recent interview. “More and more, communities are seeing the need for a mix of housing, including upscale, rental for seniors, young singles and families, and workforce housing. There is still a good mix of housing being built...but some communities are coming straight to us and telling us they need a better mix of housing choices.”</p> <p>Clark reflects the reality that in the economy of today and in the future, Twin Cities communities will need to provide a full range of housing choices to be successful. The Metropolitan Council estimates that about one in eight households paid more than half of their income in housing costs in 2013. About 266,000 households paid at least one-third for housing. Only about 20 percent of the housing needed by these individuals and families is being built annually.</p>	<p><b>If a shorter article is needed, the first three paragraphs could be deleted.</b></p> <p><b>The introduction is a good place to localize the article. You might interview your mayor or a city council person on why a full range of housing is important to the community and what is being done to achieve the goal.</b></p> <p><b>Replace the first three paragraphs and begin the article with something like: “When Mayor Jane Doe thinks about the future of her community she knows it must include a full range of housing choices.” Keep the new comments to about 175 words.</b></p>

The need for housing that is affordable is affecting more and more people in today's economy. Some of our community's most essential workers – many of those in health care, those starting out in education or a number of public safety workers – earn wages that make housing unaffordable. It's not that these people are going homeless (although some are), it's that when they spend more than one-third of their household income on housing, other important necessities, including health care and good nutrition, get squeezed.

Additionally, stable housing is a key contributor to both academic achievement and good health. If we want to close the achievement gap and control long-term health costs, housing must be part of the solution.

There are actions communities can take to promote the development of new affordable housing and reinvestment in existing housing stock:

First, communities should have a specific housing policy to guide development and investment. The policy should be a long-term map of where different kinds of housing will be located and the size and density that is appropriate for each site. The time couldn't be better for communities to develop long-term housing policies. Communities in the Twin Cities are required to update their comprehensive plans by 2018. Communities that don't have housing policies should develop one as part of the comprehensive planning process; communities that do have a housing policy should review and update it as part of the 2018 work.

Second, community leadership should embrace a full range of housing choices. The Minnesota Challenge – a nonpartisan, nonprofit-led initiative to lower the cost of affordable housing – has created 11 best practices communities can integrate into their housing policies. **(The full Minnesota Challenge report is at [www.MnChallenge.com](http://www.MnChallenge.com).)**

Third, communities need to have discussions that focus on people, not buildings. Too often, affordable housing becomes part of the community's conversations only when specific projects are proposed. While it's important to be respectful of everyone's point of view, studies consistently have shown that a full range of housing choices is vital to a community's prosperity. Affordable housing is a community asset. Analyses of Twin Cities projects show that affordable housing doesn't harm existing home values or raise property taxes. It makes communities safer, according to the National Crime Prevention Council, and makes it possible for young working families to put down roots and become part of our future.

New housing, including housing that is affordable, creates additional tax revenue and increases economic activity. A full range of housing choices includes affordable homes for young families, allowing them to put down roots in the community and eventually become the buyers of tomorrow's empty-nest homes.

These are goals that benefit the entire community.

**Starting the article here will create a 445- word article if no other changes are made.**

**This paragraph and the following one can be replaced with an example of a person who is able to work and live in your community because of housing that is affordable. For example, "John Doe is a nurse assistant at (insert name of Local Nursing Home). HE is a great worker, his patients love him and he is becoming part of his new community. But none of this would be possible without (insert name of an affordable housing development). Add a quote from the person. Keep the entire section to about 125 words.**

**A summary quote from the mayor or a city council member can be inserted here, replacing the last two paragraphs. A good summary reinforces the value of a full range of housing choices delivers to all residents. A new quote should be no more than 50 words or so.**