

Incorporating fair housing principles in the Sustainable Communities Initiative

1) Prioritize the deconcentration of affordable housing. At least 50-75% of new affordable housing developments for families should be set aside for high-opportunity areas with low-poverty schools, and should be affirmatively marketed to minorities and residents now living in distressed communities. The remaining affordable housing development should be built as part of mixed-income development. Housing vouchers should be administered regionally, with affirmative housing mobility counseling and priority given to moves to high opportunity areas, to counter concentrated poverty and to ensure that low income families have authentic choice.

2) Target connective transit and transportation development. New transit development should create new and better connections between low-opportunity and high-opportunity areas. It should also ensure that new and existing public investments in infrastructure (water and sewer for new higher density housing, parks, libraries, etc) are served by transit. This effort will have the additional benefit of ameliorating sprawl and will allow all residents of a region to more equitably share in the benefits of public investments.

3) Environmental initiatives should focus on healthy neighborhoods. Environmental plans should include removing food deserts, improving air quality, promoting green space, and increasing health care options in low-opportunity communities. These will result in greater opportunity and improved desirability of these neighborhoods.

4) Prioritize economic development in low-opportunity areas. Economic development, especially for employment and education, should be prioritized for use in low-opportunity areas. Promoting economic development focused on job growth and educational opportunity will alleviate this dilemma and promote more environmentally sustainable regions.

A failure to stress these 4 principles will likely result in the perpetuation of the segregation of opportunity. Particular risks include:

- > Developing affordable housing development in the neighborhoods of central cities and inner ring suburbs that already possess higher rates of poverty. Because most mass transit options are available in central cities and inner ring suburbs, there is an acute risk of exacerbating concentrations of poverty if affordable housing development occurs in neighborhoods with decent transit access despite their low level of opportunity.
- > Designing traffic networks that will exclude low-income neighborhoods and transit networks that exclude high opportunity suburbs. If transit programs are designed to connect high-opportunity suburbs and central business districts without including connections to neighborhoods and suburbs with few employment opportunities, the jobs:housing mismatch that characterizes metropolitan regions will accelerate. On the other hand, if public dollars are invested in building community facilities (parks, libraries, higher density housing) located in high opportunity areas that are not served by transit, then transit dependent persons will be excluded from the benefits of those public investments.
- > Widening disparities in neighborhood health levels. If green planning fails to account for environmental justice issues, the gap between health qualities in high- and low-opportunity neighborhoods will widen.
- > Economic development can frustrate regional equity goals if it is concentrated in already high-opportunity communities in a region. High-quality jobs are already disproportionately located far from affordable housing options in metropolises.