

CONTACT: Jessica Dudley, President and Chief Professional Officer
United Way of Hall County
527 Oak Street, Gainesville, 30501
678-989-5333; jdudley@unitedwayhallcounty.org

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Urban Land Institute Issues Technical Assistance Panel Report on “Affordable Housing Strategies for Gainesville and Hall County” in Partnership with United Way of Hall County

GAINESVILLE, Ga. – The Urban Land Institute (ULI) has issued its official Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) report on *Affordable Housing Strategies for Gainesville and Hall County*, following their two-day visit to and study of the community in March 2019.

TAPs organized through ULI Atlanta provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the Atlanta region. United Way of Hall County, through a sponsorship by Jackson EMC, brought ULI Atlanta’s TAP to Hall County to assess the community’s housing needs and provide recommendations based on their best-practice expertise.

The TAP spent two days conducting stakeholder interviews, touring the community, studying data and hearing from local housing experts. After an initial report out at the end of their two-day visit, they further refined and expanded their recommendations into a 40-page report just released. The report outlines six recommendations, along with one informal recommendation, along with a suggested timeline.

The recommendations include:

1. **Create a shared vision, goals and public purpose** for providing housing options that are affordable for both low-income families and households that find affordability of starter homes increasingly out of reach. According to the report, “no real, sustained progress will occur without first gaining buy-in from the community and building the broad platform.” The report suggests that “success will require a champion to drive the issue and engage the ‘power brokers.’ The panel believes the business community is best suited to be this champion who could build an effective coalition to broker effective solutions.”
2. **Focus resources on a designated area that has potential to catalyze further development.** The panel noted the revitalization of Walton Summit and “believes this model could be replicated for an even more innovative mixed-income project that incorporated increased density, multiple development partners and financing options, and different types of housing.” The report suggests an area near the Midtown Greenway and possibly the jail site could be an ideal spot for this project.

3. **Evaluate existing barriers, incentives and tools that will determine the overall success of the effort.** “Inducting the private sector to build affordable housing is the thrust of this recommendation,” the report says, “the idea being to align existing locally available public resources with the public objective of creating more housing options.” Options suggested include property tax abatements, Tax Allocation Districts, Opportunity Zones and a Housing Trust Fund.
4. **Create an action plan to produce missing middle housing.** According to the report, “it’s not just families at the lowest ends of the income scale that are finding it increasingly difficult to locate adequate housing. The missing housing product for entry level homeowners, first responders, teachers and other lower-paid professionals must also be addressed.
5. **Create a community land trust.** The report commends the city and county for the creating of the Hall County-Gainesville Land Bank to rehabilitate blighted, abandoned properties. To complement the land bank, the panel recommends the creating of a community land trust, a nonprofit, community based organization designed to ensure community stewardship of land.
6. **Develop a housing needs assessment and strategic plan.** A comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment would identify the number of housing units needed in the market by tenure (rentals vs. for-sale), price point, bedroom type and market segment (e.g., families, seniors, young professionals, etc.) The assessment would give community leaders the necessary information to develop a strategic housing plan that aligns resources, ensures a unified strategic direction and facilitates partnership to achieve a shared vision of housing affordability in a cost-effective manner.

The panel’s informal recommendation is to explore Margy Stagmeier’s model of incorporating a housing partnership with a services nonprofit – providing services such as free onsite after-school programming, gardening and affordable medical care.

The report commended the leadership of Gainesville and Hall County governments and Gainesville Housing Authority, as well as United Way’s One Hall initiative. “From the get-go, it was evident this leadership team has considerable knowledge and passion for enriching the housing market at all levels in Gainesville and Hall County. While affordable housing may be their number one priority, the leadership team demonstrated a deft understanding of the importance and need to bolster housing at affordable levels for varying income segments to make their community a more desirable place to live.”

That recognition is a welcome one says Jessica Dudley, president of United Way of Hall County. “Since my arrival in April, I have been so impressed with the knowledge and passion of our housing experts in the public and private sectors. United Way serves as the vehicle to unite these various stakeholders, and now with this report from ULI, we are armed with a game plan of how to meet the housing needs of our residents across all levels in our community.”

“Vetting through the report’s recommendations and connecting the community to turn them into action will be the next task of United Way’s One Hall Financial Stability Committee,” said United Way Board Chair Katie Dubnik “Thanks to the One Hall committee structure, our community is poised to quickly act upon this report. As per the TAP’s recommendation, we will likely work to broaden our One Hall committee scope and engage even more stakeholders in the conversation, aiming toward our ultimate goal of creating pathways out of poverty for our community’s most vulnerable populations.”

The full TAP report can be viewed on the United Way of Hall County website here:

www.unitedwayhallcounty.org/housingreport