



HOUSING

Just Imagine...resilient housing in attractive neighborhoods that people can afford and access

Housing policy directly impacts the availability, affordability, and accessibility of housing. Throughout the Just Imagine process, housing rose to the top of the region's priorities. Quality housing that families and individuals can afford is critical for the economic growth of the region. The following housing recommendations are based on:

1. Assessment of existing housing supply, affordability, and delivery models
2. Housing Guiding Group meetings and input
3. Public input throughout the process
4. Technical meetings with developers, general contractors, and non-profits

The tables list the full set of recommendations with estimated costs and time frames, and key recommendations are described in more detail.

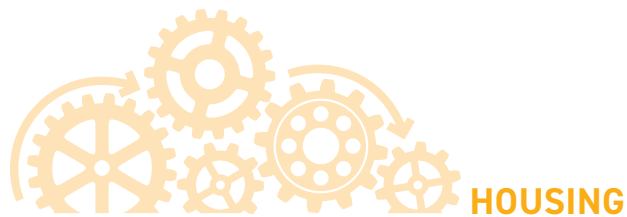
Increase the Supply of Housing through Zoning Allowances

Southwest Louisiana has a deficit of housing units that are affordable to each income range and this deters people from moving to the area. Cities and parishes should use the levers of zoning to incentivize additional housing to be built. These changes may include upzoning districts across the whole jurisdiction or allowing additional density along corridors, in high-opportunity neighborhoods, and in walking distance to amenities like downtown, the waterfront, McNeese State University, and others. Cities and parishes can reduce the cost of building housing by eliminating parking minimums and letting the market determine the necessary parking ratio, and allowing housing to be built in commercial districts.

Demonstration Neighborhoods
Fund infrastructure for sites/projects that assure a level of affordability and resilient design



Resilient and Affordable Homes Non-profits interested in developing affordable housing can use standards developed in the Resilient Housing for SWLA.



PLAN RECOMMENDATION	COST	TIME FRAME
Zoning and Regulatory Updates		
① Adopt zoning ordinance updates that will help to increase the supply of housing in the region (mixed-use zoning, reduced parking requirements, upzoning, etc.)	TBD	1-2 years
② Reform the entitlements and approvals process to make housing development faster and more predictable	TBD	1-2 years
Subsidized and Affordable Housing		
③ Adopt criteria for cities and parishes to use when evaluating whether to support LIHTC applications to the state (such as a requirement to deconcentrate poverty and to engage neighbors in a community process)	TBD	0-1 year
④ Allocate HOME/CDBG funds to non-profits building affordable homeownership	TBD	1-5 years
⑤ Provide funding and technical assistance to help housing non-profits apply for state-certified CHDO status	TBD	1 year
⑥ Fund infrastructure for sites/projects that assure a level of affordability and resilient design	TBD	0-1 year
⑦ Offer grants to provide gap funding for affordable and resilient housing projects	TBD	0-1 year
⑧ Adopt policy recommendations for areas with high concentrations of subsidized housing	TBD	1-2 years
⑨ Support and build the capacity of non-profits who are interested in developing affordable housing in the region	TBD	0-1 year
⑩ Create a regional Affordable Housing Trust Fund for SWLA (funded through property/sales tax or a widely distributed transfer tax)	TBD	5-15 years
Training and Partnerships in Advance Resilient Building Practices		
⑪ Organize builder workshops throughout the region to share resilient building practices and benefit-cost information to demonstrate the advantages post-disaster	n/a	0-1 year
⑫ Partner with the Homebuilders of SWLA and the Associated Builders and Contractors Southwest Training Center to recruit and train a larger workforce for the homebuilding and construction industries; focus on the importance of resilient building practices	n/a	0-1 year
⑬ Support contractors in getting certified as fortified roof installers and inspectors; establish small business support systems for those interested in starting specialized contracting companies for resilient building practices, such as fortified roofing.	n/a	0-1 year

Housing

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Quality, resilient, and affordable housing is one of the region's greatest needs.
- The cost of housing is going up and many households are being priced out.
- If families and individuals can't find housing they can afford, it will limit the growth of SWLA.
- Storms will continue to increase in severity, and homes need to be built to higher standards.
- Stable, safe housing is essential for families and people to thrive.

DESIGN CRITERIA CHECKLIST

1. **Buildings Front Public Areas:** If a development does not include public streets, parking drive aisles should be designed with enhancements to make them “street-like” (shade trees, non-circu- itous sidewalks, street furniture such as benches, trash receptacles, and street lights).
2. **Access:** Convenient access to public transit, walking and bicycling trails, and other amenities enhances access to opportunities for employ- ment, education, and cultural experiences.
3. **Neighborhood-Scale Blocks:** Development should be organized into blocks that are less than 3 acres each to create a walkable community.
4. **Fronts and Backs:** Buildings should have discern- ible fronts and backs. Front facades should face other front facades and rears of buildings should face other rear facades.
5. **Perimeter Frontage:** Fronts of buildings should face publicly accessible streets (or parking lot drive aisles designed to be “street-like”) or greenways. Service areas, off-street parking, and semi-pri- vate outdoor space should be located in the cen- ter of blocks.
6. **Diverse Building Types:** The objective is to build new homes in new or extended neighborhoods. A range of building types and architectural designs are required to move from building a development or apartment complex (typically with one or two repeating building designs) to a neighborhood.
7. **Mixed-Income:** LIHTC projects should aim to serve a range of incomes.
8. **Human-Scale Building Elements:** Porches, stoops, awnings, balconies, and other elements are necessary to create places where people can interact and enjoy outdoor space.
9. **Accessible Amenities:** The development has a diverse range of indoor and outdoor amenities, including small parks for children, indoor com- munity gathering space, fitness amenities, etc.

Accelerate Entitlements and Approvals

Streamlining approval processes and entitlement times has proven to translate to cost savings that can lower rents and keep housing affordable. Zoning ordinances should be updated to have the desired regulations and the majority of approvals should occur by-right, without additional review required. The cities and parishes in Southwest Louisiana have intentionally focused on speeding up review and approval times. Additional funding for staff capacity would allow the departments to improve further and facilitate the production of more housing in the region.

Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Criteria

One funding mechanism that for-profit and non-profit developers use are Low Income Hous- ing Tax Credits (LIHTC), issued through Loui- siana Housing Corporation (LHC). LIHTC is an indirect federal subsidy that helps to finance the construction and rehabilitation of rental housing for low-income individuals. The tax credit is a commodity that developers can use to generate capital for projects, and in exchange, they agree to income-qualify tenants, maintain affordable rents for a 15-year period, and follow leasing and property management requirements.

The most valuable credits are competitive at the state level and applicants often approach cities and parishes for letters of support for their appli- cations. This can put elected officials in a difficult position of having to judge one application against another, prior to the state’s evaluation. As part of

the Just Imagine process, the checklist to the right was developed as a tool for municipal and parish staff to use in evaluating support for projects.

A LIHTC project should meet at least five of the nine criteria before a letter of support is consid- ered and/or recommended.

Adopt Policies for Areas with High Concentrations of Subsidized Housing

Concentrating low-income households not only limits the possibilities for families and individuals to thrive, but also can concentrate social chal- lenges and impact the value of one part of a city or region. The issues and property values can spiral downward as more subsidized housing is built in the same area (often for the reason that there is less public opposition to building more of what’s already located in an area than to integrating subsidized housing into high-opportunity areas). The best practice is to offer housing that serves a mix of incomes in all neighborhoods. Low-income families experience more upward economic mo- bility when living in closer proximity to higher- income families and when given access to the same amenities and resources that others benefit from. All municipal and parish approving bodies should adopt a policy not to approve subsidized housing for areas that are already saturated with very low- and low-income households.

Build Coalitions Between and Support Organizations Building Affordable Housing

The Southwest Louisiana region has valuable but limited partners on the ground building affordable rental and home ownership. These organizations could benefit from collaboration, capacity support, and additional funding. Additionally, organizations from other parts of Louisiana are willing and interested in supporting SWLA. A network should be established for best practice sharing.

Fund Infrastructure and Financing Gaps for Attainable Housing Projects

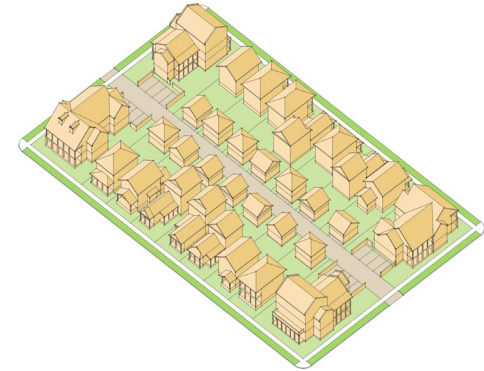
Most affordable and subsidized housing projects have gaps in their financing and funding stacks. As labor and material prices climb, these gaps have become hard to close. When publicly funded, infrastructure improvements such as public streets, utilities, drainage, parking, etc. can incentivize development that would not have been feasible before those improvements. The Regional Planning Commission (RPC), parishes, and cities should compete for new sources of infrastructure funding (such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)) and use the capital dollars to incentivize and offer leverage for affordable housing development.

Similarly, philanthropic grants should be set aside for gap funding for projects that guarantee affordability up to a maximum area median income. Philanthropic funding should also be tied to ensuring that new or renovated housing is built to resilient standards and can withstand flooding, strong winds, and other hazards.

Create a Regional Affordable Housing Trust Fund for Southwest Louisiana

Housing trust funds are a flexible source of funding that can be used to support a variety of affordable housing activities. When they are created and administered at the city or parish level, housing trust funds can be designed to address specific local priorities and needs. Several action steps for establishing a SWLA Housing Trust Fund include:

1. Determine whether the fund will be administered by an existing public office or non-profit organization, or whether a new entity will be enabled and established.
2. Dedicate a revenue funding stream. Common funding for regional housing trust funds include real estate transfer taxes, document recording fees, developer fees such as linkage fees, demolition taxes, permit fees, hotel taxes, taxes on legalized medicinal or retail marijuana, taxes or fees on luxury housing, or taxes on short-term rentals.
3. Identify the activities that the trust fund will support (i.e., What range of median household income level should projects receiving funds serve? Should the funds support rental, home-ownership, shared-equity housing, etc.? Can the fund support rental assistance subsidies or just development?).



11 Advance Resilient Building Practices Builders in SWLA are exploring ways to build resiliently and affordably, including using pier and beam foundations.

Resilient Housing Toolkit

HOUSING POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **What's Affordable?** The Resilient Housing Toolkit provides a primer on housing affordability, using 2021-2022 demographics and metrics. Housing is generally considered affordable if a household pays 30% or less of their gross monthly income for housing costs (including mortgage or rent, utilities, homeowners insurance, and property taxes). As of 2022, the average family in Southwest Louisiana cannot afford to purchase the average home for sale, unless they can afford to make a 25% or greater down payment. Rents are steadily rising and many median or below-median income families are severely housing burdened.
- **Why Should I Care?** Citizen opposition to the construction of new housing in high opportunity areas is one of the most detrimental obstacles to the production of more affordable housing. Southwest Louisiana is experiencing a housing crisis that will continue to get worse until available housing stock for all income brackets increases. The Resilient Housing Toolkit explains reasons why every person should care and support the construction of more housing, affordable housing, and resilient housing in simple terms.
- **Supporting Middle Neighborhoods:** Middle neighborhoods are older or more established neighborhoods where middle-class and working class families live. These neighborhoods are stable and desirable, but they require continued investment in the homes, public infrastructure, and services to ensure that they do not decline. In SWLA, many of the middle neighborhoods are in the northern half of the city and may have reduced flooding risks. A series of seven policy recommendations for supporting middle neighborhoods are included in the Resilient Housing Toolkit.

RESOURCES

WHAT'S AFFORDABLE?

WHAT IS CONSIDERED "AFFORDABLE" FOR HOUSING?

- Housing is generally considered as affordable if a household pays 30% or less of their monthly gross income for housing costs (including mortgage or rent, utilities, homeowners insurance, and property taxes).
- Households that pay more than 50% are considered severely housing burdened.
- To qualify for **subsidized affordable housing**, a family of four would need to make \$38,820 or less.

WHAT CAN AN AVERAGE FAMILY IN SWLA AFFORD TO BUY?

- The average family makes **\$51,547** and can afford to spend **\$1,200/mo.** in total housing costs. With those costs, they may be able to afford a home that costs **\$150,000.**
- The median home listed for sale in January 2022 is **\$225,000** in Calcasieu Parish and **\$325,000** in Cameron Parish.
- The average family that lives in Calcasieu & Cameron parishes **cannot afford** to purchase the average home, unless they can make 25% (or greater) down payment

THE AVERAGE RENTS IN CALCASIEU & CAMERON PARISHES ARE:

- \$702 for a studio apartment
- \$732 for a 1-bedroom apartment
- \$941 for a 2-bedroom apartment
- \$1,178 for a 3-bedroom apartment
- \$1,321 for a 4-bedroom apartment

Families with children might have a hard time affording rent.

It costs about \$360,000 to build a 3-bedroom, 2400 sf house, but can cost more.

RESOURCES

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

MAKING A PLAN

After listening to over 2,000 of your neighbors, the #1 thing that people wanted for housing was to see more affordable housing for families of all incomes. That doesn't just happen. A **policy** is a course of action; a plan saying how we get to the things we imagine. For more houses to be available, affordable, and accessible, you can support policies that:

- Allow More Housing to be Built**
 - Make it faster and easier to build with faster permit review
 - Allow for more housing in existing neighborhoods like duplexes and small apartment buildings.
- Stabilize Existing Neighborhoods**
 - Improve public services in neighborhoods that need investment
 - Limit how much rent goes up each year
- Subsidize Housing Cost for Those Who Need It**
 - Prevent discrimination against people with housing vouchers
 - Require that some affordable housing be built in projects of a certain size, or that are in a good location.
- Build Safer, Longer**
 - Have each community look at a Design Flood Elevation regularly on what floods have done in the past, and how things are changing.
 - Enforce building codes

There are many more policy ideas in the Just Imagine SWLA Policy Guide.

WHY WOULD I SUPPORT STRICTER RULES FOR BUILDING HIGHER AND STRONGER?

- Building a house that can stand up against storms can be less expensive in the future.
- If your house is damaged in the future, insurance will cover things required by codes. If more resilient standards aren't required, homeowners would have to pick up the cost themselves.

SO, WHAT CAN I DO?

- Support rules to help everyone build safer like:**
 - Implementing Design Flood Elevation
 - Wind Mitigation Requirements
 - Adoption of Stronger Building Codes
 - Stormwater retention
 - Limits on building dirt mounds to build slab-on-grade

RESOURCES

SUPPORTING MIDDLE NEIGHBORHOODS

MIDDLE NEIGHBORHOODS

There are many neighborhoods throughout the region where middle-class and working-class families live. These are called **middle neighborhoods**. They are often established neighborhoods that have a long history in the area. Sometimes, these neighborhoods can be left out of conversations about how they can best be supported. How you can describe a middle neighborhood:

- Middle neighborhoods are where middle-class and working-class families live.
- In these neighborhoods, incomes and house prices are typically pretty close to the middle for a city or region.
- Middle neighborhoods are the backbone of a region and important to building equity for Black and other communities of color.
- They require continued investment in the homes, public infrastructure, and services to ensure that they do not decline.

In SWLA, there is not much land that is outside of places with high flooding risks. Keeping established neighborhood strong can be an alternative to building new houses in areas more likely to flood.

The houses that were built in middle neighborhoods are often smaller and have fewer bedrooms and bathrooms than people look for when buying a new house. This can make it hard to sell a house in a middle neighborhood

GOOD BONES

Many middle neighborhoods have been around for a long time and have great things like big trees, concrete streets,

AMENITIES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Some middle neighborhoods already have great things like parks. These good things need to be supported and encouraged to grow and get better.

BRAND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Many of these neighborhoods already have names that people call them. Banners and signage can help emphasize neighborhood identity.

for top value, which makes it hard for the neighborhood to grow and thrive. Sometimes, these established neighborhoods

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

- Many houses in middle neighborhoods have one bathroom, making the homes less desirable to families in the market. Fund a half bath program (hire local architects to create standard renovation plans for the typical floor plans/house types in the neighborhood to show how 1/2 baths can be added)
- Increase the level of city services to these neighborhoods (street maintenance & improvements, garbage pick-up, replace broken street lights, repair broken sidewalks, etc.)
- Improve and build new highly desirable neighborhood amenities (parks, play structures, community centers, gathering spaces, neighborhood-serving retail in walking distances, access to bike and walking trails, etc.)
- Provide grants to neighborhood organizations to create branding and marketing to promote the neighborhoods
- Increase the number of move-in ready homes by offering grants to homeowners
- Develop a "rehab and ready program" through a land bank or redevelopment authority
- Support organizations & program events in these neighborhoods that will both serve existing residents and attract people from outside the neighborhood

ADDRESS THREE THINGS TO HELP INCREASE HOME SALES IN MIDDLE NEIGHBORHOODS

- Property conditions
- School conditions
- Safety

Affordability Metrics

Area Median Income (AMI) is the metric used to allocate housing subsidies. The table to the right shows the Lake Charles MSA low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) limits. Typically, households making up to 60% AMI can qualify for subsidized rental housing, and sometimes households making up to 80% AMI can qualify. Area median income is also the metric that most housing trust funds and some foundations use to determine what kinds of projects should receive funds (for example, for sale homes for households making up to 80% AMI may qualify for grants).

LAKE CHARLES LA MSA — LOW-INCOME HOUSING TAX CREDIT (LIHTC) INCOME LIMITS (2021)								
Household Size	20% of AMI	30% of AMI	40% of AMI	50% of AMI	60% of AMI	70% of AMI	80% of AMI	Area Median Income
1 person	\$9,060	\$13,590	\$18,120	\$22,650	\$27,180	\$31,710	\$36,240	
2 person	\$10,360	\$15,540	\$20,720	\$25,900	\$31,080	\$36,260	\$41,440	
3 person	\$11,660	\$17,490	\$23,320	\$29,150	\$34,980	\$40,810	\$46,640	
4 person	\$12,940	\$19,410	\$25,880	\$32,350	\$38,820	\$45,290	\$51,760	\$68,400
5 person	\$13,980	\$20,970	\$27,960	\$34,950	\$41,940	\$48,930	\$55,920	
6 person	\$15,020	\$22,530	\$30,040	\$37,550	\$45,060	\$52,570	\$60,080	
7 person	\$16,060	\$24,090	\$32,120	\$40,150	\$48,180	\$56,210	\$64,240	
8 person	\$17,100	\$25,650	\$34,200	\$42,750	\$51,300	\$59,850	\$68,400	

