

CRAFTING POWERFUL PRO-HOMES MESSAGES



welcoming
neighbors network



Sightline
INSTITUTE

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To build support across race, income, party, and ideology, we need to connect rising housing costs to local people's stories and day-to-day experiences of housing shortages. We must then present specific, concrete housing choices and the community benefits they will produce.

Across the country, the high cost of housing hurts Americans from all walks of life, in big cities and small towns. Yet in most places, **a failed status quo restricts affordable choices**, resulting in a shortage of homes, cutthroat competition, and the displacement of local workers and families.

Americans are ready for change. **A broad majority sees housing as a major issue — but a solvable one.** While many voters do not naturally connect high costs to short supply, **most recognize negative consequences of shortages in everyday life and support policies to allow more housing in their communities**, from backyard cottages to small apartments; and majorities favor solutions to foster affordable, connected, convenient city neighborhoods.

Welcoming Neighbors Network and Sightline Institute partnered with FM3 Research, Global Strategy Group, and Grow Progress to develop a tested messaging framework ready to deploy on the front lines of the fight for more abundant and affordable housing nationwide.



2.

THE PRO-HOMES FRAMEWORK

The Pro-Homes Framework

Through extensive testing, including qualboards, research journaling, and two national surveys of American voters and political influentials, followed by randomized controlled trials, we have developed a five-step framework for policymakers and advocates to advance housing policy. **The messaging framework connects tactical policy changes to the real experiences and aspirations of real people and communities.**

1
Meet people where they are:
costs are too high

2
Point to **competition** as how **shortages** increase **costs**.

3
Emphasize the **people affected** in our communities now

4
Be **specific** and **concrete** when presenting changes

5
Highlight how **more home choices** **benefit people** and their communities

1.

Meet people where they are: COSTS ARE TOO HIGH

Across policymakers, thought leaders, and the general population of American voters, **high costs are the key entry point to the housing issue** .

Leading with costs establishes common ground with people across identities and ideologies.

Top-Testing Example:

“Housing is too unaffordable today because there are not enough homes to rent or buy that meet people’s needs and budgets.”

2. Point to **COMPETITION** as how **SHORTAGES** increase **COSTS**

While people do not easily grasp the economics of housing markets or the cost impacts of regulations and zoning, they can see ways that shortages increase housing costs. Point to familiar ways **shortages drive competition** —from wait lists for rentals to bidding wars for homebuyers—to **connect the shortages to cost.**

Top-Testing Example:

“Not having enough homes to rent or buy creates cutthroat competition and drives up prices.”

3.

Emphasize the PEOPLE AFFECTED IN OUR COMMUNITIES NOW

Focus on **sympathetic community members** who are hurt by the shortage—families trying to stay where they grew up, workers that communities rely on who can't afford to live where they work—to **forge an emotional connection** to policies that will help unlock more home choices people can afford. **Shift the focus** from housing structures **to the benefits for people.**

Top-Testing Example:

“Right now, people our communities rely on —like teachers, childcare workers, and service and retail workers —can't find homes they can afford in the places they serve.”

4. Be SPECIFIC AND CONCRETE when presenting changes

Jargon, abstractions, and the implication of drastic change can cause fear of policy changes. But voters and decision-makers respond favorably to **specific, familiar home types and discrete, focused regulatory fixes** .

Top-Testing Example:

“We can allow smaller homes to be built on small lots to create affordable starter homes, and we can make it legal to convert a basement or garage into an apartment for a family member or caregiver to live in or to rent out.”

5. Highlight how more home choices BENEFIT PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

Paint a compelling picture of positive community outcomes and the ways people stand to benefit.

Create a powerful emotional response by **illustrating how the lives of sympathetic community members will be better** through policy changes that allow more home choices.

Top-Testing Example:

“A mix of homes, of all sizes and prices, will give more people a chance to own their home, build wealth, and provide solid foundations of economic stability and opportunity for themselves and the next generation.”

Research-Based Tips for Powerful Pro -Homes Messages:

Tip # 1

Instead of “supply and demand,” use people’s day - to -day experience of competition to frame the shortage

Research-based language:
Anybody who has tried to buy or rent a home here recently knows that there are simply not enough housing options available, and that the cutthroat competition over existing homes is pushing prices out of reach for working people.



Research-Based Tips for Powerful Pro -Homes Messages:

Tip #2

Make clear the status quo is due to policy choices and is changeable, not set in stone

Research-based language:
The city strictly limits or outright bans apartments, townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, and in-law units, which has led to not enough homes being available for the people who live and work here. New rules can unlock affordable housing choices in our communities.



Research-Based Tips for Powerful Pro -Homes Messages:

Tip #3

Position more housing options as a way to protect people from displacement

Research-based language:
When there are not enough homes, the wealthy will always outbid working people, and everyone else has to move farther away. Unless we build more homes to buy or rent, people will be priced out of the places where they grew up or built their lives.



Research-Based Tips for Powerful Pro -Homes Messages:

Tip #4

Frame abundant housing options as a vehicle for working people to gain long-term wealth

Research-based language:
Modest, affordable housing options like condos and townhomes enable average people to put down roots, own their own home, build wealth, and provide a solid foundation of economic stability and opportunity.



Research-Based Tips for Powerful Pro -Homes Messages:

Tip #5

When talking to policymakers and influencers, tie housing to workforce

Research-based language:
Allowing more options like duplexes and apartments in our communities will mean shorter commutes and more affordable places to live for local workers that communities rely on, and help business owners find local employees.





4. Framing and Terminology

DOs and DON'Ts: FRAMING

Housing <i>shortage</i>	Housing <i>crisis</i>
More choices and availability	Building and construction
Allow homes of all shapes and sizes; lift local restrictions preventing affordable home choices	End single-family zoning; rezone; upzone
More affordable home choices for people with jobs here; workers the community relies on	Growth projections; population boom
More available homes give renters and home buyers more leverage and power	Allow supply to meet demand
Allow smaller starter homes on smaller lots	Reduce minimum lot sizes
Bans on affordable housing choices like [housing type]	Single-family zoning
McMansions and luxury remodels	Single-family homes

Adopt everyday wording, familiar examples, and friendly visual language

Avoid repeating anti-housing frames, scare tactics, exaggerations, and jargon that alienates people.

DOs and DON'Ts: TERMINOLOGY

Homes	Units
More homes choices; more housing options	Housing <i>supply</i>
More home choices in convenient; connected communities	Density
More home choices in cities; home choices near jobs and transit; homes tucked into existing neighborhoods	Infill; urban infill
Affordable; unaffordable	Expensive; inexpensive
Small apartment buildings up to [proposed number of] stories	Multifamily housing; mid-rise apartments; 5-over-1s
Duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and townhomes	"Missing middle"; small multifamily
Displacement	Gentrification
Working family housing	Workforce housing

Adopt everyday wording, familiar examples, and friendly visual language

Avoid repeating anti-housing frames, scare tactics, exaggerations, and jargon that alienates people.

In our testing, four pro -homes messages persuaded people across all demographic groups, without alienating any group:

1. Homes that **local workers** who serve our communities can afford
2. Home choices **young people** can afford to keep families together
3. Affordable home choices for **local seniors** to downsize in their community
4. Starter homes build solid foundations of **economic stability** and opportunity



General Population Research

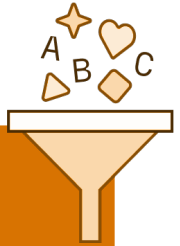
[FM3 used two different methods](#) to conduct research among a nationwide, general population audience —a national survey of 1,211 respondents and a qualboard (an online discussion forum facilitated by researchers) with 25 respondents. This phase of research allowed us to identify the perceptions of the housing space among everyday Americans.



Elites and Policymakers Research

Global Strategy Group (GSG) [conducted](#) an online journal among nationwide “policy elites” defined as people who are higher education, higher income, high news consumption, and civically engaged, meaning they are active in their own communities and likely to speak up when it counts, including on matters of local import such as zoning.

This journal contained a mix of elites across gender, age, region, partisanship, level of education, and homeowner/renter status. They also conducted a survey of 500 nationwide elites.



Randomized Message Tests

Grow Progress conducted a message tests that focused on various types of housing development, with 9 messages total. In the test, respondents were split into groups of 1,000 and exposed to either one of our messages, or to a placebo message to establish a baseline of sentiment without any message exposure. Message success is measured by the persuasive effect a message had across a set of success questions.

This research approach allowed us to identify where there is alignment between a general population audience and elites when policy, as well as where there are gaps in knowledge and sentiment. Randomized message tests were then used to confirm our findings and identify the exact language that is more effective for persuading audiences across demographic groups.

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