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Polk County Iowa Housing Trust Funds Builds Community Support

by Michael Anderson // 2013, Spring



The Polk County Iowa Housing Trust Fund is the comprehensive planning, advocacy and funding organization for affordable housing in Polk County, Iowa. Created seventeen years ago, the Trust Fund is responsible for allocating state and local funds to increase and preserve the inventory of affordable housing throughout the county. It is also responsible for conducting the Combined Campaign for Housing to fund the operating and program needs of nonprofit affordable housing providers assisting low income households. This enables the Trust Fund to create and sustain a broad and integrated vision for affordable housing and the supportive services necessary to maximize the impact of securing safe affordable housing. The Trust Fund has maintained a model relationship with the community, informing and engaging residents in its mission to create and sustain affordable housing throughout Polk County.

The basis for all of its work is the research and planning activities of the Housing Trust Fund. Partnering with local university faculty and students, the Trust Fund has assembled a significant body of local housing information and provides that data to the community. The [Polk County Housing Trust Fund website](#) provides funders and government officials access to local and national best practices consistent with the strategic funding plan of the Trust Fund.

The Polk County Housing Trust Fund annually receives \$1.5 million from the County, a portion of which supports administrative costs of the fund. In addition, Polk County is eligible for funds from the state housing trust fund. The State Housing Trust Fund is funded with an annual appropriation from the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund and an increasing portion of the proceeds of the real estate transfer tax. These funds are allocated by the Iowa Finance Authority to 25 local Housing Trust Funds in Iowa. Last year, Polk County's allocation was \$525,640.

Managing more than \$2 million of state and local funds each year is the major activity of the Housing Trust Fund. Through its various committees, the PCHTF establishes an annual Housing Allocation Plan and invites local non- and for-profit developers to make application. A competitive application process,

along with strict post-award oversight, guarantee the most worthy projects receive funding and promised results are achieved. During 2011-2012, the Polk County Housing Trust Fund created or preserved 545 homes. Funds from the Trust Fund leveraged more than \$10 for every \$1 dollar invested in affordable housing activities.

April 15-20, 2013 was Affordable Housing Week in Polk County—a first for the county—and spearheaded by the Polk County Housing Trust Fund. The Housing Trust Fund created an interesting cross-section of activities and initiatives to educate and advocate for the benefits affordable housing brings to the community.

The first was a Mayors' Honor Roll where the mayor of each city in Polk County read and signed a Proclamation recognizing the importance of affordable housing. All seven mayors participated. [Click here to view the Proclamation and its signatories.](#)

Additionally more than 50 metro leaders participated in a community bus tour that explored the critical relationship between affordable housing and public transportation. The tour was co-sponsored by the Polk County Housing Trust Fund and the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority. [Click here for a trip Itinerary.](#)

Finally, more than 50 area high school students competed for scholarships by designing an affordable home for a low-income family of six on an in-fill lot in central Des Moines. Working within the parameters of a narrative created by local architects, the students drew floor plans and elevations of a house that they thought best served the needs of the family. Each student was helped along the way by architects from local firms who were able to give guidance to the young planners. On the last day of Affordable Housing Week, creators of the six best entries were challenged to present and defend their work to a panel of judges made up of local affordable housing professionals. The winner received a \$2,000 scholarship provided by the Home Builders Association of Greater Des Moines Professional Women in Building. And two additional \$500 awards were provided.



Des Moines students strategize over their design submissions for an affordable home.

During Affordable Housing week, PCHTF launched a major campaign with advocacy and education at its heart. The campaign was developed in response to research indicating increasing neighborhood resistance to the creation of more affordable housing. The metro-wide media and promotion campaign is called “*Can I Be Your Neighbor.*” The campaign is directed at helping all cities and neighborhoods understand the importance of affordable housing for a region that works. Its focus is on the people who are critical to the metro’s economy and need affordable housing. The campaign is supported by local business sponsors and has its [own website](#). The campaign has distributed posters and billboards, newspaper ads and flyers.

*“Over the past 2 ½ years the PCHTF has engaged in a detailed and deliberate process of self-evaluation of its mission and activities. From that the Board has realized the full potential of the Housing Trust Fund to shape the community agenda for affordable housing. By embracing a strategic vision for Polk County and targeting that vision with **both** funds and advocacy, the PCHTF aims to make sure all community housing dollars are deployed to best meet recognized needs,”* says the Trust Fund’s Executive Director, Eric Burmeister.

The Polk County Housing Trust Fund strives to be the “*go to*” organization for affordable housing in the Des Moines metro area. Its Staff, Board of Directors and Committees are committed to its vision, that

"all Polk County citizens have access to safe, stable and affordable housing."

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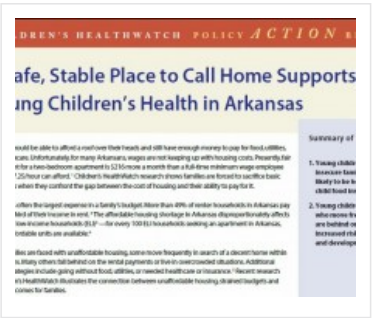
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