

Affordable Housing in Hamilton County

by LWVCA Housing Committee

In 1949 the U.S. Congress passed the National Housing Act setting a goal of decent, affordable housing for all Americans. Though repeatedly reaffirmed by Congress, the goal has not been met. In Hamilton County, Ohio, government rental housing programs provide housing to about one in three low-income households. Most families with incomes under \$30,000 a year live in housing which costs more than they can afford or is substandard.

The best measure for housing affordability is the housing cost burden, or the percentage of income one spends on housing. Using the housing cost burden measure, spending more than thirty percent of income has been defined as an excessive cost burden. For renters this means rent and utilities should not exceed 30% of their total income. Similarly, for homeowners, mortgage payment, taxes, insurance, and utilities together should not exceed 30% of their total income. Therefore, affordability is defined not by where one lives, what type of housing, or whether a subsidy is involved, but whether housing costs exceed 30% of household income.

Subsidized Housing

Some housing is made more affordable through a government subsidy. The largest housing subsidy program in the U.S. is the mortgage deduction on individual income tax, which costs over \$70 billion a year. Smaller subsidized housing programs in Hamilton County include:

The Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) serves all of Hamilton County. It owns and manages about 5000 public housing units, and also administers the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program that provides vouchers to another 10,000 households.

About 90% of the public housing in Hamilton County is within Cincinnati. The other 10% is scattered throughout the county in small apartment buildings and houses. There has been a decrease in the amount of public housing in Hamilton County in the last 15 years.

Section 8 vouchers are used on the private rental market. The families select where they want to live and find a landlord who will rent to them. CMHA determines eligibility and inspects the housing annually. The vast majority of rundown housing assumed to be “Section 8 housing” is not part of the program and would not qualify to be rented by a family with a voucher because it could not pass the strict inspection standards. Rundown and substandard housing is rented by low-income renters who cannot afford anything better because they do not have a subsidy.

42% of people with Housing Vouchers are elderly or disabled, 35% are employed. 53% of the families use the voucher for less than five years. It is very difficult to get a Housing Voucher because of long waiting lists. Locally when the waiting list was opened for a few days, 19,000 families applied. The waiting list currently has about 10,000 families and is closed.

Resources

A 13-minute video “Who Needs Affordable Housing in Greater Cincinnati?” was produced by Affordable Housing Advocates. It can be accessed from their website at www.ahacincy.org. Also on the AHA website is a 41 page “2011 Housing Report for Hamilton County” that provides statistics on homelessness, foreclosures, substandard housing and accessible housing.