

The NIMBY Report

*on the continuing
struggle
for inclusive
communities*

April, 2002

NIMBY--Not In My Back Yard--has become the symbol of neighborhoods that seek to exclude certain people because they are homeless, poor, disabled, or because of their race or ethnicity.

The NIMBY Report supports inclusive communities by sharing news of the NIMBY syndrome and efforts to overcome it. It is published by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, in collaboration with the Building Better Communities Network, and is distributed monthly as a supplement to NLIHC's "Memo to Members." Semi-annual issue reports provide in-depth analysis on specific subjects.

New York

Town Agrees to Host Homeless in Exchange for Cash

In the fall of 1991, HELP USA opened a transitional housing program for homeless people in the Westchester County town of Greenburgh. At the time, residents of the adjoining Mayfair-Knollwood neighborhood were so vehemently opposed that they tried to secede from the town. Much political wrangling and a couple of years in the courts later, WestHELP Greenburgh opened as a series of two-story apartment clusters housing 108 apartments. The project went forward only after opponents secured a promise from the county's Department of Social Services that homeless residents would be moved out after 10 years and the apartments converted to permanent housing for seniors.

The 10-year lease expired last fall. But instead of moving to evict the formerly homeless families, the town opted to extend the lease for another 10 years, with the strong support of the Mayfair-Knollwood Civic Association. This remarkable turnaround was due, in large part, to the fact that WestHELP residents had integrated themselves fairly quietly into the community and helped dispel some of the myths about homeless people.

However, two other economic forces contributed to the extension. First, it appeared that the conversion to senior housing was much more expensive than anticipated. More importantly, however, the town convinced the county social services department that its

continued role as host to WestHELP had a monetary value. The \$1.6 million annual county contribution was converted to a rental payment to Greenburgh, which the town uses for various municipal needs, including the school district. The civic association itself also garnered \$100,000 in town support.

Town Supervisor Paul Feiner thinks Greenburgh has happened upon a solution to NIMBYism: Cash payments to assuage the concerns of neighborhood opponents. This same approach has been incorporated into the opening of another transitional program two miles away, just outside the town limits. In exchange for acquiescence to the 149 new beds, neighbors have secured a promise that the number of housing units for the homeless within a two-mile radius of Mayfair-Knollwood will be capped at 420 and that exceeding the cap will cost the county a service fee of \$1,000 per person per day.

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