

A Model Public Education/Forum Format

The Sussex Housing Group (SHG), a subcommittee of the Delaware Housing Coalition developed a format for a public education forum that could be replicated by others. The SHG forum featured a panel of public officials in a public hearing format. The event was held at the Georgetown Presbyterian Church hall in Georgetown, at no cost except for refreshments that Gina brought.

SHG invited a wide variety of housing non-profits to bring clients or other grassroots representatives to the session with the understanding they would comment on their own housing experience and needs. A Spanish-speaking MC with a housing background ensured the availability of translation, if needed, and ensured the event felt informal enough to make inexperienced speakers feel comfortable telling their stories.

Panelists included a freshman state representative who is chairman of the Housing and Community Affairs Committee in the state House of Representatives and a long-time state senator who co-chairs the Joint Committee on Capital Improvements as well as the county's director of community development and housing. In addition to a wide variety of grassroots representatives, the event attracted key staff from all major housing-related non-profits serving the county and most of those serving the entire state.

The MC introduced the speakers and each spoke briefly about his background and public service role. The MC then invited audience members to speak about their housing experience and/or need. The evening proceeded for over two hours of interaction among the panelists, those in need, and representatives from the various non-profit agencies who offered information on various programs and background on specific possible solutions. The legislators learned a great deal about real housing needs and committed to addressing them to the extent legislative solutions are needed.

Speakers described the difficulties of ex-offenders in securing housing; problems of manufactured home owners and renters as land owners are escalating rents as land values spiral upwards; opportunities for perpetual affordability offered by the new statewide community land trust; a very positive experience with Sussex County Habitat for Humanity; and many other issues and solutions.

The DHC covered the cost of videoing the entire event. Clips will be used in a short video that will be produced for a future event that is being planned by Sussex County Habitat for Humanity and the Rehoboth Beach Film Society, and will be available for other groups to use.

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League of Women Voters of Delaware
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