

Surveys Find Significant Support for Affordable Housing

By Michael J. Novogradac, CPA

Two out of three Americans are concerned about the cost of housing in their communities, and 67 percent say that it is important to vote for those who work to make housing more affordable, according to a new national survey released September 26 by the National Association of Realtors (NAR). Those findings follow the results of a poll that found 58 percent of California voters believe the community where they live should build new starter homes rather than more rental housing. That poll was taken on behalf of Novogradac & Company LLP for its 10th Annual Affordable Housing Conference held September 17-19.

The NAR study found that worries about affordable housing ranked right up there with affordable health insurance, and jobs and unemployment. The survey reports that 71 percent of the respondents would like to see government place a higher priority on making housing more affordable for renters and homeowners alike. Local, state and federal governments received a grade of "C" from their constituents for their work on affordable housing. The NAR survey of 1,000 urban and suburban residents in the top 25 media markets was conducted by Public Opinion Strategies August 13 through 17.

In the California survey, also carried out by Public Opinion Strategies, 58 percent of those polled expressed a definite desire to see more starter homes, while only 25 percent definitely backed more rental housing. Starter homes gained the most popularity in San Diego and Sacramento while more rental housing was most popular in the San Francisco Bay Area and Central Valley.

In the NAR survey, concerns centered on finding a good fit in the type of housing produced. It found a willingness to support more affordable homes if they were "built in such a way that they fit with the area and were pleasant to look at."

The poll for Novogradac & Company LLP showed a definite age gap on the issue of starter homes vs. rental housing with younger voters much more in favor of starter homes than older voters. There also was a definite difference by ethnicity, with non-white voters (especially the women) being much more in favor of starter homes than their white counterparts.

Looking at these polls, it is abundantly clear that a majority of Americans support the construction of more affordable housing, both rental and ownership, in their communities. It is also evident that there is solid support for the production of affordable housing that will lessen the impact of the rising cost of housing and its effect on teachers, firemen, police, nurses and others on whom communities depend. And they are willing to support such housing with their votes. In the NAR poll, 31 percent of the respondents say it is very important to vote for those who work to make housing more affordable and 81 percent support the construction of affordable homes for public employees.

Given these citizen concerns, the industry must work together and continue to find ways to work with federal, state and community officials to remove financial obstacles and to produce more affordable single and multifamily homes so residents can afford to live in the same areas where they serve, protect, teach and work. ❖