

A Fair Housing and Equity Assessment for the Twin Cities

Too often resource and policy decisions that affect low-income people and people of color are made without significant input from those communities. But the tides are shifting, and more public agencies are consciously advancing opportunities for residents to have a voice in planning their communities.

The federal Sustainable Communities Initiative is at the forefront of this change in the transit equity, environmental justice and affordable housing worlds. This partnership between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Transportation is pushing state and local agencies to engage communities in decision-making and explicitly plan for more equitable outcomes.

The Twin Cities region received a large grant from the Sustainable Communities Initiative in 2010. As a piece of that work, our leaders are tasked with completing a Fair Housing and Equity Assessment (FHEA). The FHEA will identify ways to connect low-income communities and communities of color to opportunity by identifying a set of indicators of opportunity and mapping how well (or how poorly) connected communities are to regional resources.

For example, if “access to jobs” is chosen as an indicator, the FHEA will analyze and illustrate how well our public transit system connects local communities and major job centers in the region. This process of “opportunity mapping” will demonstrate where public investments or changes in local and regional policy could connect people to jobs, affordable housing, health care facilities and more.

It will be critical for the Metropolitan Council, the regional government agency that is leading the FHEA process, to identify indicators of opportunity that are reflective of the needs and wishes of low-income communities and communities of color. If the FHEA is to influence how public entities will make investments in the region, it needs to be inclusive of underrepresented communities in identifying, choosing, and weighing indicators of opportunity, while also creating space at decision making tables for those communities. The Alliance is partnering with the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) to engage our community partners and allies in conversations that will help develop appropriate indicators to inform the FHEA. Our goal is to go beyond collecting information. We want to truly elevate voices of residents of underserved communities to make this an equitable process.

The FHEA has the potential to lay the foundation for communities to advocate for resources or policy change in their neighborhoods. The FHEA will not be a catch-all solution to solving race and class inequities in our region, nor will it create a permanent place at regional decision-making tables for underrepresented communities. But the FHEA presents a new opportunity for communities of color and low-income communities to influence major public investments and to infuse new voices into regional decision-making processes. We hope it will craft a shared narrative for why leading with an equity lens will help us build a stronger Twin Cities region.



CURA Director of Community Research Neeraj Mehta is partnering with the Alliance to facilitate community input on the FHEA.

