



Actualizing Equity 2020

From Commodity to Community Advancing Housing Equity

The COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the undeniable connection between housing justice and community health. Building on the strong base of organizing in the Twin Cities, the current crisis has mobilized more renters and allies to demand that both short term relief and longer-term policy change center the needs and leadership of tenants and communities of color. At our **May 2020 Actualizing Equity event** we explored: How can we leverage this moment to build solidarity and move agendas that reject the notion that we can reform a fundamentally inequitable system that commodifies housing and instead re-imagine a policy ecosystem that is deeply rooted in tenant and community power and ownership?

Speakers included

- » Hamza Hassan, African Career, Education and Resource, Inc
- » Emilia Gonzalez Avalos, Unidos MN / Navigate MN
- » Marque Jensen, Urban Homeworks
- » Shannon Smith Jones, Hope Community

Values

Home is more than a physical space.

We recognize that many of our migrant neighbors have been pushed out of their homes because of colonization, and economic and political exploitation. We honor that complexity and reject barriers to housing or social belonging based on immigrant status.

We have enough for everyone to be housed.

Our communities are abundant. We do not lack resources; we lack systems and institutions that prioritize those resources to meet our needs and visions.

Housing is not an individual challenge; it's a collective responsibility.

Housing instability is the intentional result of systemic exclusion and capitalism, not individual behavior. We affirm the need for a collective response that creates a different model and approach to ensure housing for all.

Housing is a human right.

We believe that safe, dignified, adequate housing is foundational to our ability to survive and thrive — and justice and humanity demand that it not be denied to anyone because of their identity or ability to pay.

Vision

We can dream a different future.

Everything that exists today came from a place of imagination. Our communities need the time, resources and care to break out of the mental constraints imposed by colonization and capitalism.

Housing is a community resource, not a market commodity.

Our homes, in the communities we choose, are a universal right and source of sanctuary, not a mechanism for private profit. We envision models that dismantle the housing market and cultivate community ownership and cooperation.

Public resources support our people, not corporate bail-outs.

Public resources secure our communities and keep people in their homes to *prevent* mass displacement, rather than bailing out banks in the aftermath of a housing crisis.

Housing needs are recognized and addressed across a continuum.

Our communities are diverse and our approaches to housing must be, too. There are no universal solutions or approaches that support renters and leaders across the housing justice ecosystem working to meet our community needs.

How We Get There

In 2019, Equity in Place identified **Five Pillars of Affordable Housing Policy** to advance affordable housing and housing justice, which are all the more relevant and essential as we move through the COVID-19 pandemic and community uprising to create a fundamentally different approach to housing and community development.



POWER: Renters and communities most impacted and historically marginalized must be centered in and have lasting influence on the decision-making processes that impact their housing stability.

- » We must also **decentralize power** from 1) property owners through policies like rent control that pull back their authority to dictate the market rate for our living and 2) banks through near-term reforms and the creation of community-owned financial institutions



PLACEMENT: The location and type of housing must be directed by communities most impacted and have access to essential daily needs like transit and healthy foods.

- » We must **prioritize resources** to keep people and community assets in place by 1) passing policies that prevent mass evictions, displacement and home foreclosures due to COVID-19 and other economic attacks and 2) ensuring relief and recovery efforts serve and prioritize BIPOC renters, homeowners and businesses.



PROTECTION: Existing renters and homeowners must have the tools and rights to remain in their homes and not experience the impacts of housing instability or displacement.

- » We must also **decolonize** our approach to livability issues, like occupancy limits that disproportionately harm and are enforced against immigrant and households of color.



PRESERVATION AND PRODUCTION:

Existing affordable housing must be maintained at truly affordable levels and improved as needed to remain safe, livable and healthy for the same residents. New housing units must be produced at a diversity of affordability levels with a commitment to use public resources for the most deeply affordable housing.

- » We must also **shift to community ownership** and other social and public housing models, rather than relying on private or nonprofit developers – *and* make space to support community members to envision transformative approaches that we have yet to dream into existence.

Policy Resources

Equity in Place Policy Agenda

Informed by communities most impacted by housing injustice and instability, Equity in Place identified four areas for housing policy change, including housing access, housing stability, community ownership and community investment. [This Policy Agenda](#) outlines specific policy solutions, citing examples and resources for each.

Our Homes, Our Health Policy Agenda

A coalition effort led by PolicyLink, the Our Homes, Our Health agenda demands that the response to and recovery from COVID-19 advance lasting housing solutions: expanding social housing that is protected from the private market, protecting renters and homeowners alike from displacement, and strengthening fair housing to address centuries of racist housing and land policies. [Learn more and access templates.](#)

Why Do Cities Need Just Cause Notice?

Just Cause Notice ordinances are an important policy tool to prevent displacement and promote tenant stability. They also protect tenants who assert their legal right to safe and healthy housing from retaliatory displacement, as well as protect them from discriminatory or arbitrary terminations that too many renters of color still face. [Learn more in this one-pager.](#)