

SECTION 5

**FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS &
MATRIX OF IMPEDIMENTS TO
FAIR HOUSING CHOICE.**

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AIFHC FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS.

The **Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice** for Grand Island, Nebraska, included a variety of quantitative and qualitative research activities in an effort to obtain valuable information. The results of these research activities revealed that the City of Grand Island has few, if any, serious impediments to fair housing choice. The City is doing well in providing affordable housing and protecting the rights of persons and families of low- to moderate-incomes.

The City of Grand Island serves a regional center for services and job opportunities in central Nebraska. A variety of businesses and industries provide ample employment opportunities in the Community. The population of Grand Island increased by 13 percent between 2000 and 2010, from 42,940 to 48,520. The City's population is expected to continue to increase, during the next five years, to an **estimated “medium” population of 54,675, by 2024**. Grand Island has the potential to experience a **“High” population** increase via increased full-time employment opportunities, which would result in a 2024 population of 55,128. Furthermore, an “ED Boost” scenario of aggressive full-time employment creation and housing construction could result in an estimated 2024 population of 55,595.

Households in the Community of Grand Island are expected to **increase by an estimated 726**, during the next five years. This includes an increase in both owner and renter households of all incomes and age cohorts.

Since 2010, an estimated 1,734 housing units have been built and added to the Grand Island housing stock, with a loss of 110 units, due to demolition. This equals a net gain of 1,624 housing units. Added housing units have included both single family owner and duplex/multi-family units, both for owners and renters. The current **adjusted housing vacancy rate in Grand Island is estimated to be 3.1 percent**.

By 2019, the City of Grand Island should **target the development of 1,361 new housing units**, including an estimated **740 owner** and **621 rental housing units** of mixed types and price points.

The City of Grand Island has a need to build additional housing units for all income sectors of the Community, by 2019. The Community currently has a shortage of affordable housing units for persons and families that are **“cost burden” and/or have “housing problems”** including plumbing and electrical issues and overcrowding.

The City of Grand Island has consistently addressed impediments to fair housing choice and the creation of affordable housing, implementing a variety of programs that use both, public and private funding sources to enbetter the living conditions and lives of the citizenry. The City of Grand Island is in the process of creating a “Housing Improvement Partnership” to act as the local Community Housing Development Corporation, or CHDO. The identification of Community Housing Partnerships with local, State and Federal housing/funding entities by this CHDO will benefit Grand Island with new financial prospects that can be geared towards developing affordable housing in the Community.

Over 1,000 affordable housing options, developed by both the private and public sector, exist in the Community, consisting of both subsidized family and elderly housing, nursing/assisted living units and Section 8 Vouchers. The **Hall County Housing Authority** does a stellar job in the provision of affordable housing for both elderly and family households. Local non-profit groups, such as **Central Nebraska Goodwill Housing** and **Hope Harbor**, have taken the responsibility to provide affordable housing for persons with special needs, including persons with cognitive or physical disabilities and persons experiencing homelessness or near-homelessness. Despite a variety of efforts to create affordable housing types in Grand Island, the **increasing cost of housing continues to exceed the purchasing abilities of low- to moderate income persons and families and, such, is an impediment to fair housing choice.**

To effectively address any impediments of fair housing choice in the City of Grand Island, Nebraska Community leadership and housing providers will need to have an on-going dialog about how the Community can become more knowledgeable of such issues. This includes an understanding of the degree such issues affect the citizens accessibility to housing (e.g. the availability of affordable rental and/or owner-occupied units, minimum building code safety requirements, Federal and State (funding) Program requirements that cannot be changed on a local level, and the availability of programs that educate and provide assistance with housing needs and housing financing).

MATRIX OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING CHOICE.

The following **Matrix** identifies **Impediments to Fair Housing Choice** in Grand Island, Nebraska, as determined by Analysis of the Grand Island Housing Survey and Community Housing Focus Group Listening Sessions. Impediments are listed by both Renter and Owner and rated as “S” – Significant, “SWS” – Somewhat Significant, or “NS” – Not Significant. This rating system was based on “frequency of response” to the various impediments to affordable housing. Opportunities and Recommended Actions address Impediments rated “S” – Significant.

| MATRIX OF IMPEDIMENTS TO FAIR HOUSING CHOICE GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA 2019 | | | | | | |
|---|---------------|------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| TYPE OF IMPEDIMENT | RENTER | | | OWNER | | |
| | S | SWS | NS | S | SWS | NS |
| Lack of available decent rental units in affordable price ranges. | X | | | | | |
| Cost of utilities. | | X | | | X | |
| Excessive application fees and/or rental deposits. | X | | | | | |
| Attitudes of landlords. | | X | | | | |
| Job status. | | X | | | | X |
| Lack of knowledge of fair housing rights. | | | X | | | X |
| Use of background checks. | | | X | | | |
| Lack of knowledge of how to file a fair housing complaint. | X | | | X | | |
| Lack of adequate public transportation. | | X | | | X | |
| Lack of educational resources about tenant responsibilities. | | | X | | | |
| Lack of handicap accessible units. | | X | | | | X |
| Restrictive zoning/building codes. | | | X | | | X |
| Cost of housing. | X | | | X | | |
| Excessive down payment/closing costs. | X | | | X | | |
| Mortgage lending application requirements. | | | | | X | |
| Costs of homeowners insurance. | | | | | | X |
| Lack of educational resources about homeowner responsibilities. | | | | | | X |
| Attitudes of immediate neighbors. | | | | | | X |

Source: Hanna:Keelan Associates, P.C., 2019.

The following identifies “**recommendations**” for the priority, or “**Significant**” **Impediments to Affordable Housing Choice**, in Grand Island, Nebraska, as determined by the research activities conducted for this AIFHC.

1. AVAILABILITY & COST OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING & COST OF UTILITIES.

Since the early 1990s, the City of Grand Island has utilized various State and Federal Affordable Housing Programs to lower the cost of housing for families of low- to moderate-income, while diversifying housing choices in the Community. State Funded CDBG housing rehabilitation and first-time homebuyer programs, in addition to Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and HUD Section 202 and 811 projects have added affordable units to both the owner and rental housing inventory.

The Hall County Housing Authority plays a major role in the provision of affordable rental housing, providing both project- and tenant based rental housing opportunities. The new CHDO, South Central Economic Development District and Central Nebraska Community Action Partnership provide valuable owner- and renter occupied housing services in the City of Grand Island. These services range from grant writing and administration, to housing rehabilitation, to new housing construction, to weatherization, to homebuyer educational workshops. The Grand Island Area Habitat for Humanity will continue to be an important partner in the provision of owner occupied housing in the City. Central Community College also provides valuable educational program, including language classes.

Of the projected 1,361 housing units needed in Grand Island, by 2024, the Community should plan and develop include up to **424 new housing units for households of very-low- to moderate-income**, by year end, **2024**, including up to **154 owner** and **270 rental units and affordable to persons and families between 0 and 80 percent AMI**. To successfully accomplish this, the Community and GIAEDC will need to continue to work with and foster a relationship with organizations providing housing services to ensure the ***availability of affordable housing and address the increasing costs housing and utilities in Grand Island***. This can include, but is not limited to the following recommendations:

- ◆ Working with local and regional housing partners, the City should maximize efforts to secure all types of State and Federal funding sources for affordable housing improvements and developments in Grand Island. The City has an initiative to utilize **tax increment financing** as local funding for community development/redevelopment activities in established neighborhoods.

- ◆ **Target housing development** in areas of Grand Island having the highest level of public and private sector services. This would include the Downtown and established residential neighborhoods.
- ◆ Continue and expand the efforts of **housing rehabilitation activities** in the Community of Grand Island, including a purchase-rehab-resale program, to improve the condition of owner occupied housing units.
- ◆ Expand a local program of **acquiring dilapidated houses for demolition and reuse of the lot(s)**. Emphasis should be placed on acquiring properties in established neighborhoods, where streets and infrastructure exist.
- ◆ Housing code enforcement activities should be supported by an **inspection and licensing program** for rental housing. All housing, both existing and new, both owner and rental, should require an occupancy permitting process.
- ◆ **Visitability** in all multifamily housing should be a goal of the City of Grand Island. The City should require that all multifamily housing be ADA accessible, or have ADA compliant units. The visitability movement in new construction is intended to allow all housing to meet the current or future needs of persons with a disability or be easily modified to meet such provisions. Three key features are promoted:
 1. At least one zero-step entrance on an accessible route leading from a driveway or public sidewalk.
 2. All interior doors providing at least 31 ¾ inches of unobstructed passage space.
 3. At least a half bath on the main floor.
 4. Future building codes in the City of Grand Island should potentially require visitability compliance for all housing construction.
- ◆ Maintain a local **Weatherization Program** to assist low- to moderate-income persons/families with the cost of making their housing units more energy efficient.
- ◆ Enhance **public awareness programs** to reduce utility costs with more effective alternative energy and energy conservation practices.
- ◆ Encourage citizens to utilize a “**budget billing**” program with local energy providers.

2. EXCESSIVE APPLICATION FEES/RENTAL DEPOSITS & DOWN PAYMENT/CLOSING COSTS TO PURCHASE A HOME.

Although Grand Island has established programs to provide down payment and closing cost assistance to residents, this issue was seen as an impediment to fair housing choice by several participants of the AIFHC process. Directly associated with this is excessive application fees and/or rent deposit. This suggests that demand for assistance outweighs available funding. For those wanting to buy a home, some felt a lack of necessary education and financial knowledge to understand the costs of buying a home. Several AIFHC participants felt that having unpaid personal loans, high credit card debt and/or a history of late payments made qualifying for a home mortgage impossible.

Today's economic environment has forced a higher level of personal financial credit standards, for both purchasing a house and renting an apartment. This, in turn, has prevented many persons and families from securing the housing of their need and choice.

Recommendations regarding this impediment include, but are not limited to:

- a) Work with major employers to establish programs to decrease down payments and closing costs by providing forgivable grants and/or low interest loan programs that employees can access.
- b) Support efforts by the City of Grand Island to expand various, both rent and ownership affordable housing programs with local financial institutions and major employers to expand funding assistance, so more families can utilize these programs.
- c) Expand renter and homeowner education classes to be required components of local high schools, college and continuing education classes. This will expand an individual's or family's budgeting skills and, eventually, financial knowledge of being either a homeowner or renter.
- d) Create an Individual Development Accounts (IDA) Program with area lenders and financial institutions to educate citizens about the importance of establishing savings accounts and saving patterns to help address and create financial stability.

- e) Landlords of apartment complexes or rental houses may require excessive fees for the submittal of an application to rent. This comes off as a way of discriminating against applicants of low- to moderate-income and/or some ethnic minority groups. To address this issue, the City could consider amending City ordinances to establish a uniform cost for application fees.

3. LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO FILE A FAIR HOUSING COMPLAINT.

The very root of fair housing choice in any Community is the process for which a citizen is able to file a fair housing complaint. In Grand Island, it should be standard procedure for the Housing Authority to educate each of the Agency's new consumers on how to file a fair housing complaint. According to the City of Grand Island website, the following Fair Housing Act guidelines are observed in the City:

- ◆ Section 110 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended.
- ◆ Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as amended (29 USC 102 et seq).
- ◆ Davis Bacon Act, as amended (40 USC 276-a – 276-a-5) and Section 2 of the June 13 1934 Act, as amended (48 Stat 948.40 USC 276© and popularly known as The Copeland Act.
- ◆ Contract Work Hours and Safety Standards Act (40 USC 327 et seq)

In addition, all landlords, property managers and other non-profit housing and human services groups should be required to provide their tenants, customers or clients with a copy of a Fair Housing Complaint Form. The City should require that pertinent tenant and landlord rights information be included in all rental agreement packets.