



THRESHOLD2008
Building the Public Voice San Mateo County

Final Report

March 2009

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Executive Summary

Threshold 2008 is a community driven, nationally recognized effort to bring the voice of the informed public into housing policy decisions in San Mateo County.¹ During 2008, Threshold engaged more than 1,000 citizens² in meaningful dialogue about urgent housing problems and possible solutions. The project used three distinct methods of civic engagement to reach and consult members of the public in different ways, but in all forums participants were presented with similar information, choices, and opportunities to exchange views.

The purpose of Threshold 2008 is to demonstrate an effective model of building community support for housing solutions, and to discover the specific kinds of housing policies and development that the informed and engaged public would prefer. The project offers civic engagement as a strategy to overcome important limitations of the formal housing approval process, which generally fails to gain broad support for housing and often divides communities.

Threshold 2008 achieved its aims. In contrast to the lack of community support for housing expressed in the formal public process and an initial baseline survey, the project confirmed that civic engagement, properly designed and executed, can build a constituency for change. Support for creating new housing rose dramatically after citizens participated in facilitated dialogue and deliberation.

The dialogues also revealed substantial common ground in the sorts of housing policies and development preferred by informed citizens in San Mateo County. Four key recommendations enjoyed strong support:

- Create more housing countywide than we have in the past
- Concentrate new housing in already developed areas, especially near transit
- Pursue countywide collaboration and planning within a framework of local control
- Engage the public more effectively in housing decisions.

Despite its focus on solving a specific problem, Threshold 2008 offers valuable lessons about civic engagement more generally. When they believe their voice matters, people take the responsibilities of citizenship seriously. Given good conditions to consider complex issues, they listen carefully to others and seek to reconcile their own views with the good of the community. When they trust that information is balanced and the process is fair, they not only engage enthusiastically in deliberation, but many also seek other opportunities to participate effectively in public life.

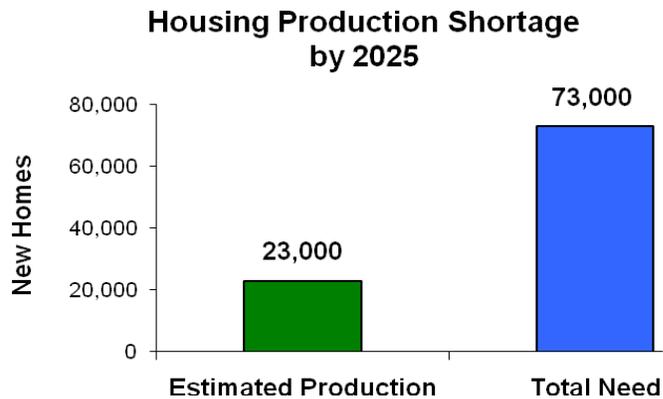
¹ Throughout this report we refer to Threshold 2008 as both a civic engagement project and the organization implementing that project. See Appendix 1 for a list of board members, staff, and consultants. Threshold 2008 has 501(c)3 non-profit status is a fiscally sponsored project of Community Initiatives.

² We use “citizen” in the broadest sense, to refer to members of a community who have democratic rights and obligations “to engage in civic discussion, to work in concert with others toward public goals, to contribute toward the welfare of the commons, and to employ their voice and vote to guide the actions of elected officials” (Common Sense California).

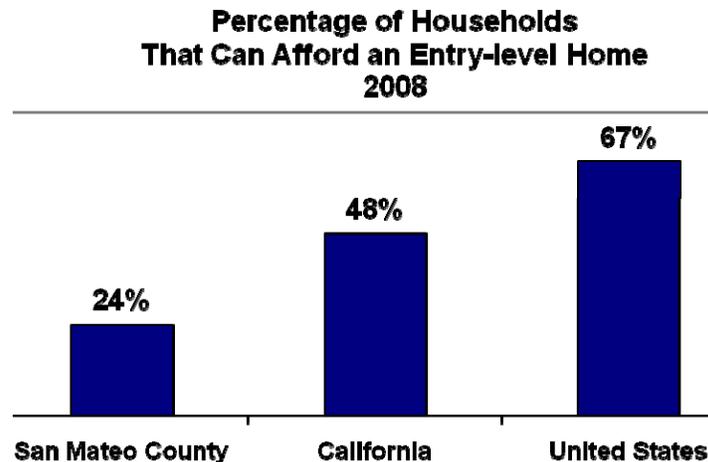
Purpose of the Project

San Mateo County's Housing Need

For most of the last decade, housing production in San Mateo County has fallen short of the identified need by about 1,000 homes each year.³ Based on projected population and job growth, the county faces a gap of nearly 50,000 homes by 2025.⁴ At the current rate of housing development, the county can accommodate only about a third of its growth over the next generation:



This supply shortage drives home prices and rents to levels that are out of reach for a majority of households across income levels. Despite declining prices nationwide, home ownership in San Mateo County remains nearly unattainable for middle- and working-class families:⁵



³ Based on state-mandated housing targets compared with actual housing production countywide.

⁴ C/CAG, San Mateo County Housing Needs Study, 2006.

⁵ Chart based on September 2008 data from California Association of Realtors.

The impacts of the housing shortage are apparent, as fewer of those who work or grow up in San Mateo County have a chance to live here. Those who commute long distances to work in the county sacrifice time with their families, add to freeway gridlock, and increase greenhouse gas emissions. Employers face growing challenges in attracting and retaining employees, threatening the region's economic vitality. Critical service workers and emergency responders live far from the communities they serve. These conditions undermine democracy itself as the middle-class shrinks, income disparities widen, and whole segments of the community are effectively disenfranchised.

The Housing Approval Process

Threshold offers civic engagement as a strategy to overcome important limitations of the housing approval process, which generally fails to gain broad support for solutions and often divides communities. Every proposed development and significant policy decision by elected officials requires a formal public process.

In the case of housing, this process tends to be weighted toward who say no rather than yes, for at least two reasons. First, people who oppose new development are acutely affected while those who would benefit are more diffused. Second, the people who would benefit the most from new housing are typically not in the room. Young people who cannot yet vote but will be impacted by the housing shortage as adults are not likely to show up to a public hearing on a school night. And those who work in the county but cannot afford to live here spend their evenings in another community miles away. The result is a consistent selection bias in the public voice when housing decisions are made.

Elected officials are charged with creating solutions, but they deliberate without the benefit of hearing from all stakeholders, and without knowing what the larger community would support if given a chance to consider the issues carefully.

The Goals of Civic Engagement

Threshold 2008 proposed a different and more inclusive way to register the public voice. The goal of the project is to allow the people of San Mateo County to make informed decisions about the future of their communities and to have leaders pay attention to this public deliberation. By including more people in the discussion and understanding the range of perspectives on housing issues, leaders will be in a better position to make decisions that support and sustain our region.

Threshold 2008 set out to answer two central questions:

- Can civic engagement build a constituency for change on housing?
- What kinds of housing solutions will the informed public support?

The challenge of civic engagement is to bring more voices to the table, increase the public willingness to address the problem, and reveal the specific housing solutions that the community as a whole could be expected to support if fully informed.

Project Design

Background

Threshold 2008 is the next phase of an effort started in 2002 by the Housing Nachos, a group of citizens who came together around a shared concern about the county's housing situation. In 2003, the group launched a civic engagement project that involved residents and stakeholders in four daylong community conversations about housing. Participants considered alternative approaches to housing development, and the dialogues revealed essential common ground among people with a wide range of backgrounds and values. The final project report articulated a clear vision of the kinds of housing policy choices that the public could be expected to support, expressed as a "Citizens' Scenario."

Citizens' Scenario (Housing Nachos, 2004)

"We love San Mateo County. Its open space is a vital part of our quality of life, and preserving this open space from development is our highest priority. To save our county's open spaces while creating housing, we are willing to increase the height and density of already developed areas and to move towards more mixed-use development. This will require an investment in better public transportation and improved regional planning. We understand that effective regional planning will entail some loss of local control, and we are willing to accept that (along with moderate tax increases), but only on the condition that the regional authority, its funding and its decisions be open, transparent and accountable."

The work of the Housing Nachos created a groundswell of interest and contributed momentum to others' efforts on a number of bold initiatives in San Mateo County. These included the establishment of a trust fund for affordable housing (HEART) in 2004, the formation of a County Housing Department in 2005, and creation of a ten-year plan to end homelessness (HOPE) in 2006. The widespread will to confront the housing problem reflects a culture of collaboration and a wealth of expertise that are typical of San Mateo County as a region. Those involved in these initiatives understood that civic engagement offered the possibility of generating the kind of elusive public support that is essential for sustainable policy solutions.

Participants in the 2003-04 dialogues were clear in their call for more civic engagement, so the Nachos prepared for a more ambitious effort. It took two years to design the project, develop a proposal, hire staff, identify practitioners and partners, raise the funding, and prepare for implementation. Launched in December 2007, Threshold 2008 was intended to build on the success of the earlier dialogues by increasing the scale of the conversation, employing multiple methods of engagement, and offering project participants opportunities for further involvement.

Guiding Principles

Threshold 2008 was designed with a commitment to several guiding principles:

- Multiple Methods of Engagement. Threshold is distinguished by its use of three complementary methods developed by two experienced practitioners. Participants in each phase considered similar information and choices.
- Transparent Tradeoffs. Citizens were presented with clear choices and the best available arguments about the consequences of those choices. Every policy decision involves tradeoffs. If someone takes a position with a realistic understanding of those tradeoffs, then that constitutes an informed choice.
- Stakeholder Review. Months before the first public event, a committee of 40 community members was convened twice to review the participant briefing materials for balance, accuracy, and issue framing. Stakeholders included elected officials, government staff, technical experts, housing and environmental advocates, and business and labor representatives.⁶
- Residents and Workers. While the first Threshold event recruited only San Mateo County residents, the subsequent dialogues invited anyone who lives or works in the county to participate. This allowed the project to assess the views of both local voters and those who do not live locally but are still affected by the local housing crisis.
- Engagement and Advocacy. Threshold 2008 does not advocate for any particular policy or development project. The project provides citizens with accurate information and favorable circumstances in which to consider difficult choices and tradeoffs. The views expressed under such conditions represent the informed public voice, which we convey to policymakers. For that voice to have legitimacy, Threshold 2008 maintains the stance of a neutral convener of community dialogue.
- Fulfillment Opportunities. One expectations of the project was that activated citizens might seek further engagement. Given a genuine sense of civic efficacy – that one’s voice matters and is heard by leaders – citizens did indeed seek other ways to contribute to solutions or stay informed. Threshold worked with community partners before and during the public dialogues to identify opportunities for further involvement on housing issues.
- Communications Strategy. Because the project’s goal is to contribute to housing solutions, it was essential to develop a strategy to communicate the results of the citizen dialogues to decision makers. Recruitment of participants for the citizen dialogues also required strategic use of communications.

⁶ See Appendix 2 for a roster of the Stakeholder Committee.

Core Activities

Threshold 2008 engaged decision makers before and after the citizen dialogues. Before approaching the public, beginning in December 2007, community stakeholders were invited to assist in the development of participant briefing materials. After the dialogues, in November 2008, policymakers and community leaders were invited to hear and comment on the informed views of the public. Those views were expressed in four phases between February and November 2008: a Baseline Survey, a Countywide Assembly, an Online Dialogue, and a series of local Community Conversations.

- Baseline Survey. Prior to conducting public dialogues, Threshold conducted a phone survey of a scientific random sample of San Mateo County residents in February. The 25-minute survey covered a range of values and opinions related to housing, and provided a snapshot of the broader public's current views on the issues. A total of 1,822 residents completed the phone survey, which consisted of 26 questions.⁷
- Countywide Assembly. Every person who completed the baseline survey was invited to participate in a weekend dialogue to be held in March. Of those who took the phone survey, 238 participated in the weekend event. The opinions and demographic characteristics of the 238 participants were compared to those of the larger random sample, revealing that the smaller group was generally representative of the larger group in most significant respects.

Called the “Countywide Assembly on Housing Choices,” the event was a Deliberative Poll® designed in partnership with Professor James Fishkin of Stanford University to measure changes of opinion under good conditions for deliberation.⁸ The purpose was to identify the kinds of housing solutions that the public would prefer if they had access to pertinent information, time to consider their options, and an opportunity to discuss the issues with other citizens.

During the weekend event, held March 15-16 at Cañada College in Redwood City, the 238 participants were divided into 26 small groups. The format for the weekend involved alternating between facilitated small group dialogue and plenary sessions in which a representative from each small group could question a panel of experts.⁹

At the end of the weekend, Countywide Assembly participants were asked the same questions they answered a month earlier as part of the larger random sample, as well as some additional questions. Any changes in their knowledge or opinion can be attributed to the dialogue and deliberation they experienced at the event.

⁷ Threshold worked with Stanford University's Center for Deliberative Democracy to develop the baseline survey. The Guild Group conducted the survey for Threshold.

⁸ Deliberative Polling ® is a method of public consultation created by Professor Fishkin to get informed opinions from scientific random samples.

⁹ The Countywide Assembly agenda, expert panelist biographies, list of small group facilitators, participant briefing materials, and participant data supplement are available on the Threshold 2008 website: www.threshold2008.org

- Online Dialogue. In May 2008, 552 people who live or work in San Mateo County registered to participate in “Public Voices for Housing Choices,” a web-based dialogue on the same issues discussed by citizens at the Countywide Assembly. Participants were divided into seven small groups, and could post comments at their convenience on a series of topics and questions presented daily. Smaller groups allowed people to engage in written exchanges with each other, and everyone had access to factual information and policy documents to support the discussion. On most days of the two-week dialogue, one or more experts were available to answer questions on the topic of the day. Participants posted approximately 1,000 comments, and the website received approximately 23,000 page views during the dialogue.

The Online Dialogue was intended to complement the Countywide Assembly in three ways. First, it was designed to capture the nuances of different perspectives – how people connect their values and opinions, and how they reconcile their own views with those of others. Rather than measure changes in opinion as a result of dialogue, the online format begins to provide explanations of why people adopt certain positions. Second, it was open to people who work but do not live in San Mateo County. This added a new set of perspectives to the discussion started by residents alone at the Assembly. Third, because participants were not randomly selected, they did not constitute a representative cross section of the county population. They did, however, represent a segment of the population that tends to be educated, active and engaged on social issues – a constituency, in other words, that is well equipped to influence policy.

- Community Conversations. Condensing the discussion to 2½ hours, the Community Conversations were designed to reach out to a wider audience in a variety of settings.¹⁰ By June 2008, Threshold trained 40 facilitators to conduct the sessions, which were held between May and December 2008. More than 200 people who live or work in San Mateo County participated in 18 local dialogues.¹¹

As a third format for dialogue, the Community Conversations contributed to the overall project design. Their smaller scale means that increasing numbers of people can be engaged at relatively low marginal cost. As a complement to the random selection of the Countywide Assembly and the self-selection of the Online Dialogue, the Community Conversations allow targeted outreach to specific groups of citizens (e.g., those who are typically underrepresented in the public process, or leadership groups with potential influence). At each conversation, facilitators evaluated the dialogue, compiled discussion notes, and collected participant surveys.

¹⁰ A number of documents related to the Community Conversations are available at the Threshold 2008 website: www.threshold2008.org. These include participant materials, facilitator materials, host resources, and promotional materials. A password-protected portion of the site allows facilitators to download documents and enter post-dialogue survey responses directly into a dynamic database.

¹¹ See Appendix 3 for a list of Community Conversation sites.

Issue Framing

Throughout all phases of the project, participants considered similar policy options, questions, and supplemental information. The problem was framed in the broadest terms possible: San Mateo County has a housing supply problem that has become a housing price problem for most people who grow up here or work here – the middle-class included.

Citizens were asked to consider four sorts of questions regardless of the format:

- How should we grow? (How much housing do we want and where should we put it?)
- Who should decide? (What are the proper roles for local, regional, and state authorities?)
- Which policy tools should we use to encourage solutions?
- How should we pay for preferred solutions?

Four possible alternatives were proposed in response to the first question:¹²

- Continue on the current path with limited housing growth;
- Limit housing growth but invest in improving commutes.
- Rezone some open space for new housing development;
- Build more higher density housing in already developed areas;

The issues and alternatives are presented in a participant briefing packet, which also includes the best available arguments for and against each policy choice. The issue framing, briefing materials, and supplementary data were vetted by a diverse group of stakeholders prior to the public dialogues to ensure factual accuracy and balance.¹³ In the dialogues, citizens are asked to assess the tradeoffs of different choices and to identify the arguments and options they find most persuasive. In the Community Conversations, citizens are also asked to identify common ground that was revealed by the discussion. Trained facilitators led all small group discussions at the Countywide Assembly and in the Community Conversations.

¹² At the Countywide Assembly and Online Dialogue, participants considered these four alternatives. In the more time-limited Community Conversations, these alternatives were reduced to the first three. In each case, participants were told that the choices represent a framework and starting point for discussion. They were invited to propose other alternatives or to combine elements of different options.

¹³ See the Stakeholder Committee roster in Appendix 2. The participant briefing materials and data supplement are available at www.threshold2008.org.

Pathways to Change

Threshold 2008 can be described as a project without a roadmap. It responds to a real social problem (the shortage of housing in San Mateo County) and it identifies a key barrier to solving that problem (the lack of public support during the formal housing approval process). The strategy of Threshold is to set in motion a process through which citizens themselves can identify acceptable solutions. The process itself, however, does not dictate specific solutions. Because Threshold did not presuppose the outcomes of citizen dialogue, the original commitment to civic engagement essentially amounted to an educated leap of faith. The promoters and sponsors of the project believed strongly that informed and engaged citizens would choose to address the problem rather than ignore it, would be capable of working through complex policy issues, and would propose intelligent solutions grounded in the best interests of the community. One implication of this approach is that the path from civic engagement to housing solutions could not be drawn definitively beforehand, but would reveal itself only through the citizen dialogues.

Threshold makes the case for civic engagement as a necessary but not sufficient step to solve the housing problem. If all housing decisions must go through the public, and if the formal public process generally fails to find community support for housing, then a new process of engaging the public is necessary to find common ground on which to move forward. Without knowing beforehand the outcomes of the citizen dialogues, Threshold suggested several possible pathways from civic engagement to housing solutions:

- Strengthen Political Will. The project demonstrates to elected officials the kinds of housing solutions that their constituents can be expected to support, emboldening them to move forward with solutions that are consistent with that public mandate.
- Provide a Guide to Responsible Advocacy. The project reveals common ground expressed by informed and engaged citizens. Those working to advance housing solutions (including city staff) are in a better position to address the concerns, fears and values of the public through education, outreach, engagement or advocacy.
- Encourage Citizen Participation. The project facilitates connections for citizens who desire to deepen their engagement on housing issues by participating in the public process, hosting community conversations, advocating for solutions, or working with community organizations. Collaboration with community partners strengthens these connections and highlights opportunities for citizens to move from dialogue to action.
- Promote a Model of Civic Engagement. The project becomes a springboard for ongoing community dialogue to identify sustainable solutions. Given a model with demonstrated effectiveness in building public support for housing, local governments can use a similar approach to engage citizens on specific policies and developments in a way that avoids the pitfalls of the formal public process. The community conversations, for example, can be taken to scale through training of facilitators and adaptation of the meeting toolkit.

Results of the Citizen Dialogues

Summary: Participants and Major Findings

In three phases, Threshold 2008 engaged approximately 1,000 people who live and/or work in San Mateo County. Participants included residents of all 21 jurisdictions in the county. By design, each phase of the project emphasized a different method of participant recruitment: random selection for the Countywide Assembly, self-selection for the Online Dialogue, and targeted outreach for the Community Conversations. As a result, each small discussion group (more than 50 across the three methods of deliberation) displayed somewhat different demographic characteristics. On the whole, the voices expressed over the course of the project represented a broad cross section of the public.¹⁴

Despite differences in recruitment and demographics in each phase, the common ground revealed by the dialogues was remarkably consistent across all three methods of dialogue. Four key findings stand out:

- Project participants express a strong desire to meet the housing need, and support for creating new housing nearly doubled after dialogue in the random sample;
- Most people who support more housing strongly prefer infill development along the transportation corridor rather than rezoning of undeveloped land for housing;
- A majority of people who participate in the dialogues believe that local government should have the most say over housing decisions, but they also believe cities should be held accountable and should collaborate on countywide solutions;
- Participants express overwhelming support for more constructive ways to engage the public in housing and land use decisions.

The Threshold dialogues were not designed to seek consensus. Dialogue participants expressed a range of views, including ones that do not reflect these four summary points. A close reading of the survey data and Online Dialogue comments is essential if one is to appreciate the richness of the discussion and the nuances of why people agree or disagree on various issues. Nevertheless, the findings described above enjoyed consistently high support in the survey data, in the qualitative evaluations by facilitators, and in the majority of written comments by participants. Depending upon the particular goal of analysis, it may be more or less appropriate to emphasize commonality or variation in opinions. In the discussion that follows, we highlight those themes that resonated most widely among participants while also indicating some of the key issues and questions on which opinions diverge.¹⁵

¹⁴ Detailed demographic profiles of participants are available elsewhere. Interim reports for both the Countywide Assembly and Online Dialogue provide this data and are available at www.threshold2008.org. Of note: 56% of participants had never participated in a local planning process in the last 5 years; 21% had “a few times.”

¹⁵ For more detailed accounting of participants’ views, see the interim reports on the Countywide Assembly and Online Dialogue. Threshold is creating a “Question & Answer Bank” that compiles the most salient questions raised by participants. The purpose is to highlight the issues on which public opinion turns, and to compile factual information that is most critical as people consider their perspectives on housing policy.

Baseline Survey

In February 2008, a scientific random sample of 1,822 San Mateo County residents took a 25-minute phone survey on their values, knowledge, and opinions related to housing. The results of the survey reflect the views of the general public at one point in time, apart from any participation in the Threshold project. The survey revealed much that may not surprise those who work, advocate, or make decisions on housing issues:¹⁶

- Just over one-third (38%) of county residents believe there is a need for new housing;
- Fewer than half believe in the negative consequences of a housing shortage, such as:
 - Vital services will suffer without new housing (46%)
 - Companies will leave the area without new housing (29%);
- If forced to choose, residents prefer location of new housing in already developed areas (61%) to rezoning of open space (20%).

Impacts of Housing. Despite a weak desire to create new homes in the county, residents generally see housing as having benefits for the community. More residents than not believe the positive impacts of new housing development outweigh the negative impacts on quality of life, economic vitality, job growth, social and family connections, civic participation, quality of schools, local government tax revenues, and property values. With the exception of economic vitality and government tax revenue, the belief in these benefits does not rise to a majority because a significant portion of respondents believe housing has neither positive nor negative impacts. Residents are divided almost equally on whether new housing – even in already developed areas – has more positive or negative consequences for the environment.

Important Values. Residents identify a number of core values as important:

- Having middle-income workers in the community (91%);
- Preserving open space (88%);
- Making sure everyone has a place to live (81%);
- Making it possible for people who grew up here to live here (80%);
- Encouraging economic growth (78%);
- Maintaining the current character of our communities (76%);
- Having lower-income workers in the community (70%).
- Slowing the growth of suburban sprawl (68%).

Regarding the intensity of belief, the first four values also stand out as “extremely important” (a score of 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale) to a majority of residents:

- Making sure everyone has a place to live (64%);
- Preserving open space (63%);
- Having middle-income workers in the community (59%);
- Making it possible for people who grew up here to live here (59%);

¹⁶ See the interim Countywide Assembly report for the full dataset.

Housing Knowledge. The county residents surveyed were not experts in housing issues, so it is not surprising that on an index of eight knowledge questions, only 13% offered correct answers. Before deliberation only about 3% knew the median price of a single-family home in the county, and 26% could correctly answer the approximate percentage of households that could afford a median priced home. A relatively high percentage (41%) of respondents knew the average rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in San Mateo County, which is likely an indication that a large portion of the residents surveyed are renters.

Policy Attitudes. As indicated above, substantially less than a majority of residents see a need for new housing in the county. To the extent that new housing should or will be built, there is a strong preference for those homes to be located in already developed areas. Reinforcing this position, two out of three residents (67%) believe that rezoning some currently protected open space to allow housing is a slippery slope that will lead to more development later.

While Threshold 2008 frames the housing issue as a problem of supply and price for people at virtually all income levels, the survey specifically addressed views on affordable housing.¹⁷ When asked who should pay the cost of making homes affordable, a majority (59%) of respondents reply that developers should be required to provide a certain portion of their homes at prices below the market rate. They are split roughly equally as to whether such requirements make developers build less housing. Regarding the use of public funds, a majority (52%) believes that public funding will not reduce the price of homes to what most people can afford, and they are divided about equally as to whether public funding can be allocated fairly.

Who Should Decide? The survey posed a number of questions to determine how and where housing policy decisions should be made. The responses to individual questions are open to interpretation, but taken as a whole, one conclusion is that approximately equal numbers of residents support local control and regional coordination of land use. Another is that the people of San Mateo County see little or no role for the State in determining local housing policy.

The majority of residents take a stance that favors local control. When asked who should have the most say in planning and approving housing, 56% say local government (at least double the support expressed for any other level of government). Three-quarters of respondents believe that local review of housing proposals is the only way communities can hold developers accountable.

At the same time, residents expect their local policymakers to be accountable and to work collaboratively toward countywide goals, and a substantial portion favor greater regional authority. A majority (54%) believes that local government is too responsive to the most vocal residents. An understanding of the public's view of the proper relationship between local and regional control clearly requires a more nuanced interpretation of the data.

¹⁷ Affordable housing is defined here as units that are subsidized to sell or rent below the market rate.

On a continuum of local control or countywide coordination of land use, the public's views are divided almost precisely equally. When asked who should be most responsible for ensuring countywide coordination, the leading response (30%) is voluntary collaboration by local governments, but a larger majority is split among various options for regional government taking the lead (existing Bay Area regional agencies, the County of San Mateo, or a new regional authority). Indeed, 43% favor more regional authority on housing policy compared to 29% who are opposed. A majority (54%) believes that countywide approaches create options not available to local governments, and 70% believe that they allow for sharing resources across cities.

The clearest statement regarding decision-making authority is that the public wants a greater voice in the policymaking process. Even without engaging in any dialogue through Threshold 2008, fully 84% of San Mateo County residents surveyed believe it is important to increase public consultation in the planning and approval of new housing development (and more than half consider it extremely important).

Countywide Assembly

The purpose of the Countywide Assembly is to measure changes in public opinion after citizens are given balanced information and a chance to carefully consider policy alternatives. In order to participate in the weekend event, members of the public had to be randomly selected and had to have completed the baseline phone survey. The 238 residents who attended the Assembly were asked the same questions before and after the weekend dialogue, as well as some additional questions that were not included in the baseline survey.

As the first of an integrated series of dialogues, the Assembly was successful in providing initial answers to the two central questions posed by Threshold 2008:

- Can civic engagement build a constituency for change on housing?
- What kinds of housing solutions will the informed public support?

The Assembly answered the first question by demonstrating a model of civic engagement that can significantly change the public's views on a complicated policy issue. After spending a weekend considering competing policy options, deliberating in small groups and consulting experts, participants gave substantially different answers to many of the questions they had answered a month earlier in the baseline survey. Their support for creating new housing nearly doubled, they were more concerned about the impacts of the housing shortage, and they became measurably more knowledgeable about the issues.

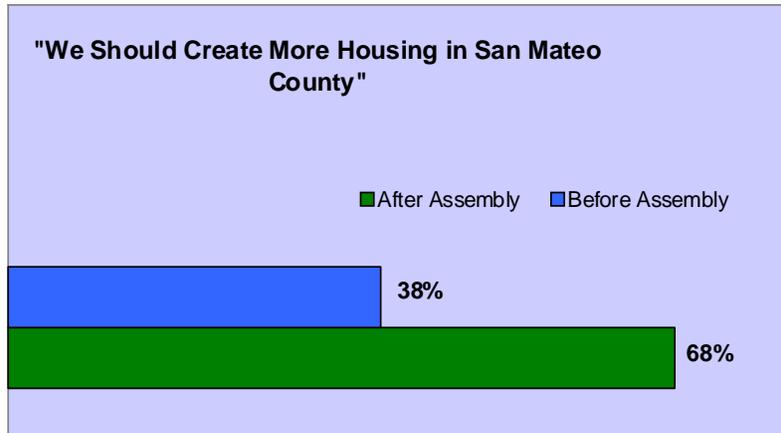
The Assembly answered the second question by calling out specific policy options favored by the informed public. In some cases, citizen preferences before the dialogue were amplified by further deliberation, while on other issues the dialogue led to dramatic changes in opinion. These results can help decision makers identify those policies for which there is already a constituency, and those for which public support can be cultivated through civic engagement.

Aside from policy preferences, the clear message from participants in the Assembly (and throughout all phases of the project) is that meaningful engagement of the public in housing decisions is essential. After deliberating with fellow citizens, participants in the Assembly made it clear that they want their voices to be heard. More than 90% of them invited Threshold to contact them about how to stay informed or get more involved in housing issues.

Participants also demonstrated that they are fully capable of making reasoned decisions on complex issues when given time and resources. Moreover, they consistently demonstrated moderation, tolerance, and respect for other views. Most people worked very hard to reconcile their own perceived self interests with the good of the larger community. Fully 85% agreed that "I learned a lot about people very different from me – what they and their lives are like." Nearly everyone – 95% of participants – considered the experience valuable, and 65% scored the event a perfect 10. The promise for public life is that people who are given the chance to accept the full responsibilities of citizenship are generally willing to rise to the challenge.

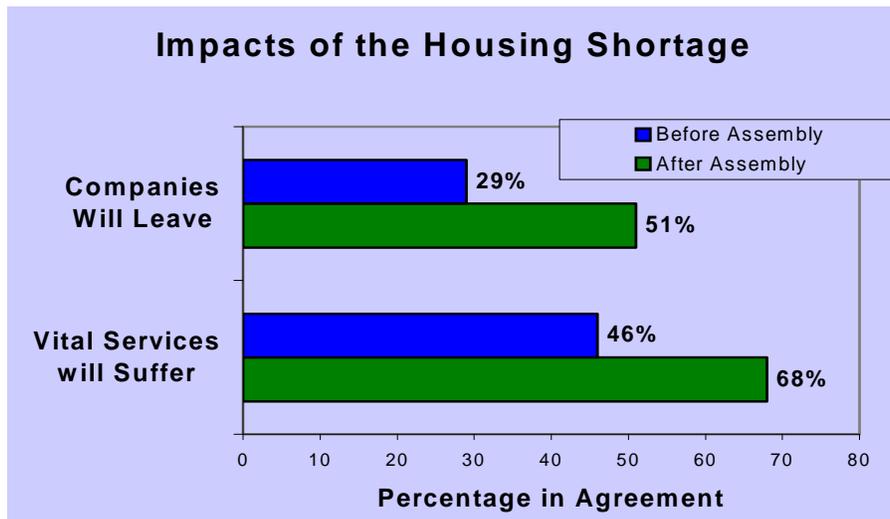
The following discussion highlights some of the most salient results of the post-event survey, concentrating on those areas where opinions were strongest or changed the most after dialogue.

Support for New Housing. After the weekend Assembly, the representative sample of county residents increased their support for creating new housing from 38% to 68%:



This near doubling of support after deliberation is among the most important findings of Threshold 2008. It signals a dramatic shift in citizen’s recognition of a housing problem, and the 30-point spread in support for new housing is the difference between a clear minority and a two-thirds supermajority.

Impacts of Housing. After the Assembly, participants became more convinced of the negative consequences of failing to meet the county’s housing need:



Participants also expressed greater belief in the economic and other benefits of new housing. Those believing new housing development would increase economic vitality of the region rose from 61% to 76%, while the percentage believing new housing development would be good for the environment rose from 33% to 44%.

Important Values. While participants’ knowledge grew and their policy positions changed, they did not substantially change their assessment of core values:¹⁸

Value Statement	% Rating as Important	
	Before Assembly	After Assembly
Having Middle-Income Workers in the Community	91	83
Preserving Open Space	88	83
Making Sure Everyone Has a Place to Live	81	79
Making it Possible for People who Grew up Here to Live Here	80	75
Encouraging Economic Growth	78	77
Maintaining the Current Character of Our Communities	76	72
Having Lower-Income Workers in the Community	70	68
Slowing the Growth of Suburban Sprawl	68	65

These data suggest that changes in policy views cannot be explained by changes in basic values. Dialogue does not change or significantly reorder one’s values. Instead, dialogue allows citizens to reassess the most effective ways to achieve what they think is important. It is possible to interpret this as an example of adaptive change on the part of informed citizens – discovering new ways to respond to changing circumstances to preserve those things that are most valuable to the community.

Housing Knowledge. Participants in the Assembly became significantly more informed about housing issues. After deliberation the percentage of the sample who knew the median price of a single family home in the county rose from 3% to 19%. Those who knew the approximate percentage of households that can afford a median priced home in the county rose from 26% to 58%. On the index of eight knowledge questions, the percentage offering correct answers increased from 13% to 28%, a statistically significant gain of fifteen points.

¹⁸ The percentage of respondents rating each value as important declined slightly across the board. This is likely due to small differences of opinion between the larger random sample and the Assembly participant sample, but the point remains the same. It is not a change in values that accounts for the changes in views on housing policy. If anything, these data underscore the argument that support for creating new housing increased dramatically despite the minor decline in scores on the basic values. The drop of 8% in “the importance of keeping middle-income workers in the community,” for example, might have been expected to reduce support for creating new housing.

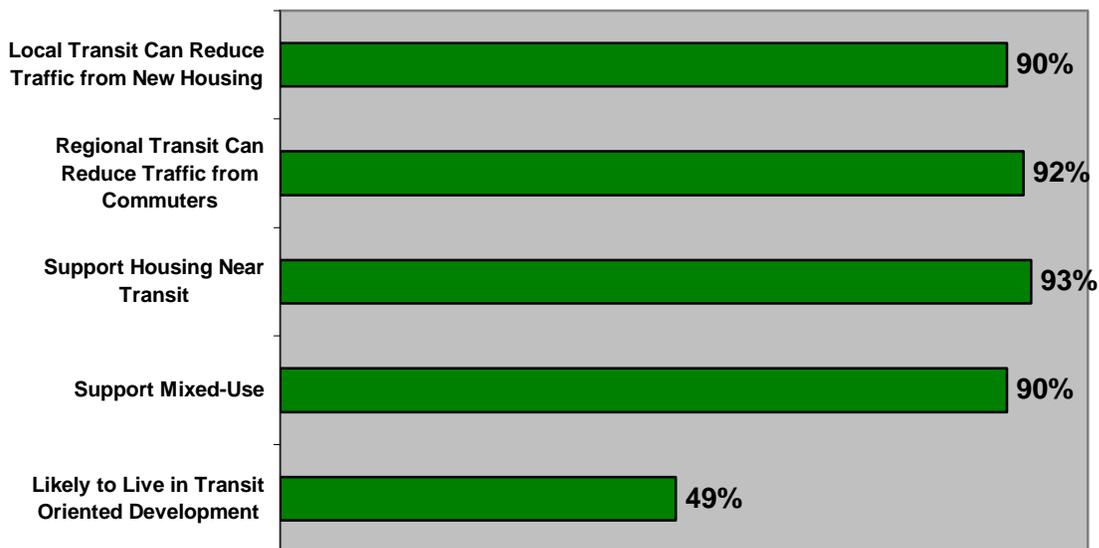
Policy Attitudes. In addition to the gains in support for new housing, citizens intensified and clarified their views on a number of policy issues.

Three areas of majority opinion before the weekend became even stronger after deliberation:

- Willingness to build on open space declined even further, as those who thought that any new housing should be located in already developed areas rose from 61% to 72%;
- Those who favor requiring developers to provide a certain portion of their homes below the market rate rose from 59% to 74%;
- Those who believe public funds alone are insufficient to make housing affordable to most people increased from 52% to 65%.

After deliberating, Assembly participants were asked a number of policy questions that were not included in the baseline survey. They offered rather clear guidance on the type and location of housing preferred by informed citizens, and on their preferences for how to pay for affordable housing. The Assembly participants displayed overwhelming support for higher density, transit oriented development. Only 26% believe that higher density housing harms the character of local communities, and 82% believe that it can help revitalize downtown areas. In short, the informed citizens at the Countywide Assembly favor the same sorts of housing solutions typically proposed by housing professionals and advocates:

Support for Transit Oriented Development

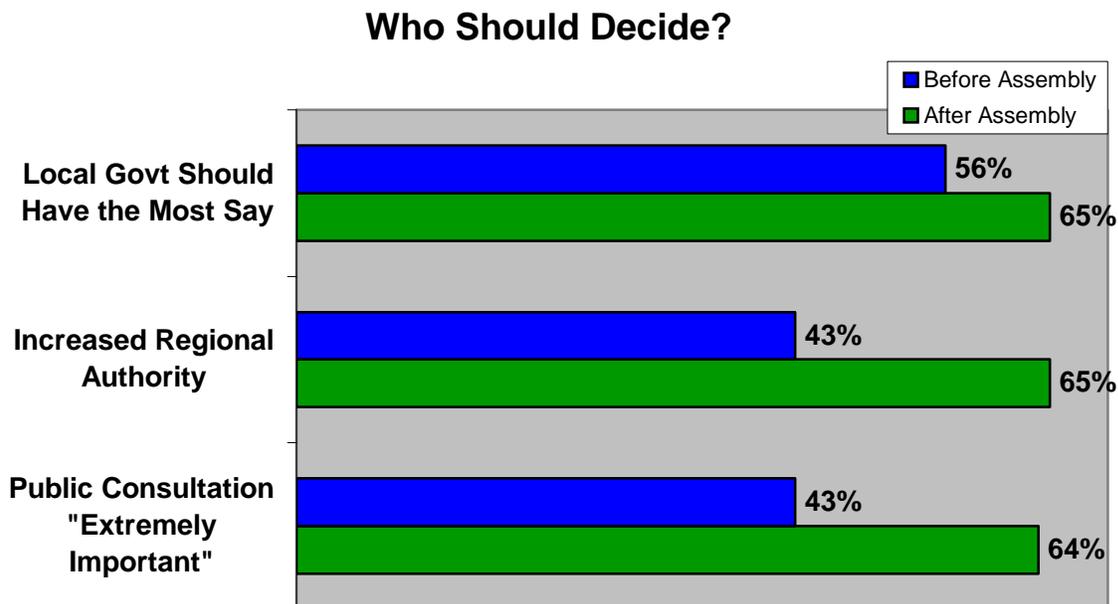


Many of the questions asked only after deliberation concerned possible ways to promote housing development and to pay for affordable housing. Participants displayed strong support for the following policy tools:

- Making the housing approval process faster and less expensive for developers (68%);
- Providing public funding for housing developments (66%);
- Providing public subsidies for affordable housing (75%);
- Requiring developers to include affordable housing in larger developments (83%);
- A dedicated source of State funding for construction of affordable housing (72%);
- A \$1 fee per square foot on new commercial, industrial and office development (70%).

In contrast, there was significantly less than majority support for other funding mechanisms including a recording fee on County documents or an increase in property or sales taxes.

Who Should Decide? The results of the participant survey reinforce the previous interpretation of the baseline survey data. After deliberation, citizens become more supportive of both local control and increased regional authority. With approximately equal intensity, they also become more supportive of a greater public role in the decision making process:



After deliberation, citizens believe even more strongly that voluntary collaboration among cities is the preferred mechanism for achieving countywide goals. At the same time, participant responses to questions asked only after the weekend highlight the importance of local government accountability. A sizeable majority (73%) support enforcement of state laws that require cities to plan for housing development, and more than half (53%) support creation of a countywide body to hear appeals when cities do not approve developments that appear to abide by locally adopted guidelines.

Online Dialogue

The design and objectives of the Online Dialogue was different from the Countywide Assembly. Participants were not randomly selected, but rather recruited widely and ultimately self selected. The dialogue was open not only to residents, but also to anyone who works or has a stake in San Mateo County. The purpose of the dialogue was not to measure opinion change among a representative sample, but to increase our understanding of why people adopt the views they do, how different values are connected to different policy positions, what kinds of information people need to make informed decisions, and which questions remain most difficult to address.

The self-selected sample was not necessarily representative of San Mateo County’s population as a whole, but the opinions of Online Dialogue participants matter. They spent two weeks thinking about the issues and responding respectfully to the views of others. One might argue that the sort of person drawn to participate in this forum is probably more active than the average citizen in housing issues. If that is true, then their views should certainly be included in a broader public conversation, and should be refined through discussion and reflection. Broader public dialogue is important for those who are left out of the current conversation and for those who are intimately a part of it.

The Online Dialogue did not necessarily bring discussions to conclusion. It did reveal, however, a consistent series of themes, questions, and considerations that citizens used to consider their options. The predominant thread of most discussions can be summarized in a “Citizen’s Scenario” comparable to that discovered by the Housing Nachos five years earlier:

Citizens’ Scenario (Threshold 2008)

Residents of San Mateo County love where they live, and many of those who work here want desperately to live here. The things that people value most about the county – and are not willing to sacrifice – are its open space and distinctive character. They believe that quality of life is tied closely to mobility, access to critical services, a healthy environment, and a strong economy. Most informed people conclude that the best way to preserve the character of the county in balance with other core values is to build more housing in already developed areas, particularly higher density housing along the transportation corridor within walking distance of services and transit. They condition housing growth on sufficient water, infrastructure, and transit. They want land use decisions to be made locally, but expect local governments to work together on countywide housing solutions. And they insist that the public should be engaged in housing decisions in a much more meaningful way than has occurred in the past.

The following section summarizes answers to specific questions raised during the Online Dialogue, and highlights some of the questions that remained open for many participants. A more detailed report by Viewpoint Learning can be found at www.threshold2008.org.

What does a housing solution look like? The most pointed discussions in the Online Dialogue concerned the ability of San Mateo County to accommodate population growth. Most participants believe that housing availability and affordability are critical issues facing the county. Most also agree that population and job growth put tremendous pressure on natural resources, particularly water. The answer to the question of how many homes to create in the county often turns on how citizens resolve this tension.

A majority of Online Dialogue participants believe creation of new higher density housing in the already developed areas, particularly near transit, as the best way to promote inclusive communities and a strong economy while also protecting the environment and preserving natural resources. Others are not convinced that we have sufficient resources to accommodate much more population. They question the premise that everyone who works or grows in San Mateo County should be able to live here, and they are willing to accept reductions in job growth as the price of limiting housing growth. This suggests that the public requires reliable information on water availability and infrastructure capacity to make informed decisions about housing.

Consistent with the findings of the Countywide Assembly, the Online Dialogue identified some powerful, shared values in San Mateo County, as well as some shared concerns. The things that citizens value most about the county – and are generally not willing to sacrifice – are its open space and distinctive character.¹⁹ “Community character” means different things to different people, but it is a concept that appears throughout the discussion. Most citizens also tie quality of life closely to mobility – so much so that many are willing to sacrifice some job growth in order to reduce traffic. Nobody questions the importance of a healthy economy, but opinions differ as to whether continued economic expansion is necessary or desirable.

Given widely shared values, levels of support for new housing varied with citizens’ confidence that growth can be managed sustainably. Those who support more housing believe that the best way to preserve open space and reduce our carbon footprint is through compact, transit-oriented development. Those who question whether new home development is sustainable believe we should inventory available resources before setting housing targets. While some are convinced the county has already grown too much, most are willing to consider more housing on the condition that new development does not threaten community character, has an identifiable source of water, and is tied to investment in infrastructure. Dialogue participants consistently pointed to the interconnection of housing and transportation, and expressed the need for effective public transit to support new development.

¹⁹ While a majority of citizens is consistently unwilling to consider development on “open space” broadly defined, many raise valid questions about the meaning of this term. Threshold has defined “open space” as land in the county outside of already developed areas (as opposed to “infill” opportunities within developed areas). This definition of “open space” includes property with a wide range of designations and uses (watershed, land held in trust or preserved in perpetuity, regional public parks, bayfront, etc.). Some participants find the question of whether to develop some “open space” difficult to answer without further specifying the kind of land at stake, and others explicitly support development of some kinds of “open space” but not others.

Who should make housing decisions? The Online Dialogue revealed two areas of common ground found in all phases of the project:

- Support for coordinated countywide planning alongside local land use authority;
- Strong support for broadening public engagement in housing decisions;

While a majority of citizens believe there is a need for collaborative countywide planning, they differ on their views about what this means. Most support voluntary cooperation by local jurisdictions, and believe any countywide organization dealing with housing should have an oversight and advisory role, rather than independent decision-making authority. However, some argue that a regional body without regulatory authority (and an associated budget) would be ineffective. A small number of participants go further to suggest that a stronger role for the state is necessary to enforce local housing commitments. The main current of this discussion is about how to balance a generally shared desire for local control of land use planning with accountability for meeting the housing targets in adopted plans. The vast majority of participants agree that some form of countywide coordination and collaboration would help to address the housing problem. There is also strong agreement that that increased public participation in housing decisions is important.

Who should pay for housing solutions? This discussion centered on how to pay for affordable housing – the gap between what people can afford to pay and the market rate for rental or ownership homes. There is generally strong support expressed in the dialogue for finding a way to keep middle- and lower-income households in the community.

- ***Developers and homebuyers:*** Many participants had never really considered the question of who – apart from homebuyers – should pay for creating an adequate housing supply. They wrestled a great deal with this issue, in particular with the role of developers. Those who supported fees on new development to support affordable housing share a perception that developers reap generous profits by building market rate housing. Those who oppose developer fees argue that they are a disincentive for developers, and that fees would simply be passed on to homebuyers and renters.
- ***Subsidizing housing:*** Views on direct subsidies to buyers or renters were mixed. Those favoring subsidies suggested that, in the absence of an enormous increase in supply, the only way to reduce the cost of housing is to use subsidies to fill the gap between the market rate and what people can afford. Many expressed this option as a tradeoff that was preferable to freeing up open space to raise housing supply rapidly. A sizable minority, however, are resistant to tampering with the market and see subsidies as an unfair redistribution of wealth. They are not willing to say that people in some occupations should be “entitled” to live in the county, and they are willing to accept the tradeoffs this stance implies.
- ***Employers:*** While most participants did not think employers should be taxed or pay fees to subsidize affordable housing for the population as a whole, many cited examples of companies that provided housing bonuses, free shuttles, telecommuting options and other mechanisms to support their employees. They suggested that cities could create financial incentives for companies to provide housing benefits.

- **Cities and County government:** Participants saw cities and the county (and therefore taxpayers) as playing a role in subsidizing some people, and a number of posts worked at determining who might be eligible for housing subsidies. Most agreed that public safety first-responders should be at the top of the list. Many noted that “low-income” in San Mateo County is not the same as elsewhere, and that hardworking people who contribute to the community are still left out of the current housing and rental market.
- **State government:** Participants acknowledged the importance of housing to the state economy, but few saw any significant role for state funding given the current budget crisis. The question of whether a dedicated source of state funds would be desirable was generally taken off the table by the widespread belief that it is not a realistic expectation under present circumstances.

What role should the public play in housing decisions? Most participants agree that a more prominent role for the public is important in moving forward on housing issues. At the same time, many shared the view that “most of us don’t get too interested unless the new development is in our own backyard.” Neighborhood opposition is seen as a significant roadblock to new housing development, and many see broader public engagement as a means to help people see the value of housing to the entire community. Because it will always be much harder to get prospective residents to a public meeting than existing homeowners, many support a continuous effort to engage the larger community on housing issues generally, so that comments on particular developments would include more effective voices for the overall community interest. As in all phases of Threshold 2008, the Online Dialogue suggests that a high priority for leaders should be to engage the public in new ways on an ongoing basis.

What do people want to know? Throughout the dialogue, participants raised important questions that they suggested might affect their thinking on many of these issues. Some of these questions were directed to specialists through the “Ask the Expert” feature. Others arose in the course of discussion as participants grappled with complex issues. Some of these questions include:

- Would building as many homes as possible in already developed areas (infill housing) put jobs and housing in balance?
- Do we have enough water to meet the housing need created by job and population growth?
- How much will it cost to build and improve transit to serve tens of thousands of new households along the transportation corridor?
- What is the track record of higher-density projects in the region – for transit ridership, affordability, and benefits to the community?
- How many people who commute to jobs in San Mateo County would actually want to live here if they could afford it?
- Where are sources of data on each city’s future housing needs, and on how well each city has been meeting its housing needs to date?
- What programs and incentives do local governments provide for first-time homeowners?
- Can federal funds administered by local governments be used to build homes for people in specific job categories (e.g., public safety personnel, teachers, etc.)?

Community Conversations

The purpose of the Community Conversations is to bring more voices to the table and to develop a scalable method of dialogue that can be applied successfully at the local level. While participants in the Countywide Assembly were randomly selected and participants in the Online Dialogue were self selected, participants in the Community Conversations were intentionally selected. That is, Threshold targeted its recruitment to include a greater diversity of citizens. Not every conversation was directed to a specific population, and collectively the local dialogues did not nearly achieve representation of the full range of voices in San Mateo County. However, this method showed promise in reaching many who have previously been left out of the discussion, and it proved to be accessible to a range of audiences in a variety of settings.

Much of the success of the Community Conversations can be attributed to two factors. First, conversation hosts typically recruited participants from within their own networks. By tapping into these networks, Threshold benefited from the existing capacity of strong community organizations in San Mateo County. Partnership relationships with many of these conversation hosts were cultivated and established before the project launch. Second, Threshold relied heavily on the commitment of skilled volunteer facilitators. Every conversation leader completed at least six hours of training and agreed to host at least two conversations.

More than 200 citizens participated in 18 dialogues throughout the county.²⁰ The model was designed as a compressed version of the earlier approaches – two and a half hours of dialogue addressing essentially the same issues and choices presented in the Assembly and Online Dialogue. An important difference from the previous two methods is that the Community Conversations did not give participants access to experts to answer their questions. The data collected from the conversations shared some characteristics with the first two phases. Like those in the Assembly, participants in the Community Conversations completed a survey after deliberation (without a pre-dialogue survey for comparison). The database is not large enough to draw inferences for the county, but the findings are suggestive if not statistically representative. Conversation leaders also collected and reported on insights in a more qualitative manner similar to the interpretation of the Online Dialogue. Nearly all participants found the dialogue helpful in thinking about the issues (69% found it “very useful”).

The following discussion highlights many of the aggregate findings of the Community Conversations. As is the case with all the small group discussion throughout the project, much of the richness of the dialogue is necessarily missed in such a summary. Part of the value of the local approach is precisely to illuminate the viewpoints and issues raised in particular places by particular groups of citizens. In addition to understanding the broader public voice, policymakers can also benefit by listening to the unique concerns of local constituents after they have had a chance to engage in dialogue. Threshold offers the Community Conversations as a model that can both scale up to represent a countywide voice, and can elicit a more informed and inclusive voice at the local level.²¹

²⁰ A list of Community Conversation hosts and locations covered in this report can be found in Appendix 3.

²¹ Threshold intends to continue to hold Community Conversations in 2009, and will make the results of specific dialogues available to policymakers. We are also exploring ways to update the countywide results on a regular basis, either in a report format or as part of a question/answer/suggestion inventory on our website.

Profile of Community Conversation Participants

- 57% had never participated or participated “only a few times” in a planning process in their city or town within the past 5 years
- 85% had not participated in any other Threshold activities
- 98% live in San Mateo County; 66% for more than 10 years
- 63% homeowners; 37% renters
- 58% female; 42% male
- 72% over age 35; 28% under age 35
- 50% have household income under \$90,000; 50% over \$90,000
- 67% have a college degree
- 75% have children under 18 living in their households

Summary Results of the Community Conversations

1. Participants believe that San Mateo County has an urgent housing problem.
 - 87% think the housing shortage is serious
 - 84% think we should build more housing in the county
2. Participants express similar common ground found in the Assembly and Online Dialogue.
 - 70% prefer higher density infill housing to building on open space
 - 44% favor local control of housing decisions; 56% favor more countywide coordination
 - 96% think it is important to have more public input in housing decisions
3. Who should pay for housing solutions?
 - Developers should bear the greatest share of the burden. 86% say they have at least some responsibility; 41% say “a lot” of responsibility
 - Employers who attract new workers are close behind. 83% say they have at least some responsibility; 32% say “a lot” of responsibility
 - Taxpayers have a role: 76% say the state has at least some responsibility; 31% say “a lot” of responsibility
4. How should we pay for housing solutions?
 - Require developers to include affordable units: 67% “strongly support”
 - Incentives for developers to include affordable units: 54% “strongly support”
 - Homebuyer subsidies for middle-class and public workers: 65% “strongly support”
 - Dedicated public funds for affordable housing: 55% “strongly support”
 - Commercial impact fee (\$1 per square foot): 45% “strongly support”
 - Document recording fee (\$1 to \$5 per document): 43% “strongly support”

Reporting of Results

Threshold reported the results of the public dialogues throughout the project. This reporting took the form of interim written analyses after the Countywide Assembly and Online Dialogue, presentations to various leadership and community groups, and posting of documents, videos and news articles on the Threshold website.²²

A number of community partners also distributed the Threshold findings. Individuals and organizations covered the dialogues in blogs, newsletters, and magazine articles. The San Mateo County Department of Housing contributed vital technical assistance to the project – providing the best available data for inclusion in participant briefing materials, and serving as content experts to answer questions from participants during the Assembly and Online Dialogue (along with others who voluntarily gave their time in this role). They summarized the results of the public dialogues in a document, “Housing Our Future Together,” which expresses the role that many organizations play in contributing to housing solutions in San Mateo County.

The most prominent, formal reporting of the public voice to San Mateo County decision makers was Leadership Reveille, an event hosted by Threshold in November 2008. The outcome of that convening is summarized in the next section.

Response to the Results

At the end of the Countywide Assembly in March 2008, Threshold made a commitment to the citizens who had dedicated a weekend to understanding the intricacies of housing policy. We promised that we would lift up their voice and convey it to leaders, and that we would report back to them about how leaders responded. Without exception, during presentations throughout the year, those who learned about the project were impressed with the degree of commitment by citizen participants and the coherence of the informed public voice. Near the end of the year, Leadership Reveille was an important opportunity to consult leaders about their reactions.

Threshold invited every city councilmember, County supervisor, planning commissioner, and city manager in San Mateo County to hear the outcome of the public dialogues. We also invited a wide range of government staff, community leaders, housing stakeholders, and a selection of project participants. In all, 150 people responded to the invitation and 130 attended the event. Elected officials, appointed officials, and government staff represented 16 of the 21 jurisdictions in the county. Nongovernmental attendees spanned the spectrum of community interests, including business, education, labor, philanthropy, and the nonprofit sectors.

²² The interim reports on the Countywide Assembly and Online Dialogue, as well as video and news coverage of the project, can be found at www.threshold2008.org. A list of groups that received presentations by Threshold is included in Appendix 4.

The purpose of Reveille was to fulfill the promise first made to participants at the Countywide Assembly: to carry forward the public voice and to solicit reactions from community leaders. Those in attendance were asked three sorts of questions:

- Do you think the process and results of Threshold 2008 are valid?
- To what extent do you agree with the informed citizen stance on key issues?
- How much housing should we create in San Mateo County over the next 25 years?

The responses to these questions were gathered in real time using” keypad technology. Once a question was asked, the responses of everyone in the room appeared on a screen. Most questions asked attendees to express their level of agreement with a particular statement on a scale of one to ten. Answers were presented as an average response of everyone in the room, and then disaggregated to show how people in each sector (government, business, etc.) responded.²³

While there were variations by sector in the responses to each question, the most striking finding was a generally high degree of agreement among all attendees. The views of policymakers and community leaders at Reveille can be summarized as follows:

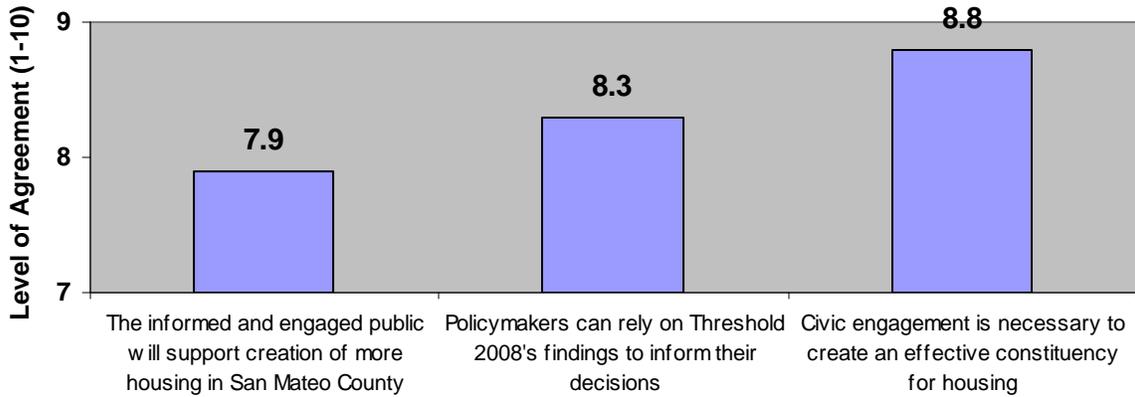
- They found the results of Threshold 2008 to be valid and reliable;
- They support civic engagement to build public support for housing;
- They agree broadly with the views of the informed public on housing issues;
- More than three-quarters believe we should strive to meet 100% of San Mateo County’s housing need within a generation.

The responses to all questions are helpful in understanding where community leaders and policymakers stand on issues of importance to the informed public. Perhaps most striking is the number of San Mateo County leaders in the room who endorse a dramatically new approach to housing. If all jurisdictions in the county create new homes at the same pace as during the last decade, we will collectively meet about one-third of the projected need over the next 20 years. To say that we should strive to meet 100% of that need, as three-quarters of Reveille participants did, is to say that we must find a way to triple our housing production over the next generation.

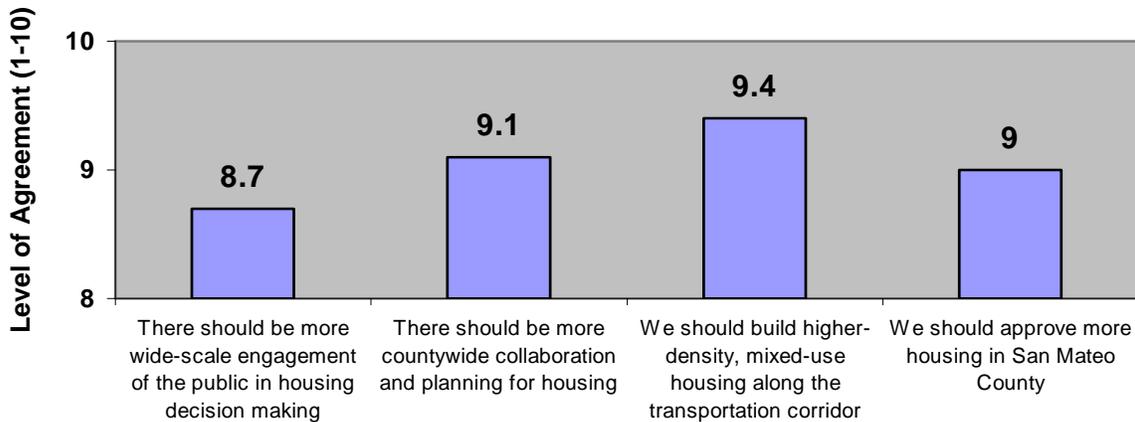
The charts below summarize the level of agreement, on a 10-point scale, with various statements presented to attendees at Reveille.

²³²³ The interactive portion of Leadership Reveille was designed in partnership with Chris Bui, founder of 5th Medium I.C. Chris is an experienced civic engagement practitioner, trained Community Conversation leader, and randomly selected Countywide Assembly participant.

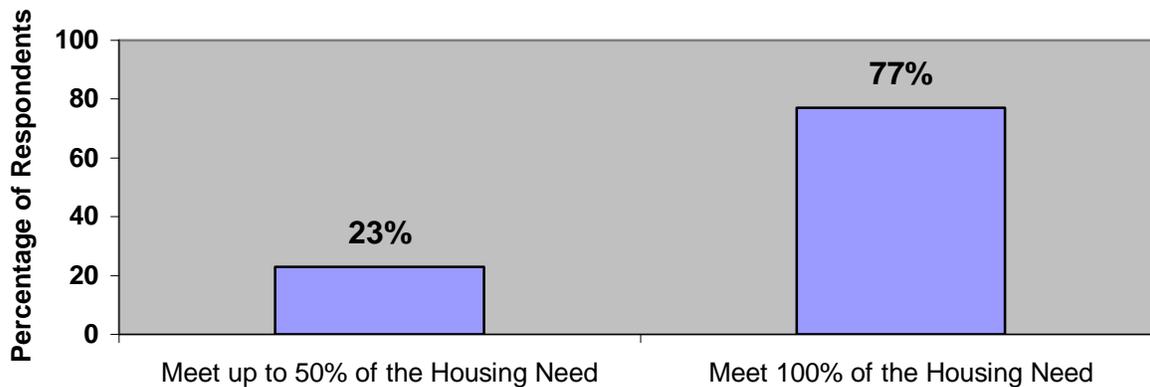
Validity of the Process



Agreement Between Leaders and the Public



How Much Housing Should We Create in San Mateo County by 2025?



Next Steps: Threshold 2009

Threshold 2008 was one of the most ambitious and successful civic engagement efforts in the nation last year. We worked with world-class practitioners to design and implement a project in which more than 1,000 people who live or work in San Mateo County participated in meaningful dialogue about the region's housing problem. The project demonstrated convincingly that:

- Well-designed, dialogue-based civic engagement can significantly increase the public's understanding of housing issues and support for creating new homes;
- The informed and engaged public has clear preferences about housing solutions;
- Policymakers and community leaders are generally supportive of the same common ground principles favored by the informed public.

Threshold 2009 will leverage the results of our public dialogues for real policy change. We will do so by continuing to engage the public in dialogue, by encouraging local governments to adopt effective civic engagement practices, and by proposing countywide initiatives that respond to the recommendations of the informed public.

Specifically, we are exploring possible directions for future work:

- Continue to conduct community conversations, particularly where cities, towns and the County are actively planning for housing;
- Work with government staff and stakeholder organizations to build the capacity of communities countywide to conduct effective dialogue-based civic engagement around housing decisions;
- Design and propose a countywide citizen body to review annual progress on meeting the housing goals expressed in each jurisdiction's General Plan;
- Engage policymakers in dialogue about similar issues and choices presented to their constituents during Threshold 2008;
- Create a "Question & Answer Bank" to express and respond to the issues that were most salient in shaping the opinions of participants during Threshold 2008.

As a citizen-driven initiative, Threshold takes a flexible and entrepreneurial approach to problem solving. In all our efforts, we work collaboratively and seek to serve as a catalyst for improvements to the system in which land use decisions are made.

Acknowledgements

Production of this report was supported by a grant from Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

The Countywide Assembly section relies on data initially collected and presented by our partners at Stanford University (Dr. James Fishkin, Dr. Robert Luskin, Michael Weiksner, and Alice Siu), and portions of the Online Dialogue section appeared in an earlier report by Heidi Gantwerk of Viewpoint Learning. Susan Clark and Laurie Kappe made extensive editorial comments on earlier written materials that inform this report. Greg Greenway wrote the final report with valuable contributions and support from Susan Danielson. All conclusions, including errors or omissions, are the sole responsibility of Threshold 2008.

Much of the project's success is due to invaluable contributions of time and energy from many project partners and community supporters. Organizations making major contributions include the San Mateo County Department of Housing, Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County, Cañada College, and League of Women Voters. Lists of individual Threshold stakeholder committee members, volunteer facilitators, conversation hosts, and other project contributors can be found at www.threshold2008.org. Threshold's volunteer board members provided essential leadership, guidance, and support.

The entire project would not have been possible without generous donations of financial and in-kind support. Threshold 2008 donors include Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Open Square Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, County of San Mateo, Whitman Institute, Common Sense California, Hurlbut-Johnson Charitable Trusts/Fund, Mills-Peninsula Health Services, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, San Mateo County Community College Foundation, Cañada College, and Bailard, Inc. Norcal Waste Systems and Wells Fargo Bank sponsored the Countywide Assembly reception. Open Square Foundation sponsored Leadership Reveille.

Threshold 2008 is a sponsored project of Community Initiatives.

APPENDIX 1

Board, Staff & Consultants

Advisory Board

Thomas E. Bailard, CEO, Bailard, Inc.
Richard S. Gordon, San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
Thomas Mohr, President, Cañada College
Jennifer Raiser, President, Raiser Senior Services
Audrey Rust, Executive Director, Peninsula Open Space Trust
Mark Simon, Special Assistant to CEO, San Mateo County Transit
April A. Vargas, Board Member, Committee for Green Foothills

Staff

Greg Greenway, Executive Director
Susan Danielson, Project Coordinator

Consultants

Kathy Armstrong, League of Women Voters
Chris Bui, 5th Medium I.C. / The American Focus
Susan Clark, Common Knowledge
Dr. James Fishkin, Center for Deliberative Democracy, Stanford University
Heidi Gantwerk, Viewpoint Learning, Inc.
Laurie Kappe, i.e. Communications LLC
David Perry, David Perry & Associates

APPENDIX 2

Stakeholder Committee Roster

Yoomie Ahn	Mid-Peninsula Housing Coalition
Sandra Bass	The David & Lucile Packard Foundation
Patty Boyle	Bay Area League of Women Voters /Menlo Park Housing Commission
Dorcas Cheng-Tozun	San Mateo County - Department of Housing
Barbara Christensen	San Mateo County Community College District
David Crabbe	Crabbe Architects
Irvin Dawid	Sierra Club, Loma Prieta Chapter
Steve Dworetzky	United American Bank
Gael Erickson	Midcoast Community Council, Chair
Doug Frederick	City of Menlo Park, Housing Manager
Pam Frisella	City of Foster City, Mayor 2008
Corrine Goodrich	San Mateo County Transit District
Carole Groom	City of San Mateo, Mayor 2008 / Mills Peninsula
Bruce Hamilton	HIP Housing
Laurie Lavaroni	US Dept of the Treasury - Office of Thrift Supervision
Richard Matgen	Agora Foundation
Chris Mohr	Housing Leadership Council of SMC /HEART
Tom Mohr	Cañada College
Mark Moulton	Living City Partners
Cathy Moyer	Volunteers for Outdoor California/Friends of RWC
George Mozingo	San Mateo County Assn of Realtors (SAMCAR)
Catherine U. Mullooly	Town of Hillsborough, Mayor 2007-2008
Bill Nack	Building & Construction Trades Council of SMC
Mark Nagales	Office of Assemblyman Gene Mullin, Senior Field Representative
Barbara Pierce	City of Redwood City, Mayor 2007
Sarah Rosendahl	Office of Senator Joe Simitian 11th District
Bertha Sanchez	Friends of Bay Meadows
Brock Winstead	Office of Senator Joe Simitian 11th District

APPENDIX 3

Community Conversations

2/13/09	Hosted by Redwood City-San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce Housing Leadership Day, Provident Credit Union, Redwood City
11/15/08	Hosted by Threshold 2008, Peninsula Conference Center
11/12/08	Hosted by Woodlake Homeowners Association, San Mateo
11/7/08	Hosted by Beverly Garrity, Cabrillo Unified School District, Half Moon Bay
10/30/08	Hosted by Threshold 2008, Peninsula Conference Center
10/29/08	Hosted by Threshold 2008, Peninsula Conference Center
10/23/08	Hosted by Tri-City Church of Religious Science Center for Spiritual Living, Fremont Chamber, Fremont Redevelopment Agency (commuters)
10/23/08	Hosted by City of San Carlos
10/22/08	Hosted by Sustainable San Mateo County
10/21/08	Hosted by Mid Peninsula Housing Coalition, City Center Plaza, Redwood City
10/15/08	Hosted by Beverly Garrity, Coastsiders Meet @ Café Lucca, Montara
9/24/08	Hosted by Paratransit Council & SamTrans Redi-Wheels Advisory Committee, San Carlos
8/12/08	Hosted by Project Read North San Mateo County, South San Francisco Public Library
6/21/08	(With Leader Training), Hosted by Threshold 2008, San Mateo Main Public Library
5/30/08	Hosted by College of San Mateo, Action Club/Political Science Department
5/21/08	(With Leader Training), Hosted by Threshold 2008, Peninsula Conference Center
5/20/08	(With Leader Training), Hosted by Threshold 2008, Peninsula Conference Center
4/28/08	(With Focus Group Session), Hosted by Threshold 2008, Peninsula Conference Center

APPENDIX 4

Presentations

Mar-08

- 3/20 Interview on SF/Unscripted (Comcast Local)
- 3/26 Grand Boulevard Task Force
- 3/28 City Managers Association, San Mateo County

Apr-08

- 4/22 Threshold 2008 Action Forum

May-08

- 5/9 Silicon Valley Leadership Group, Housing Action Coalition
- 5/14 HOPE Interagency Council - Countywide Assembly Report
- 5/14 De Anza College
- 5/16 Affordable Housing Week Policy Breakfast

Jun-08

- 6/6 Leadership San Mateo
- 6/10 San Mateo County Economic Development Association (SAMCEDA)
- 6/12 RWC/San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce Transportation & Housing Committee
- 6/18 Grand Boulevard Task Force
- 6/20 Common Sense California Board of Directors

Jul-08

- 7/29 Sustainable San Mateo County

Aug-08

- 8/1 University of Nevada Las Vegas
- 8/25 Redwood City Council / Housing and Human Concerns Committee Joint Study Session

Sep-08

- 9/2 Redwood City Rotary
- 9/9 Seaport Industrial Association
- 9/10 Kellogg Foundation Civic Engagement Learning Community, Chicago

Oct-08

- 10/17 Housing Leadership Day
- 10/21 Bay Area Housing Action Network

Nov-08

- 11/6 Threshold 2008 Leadership Reveille
- 11/12 Silicon Valley Economic Development Alliance (SVEDA)
- 11/14 Comcast Newsmakers TV Interview

Dec-08

- 12/8 Silicon Valley Leadership Group, Policy Committee
- 12/17 Redwood City Housing and Human Concerns Committee