



Coming Home of Middlesex County Inc.

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40 Years After Mt. Laurel: New Findings about the Effects of Affordable Housing

The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled, in its 1983 decision in the case of *South Burlington County NAACP v. Mount Laurel Township*, to forbid the use of zoning to prevent construction of affordable housing units in affluent communities throughout the state.

While this decision was welcomed by housing and community advocates as an opportunity to strengthen housing stability and economic opportunities for low-income residents of New Jersey, the ensuing responses throughout the state suggested a litany of concerns related to the development of affordable housing.

A recent study conducted by Douglas S. Massey, Associate Professor of Sociology & Public Affairs at Princeton University entitled, *Lessons from Mount Laurel: The Benefits of Affordable Housing for All Concerned* showcases the positive impacts of a well run and supported, affordable housing development on the host community, neighboring townships, as well as new residents themselves.

The research sought to compare measurable outcomes prior to and after the opening of the Ethel Lawrence Homes, a development consisting of 140 units of affordable housing in Southern New Jersey.

Highlights of the study, released April 26, 2012 include the following findings:

- **The opening of the Ethel Lawrence Homes had no detectable effects on property values, property tax rates or the prevalence of crime**
 - “A multiple time series study that compared trends in home values, tax burdens and crime rates in Mount Laurel before and after 2001...found no detectable effects of the project’s opening on any outcome. Trends in home values, crime rates and taxes were the same in Mount Laurel as in similar townships nearby.”
 - “In a survey we conducted among neighbors, one third didn’t know affordable housing even existed in the neighborhood.”
- **Ethel Lawrence residents experienced measurable and significant improvements in quality of life indicators as compared to non-resident applicants**
 - “Dramatic reduction in exposure to neighborhood disorder and violence”
 - “Lower frequency of negative life events and improved mental health”
 - “Residents displayed higher rates of employment, larger shares of income from work, greater total incomes, and lower rates of welfare dependency”
 - “School quality also improved dramatically relative to the comparison group, while exposure to school disorder and violence declined steeply”

<http://library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1103671705375-214/Lessons+from+Mount+Laurel-PRAC.pdf>

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