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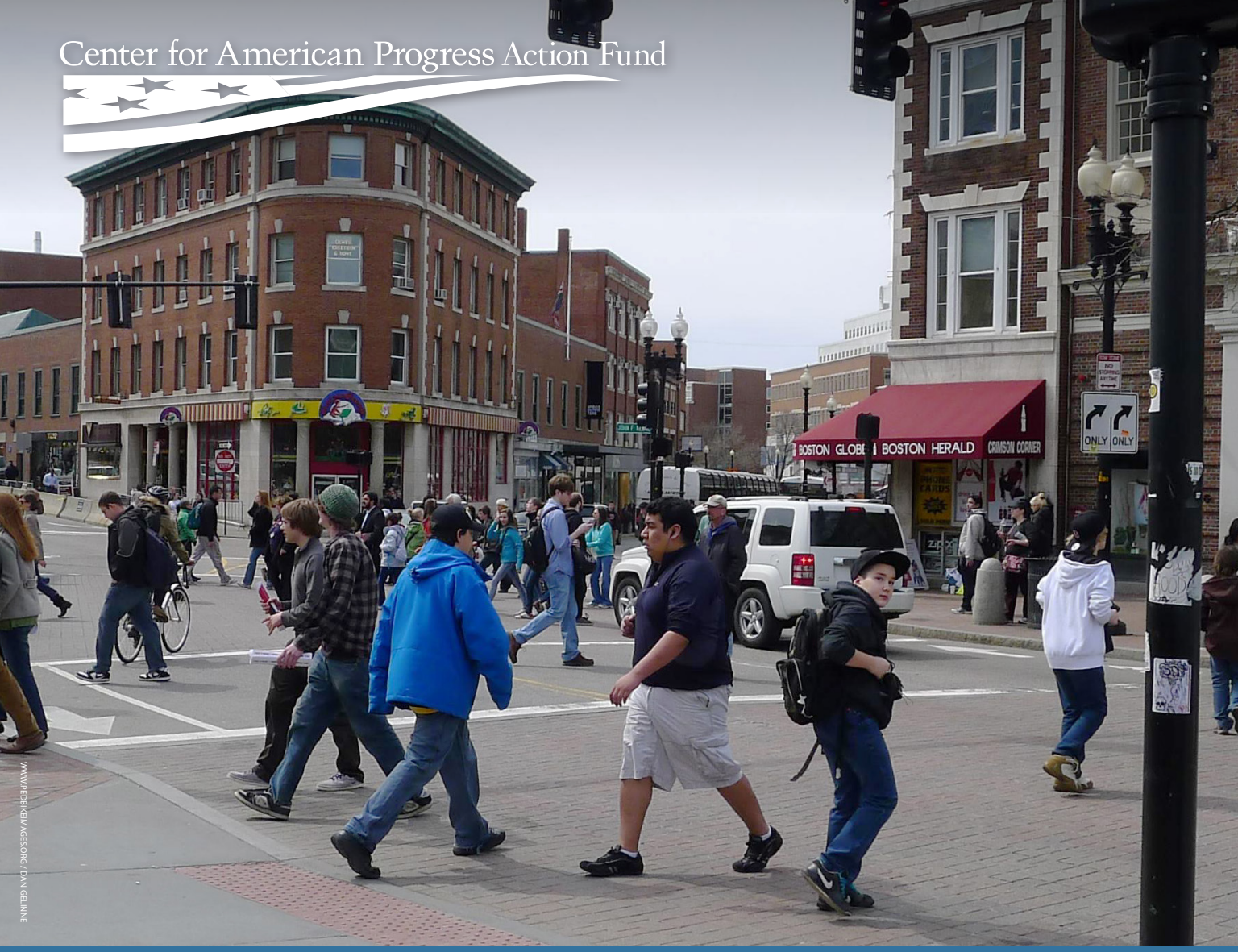

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Cities at Work: Progressive Local Policies to Rebuild the Middle Class

Report Summary

Joel Rogers and Satya Rhodes-Conway
COWS (Center on Wisconsin Strategy)

February 2014

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Introduction and summary

"Cities at Work: Progressive Local Policies to Rebuild the Middle Class" is COWS's local government companion to the Center for American Progress Action Fund's "States at Work: Progressive State Policies to Rebuild the Middle Class" report.

Our report is based on the practical experience and struggle of elected officials and advocates from around the country in moving their communities onto the "high road" of shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and efficient democratic government. Its goal is to arm progressive local elected leaders and advocates with a range of effective policies that, if adopted, would make a significant difference in getting on that high road. They will be able to use better democratic organization to add value, reduce waste, and capture and share locally the great benefits of doing both.

In the summary of their state report, our colleagues at the Center for American Progress Action Fund made a compelling case for why state and local governments need to take bold action to restore the middle class and ensure more access to it. The basic reason is that, over the past generation, American economic and political inequality has tremendously increased to the point that our status as a democratic society is severely threatened. In this summary of our report, we will assume the truth of that argument. Before getting to the particular policies we recommend for cities, however, we step back to argue that cities are a particularly important, and in many ways unique, solution to these and other social problems.[1]

The distinctive promise of cities

What is the distinctive promise of cities?

First, cities and the metropolitan regions—or "metros"—they anchor are the source of most of the wealth and innovation in America. Our top 100 metros alone, which account for merely 12 percent of total land, are home to two-thirds of our population and account for at least three-quarters of our gross domestic product.[2]

For all these reasons—their wealth, their greater sustainability, and their democratic values—cities are the natural pillars of the high-road economy and society we want to build.

These metros also contain an overwhelming share of our best schools, universities, and research centers; our most critical infrastructure; our largest labor forces; and our most competitive industries of all kinds, including "new economy" industries such as biotech, advanced robotics and instrumentation, digital media, software engineering, and design. Cities aggregate and organize their assets, become more productive, and generate and attract wealth as a result.[3]

Second, well-managed cities are also leaders in global sustainability. Their density allows them to share infrastructure more efficiently, and supports more public goods. As a result, cities generally have much lower greenhouse gas, or GHG, emissions per capita than suburbs and rural areas.[4] New York City, for example, with 8.4 million inhabitants, is more populous than most states but uses less energy than any of them. That's the efficiency of "natural capital" that we want to see everywhere.

Third, cities are generally more progressive in their values than other areas. Because they rely more on nonmilitary public goods, they are more supportive of those goods. Because they have enormous diversity, they are more welcoming of diversity, including that of the new immigrants that usually enter this country through them. Because their functioning requires accommodation of very different people in close proximity, they are more tolerant of difference. Because they are at the cutting edge of the economy and culture, they are less threatened by the new. Cities are also better organized to advance and defend such values. Along with providing the basis of the Democratic vote, for example, cities densely aggregate union membership in the United States. Just 25 cities account for half of all union memberships.[5]

For all these reasons—their wealth, their greater sustainability, and their democratic values and organization—cities are the natural pillars of the high-road economy and society that we want to build. That's their promise.

Summary of the recommended policies

Many cities today, often with new leadership that appreciates their vital strengths, are redeeming that promise. They are innovating in policy and taking national leadership on issues that have not been addressed at the national level. Even under the most straitened fiscal circumstances and the worst economic calamity since the Great Depression, cities are improving the health, education, and productivity of their residents, and of their government as well. They are expanding access to healthy food, reducing crime, opening up public spaces, investing in key physical and social infrastructure, promoting sustainability and its key ingredients of clean energy and efficiency, and engaging in real economic development to improve the quality and distribution of jobs.

Our full report on some of this work is organized into eight areas of local government policy and responsibility:

- Economic development and job creation
- Infrastructure
- Revenue
- Job standards
- Housing
- Education
- Health
- Civil rights

In each area, we first describe the need for action and the goals of progressive policy. Then we describe hundreds of key proven strategies for reaching those goals, and within those strategies several specific steps that can be taken toward their effective implementation. And we provide specific examples from cities that have already taken the approach we describe.

The summary that follows is not a substitute for the full report. You may find the full report on the Center for American Progress Action Fund website (www.

americanprogressaction.org) or the COWS website (www.cows.org), or even that of the American Legislative and Issue Campaign Exchange, or ALICE (www.alicelaw.org), the movement's new public library of progressive state and local law. But we can give you some of its flavor and content.

Below, we'll first summarize each chapter, suggested strategy, and then indicate our topline recommendations and points on implementation.

A sampling of the report's policies

The policies discussed in this report are many and varied, but in all cases represent steps along the high road for local governments. Of course, in all the policy areas discussed, a comprehensive approach is needed to implement high-road economic development; repair and green our infrastructure; create good jobs and improve the quality of existing ones; expand municipal revenue options; provide high-quality, affordable housing; reform our education system; promote healthy communities; and protect civil rights.

Some of the things we recommend have been implemented in multiple places; others are relatively untested, but are still good ideas. We highlight below a short list of policy examples, which represent the broad scope of ideas needed to move metro areas onto the high road:

- **Prepare an asset map of your city or region's assets, including major and critical industries, critical firms in those industries, and value flows among those firms and others.** Include an assessment of human capital, investment, infrastructure, business performance, and public impact. The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, for example, have drafted asset analyses as business plans in partnership with the Brookings Institution.

- **Leverage permitting power and procurement to improve wages and benefits in the private economy.** In particular, ensure that contractors permitted to operate at large anchor institutions, such as airports, are responsible contractors who provide standard wages and benefits. Los Angeles and San Francisco are good examples of metros that have this kind of policy.

- **Set required wage and benefits standards as a condition of economic-development subsidies.** Santa Fe, New Mexico, for example, requires a Community Workforce Agreement on any city-funded construction project of more than $500,000.

- **Implement a payment in lieu of taxes, or PILOT, program for property owned by tax-exempt organizations.** Boston has taken a particularly well-organized and balanced approach to this issue.

- **Develop creative funding structures to support infrastructure investment and green retrofits.** Babylon, New York; Sonoma County, California; and Seattle, Washington, all have interesting programs that have done this.

- **Create a land bank that focuses on the conversion of vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties into productive uses such as affordable housing, urban gardens, local businesses, and parks.** The Genesee County Land Bank in Michigan is a great example of this.

- **Implement health-impact assessments to determine the impact of all proposed city policies on population health.** Atlanta, Georgia, has successfully used this policy tool.

- **Strengthen police and community relations and ensure the most effective use of police resources by limiting its local role in immigration law enforcement.** Chicago passed the Welcoming City Ordinance, which prohibits Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, agents access to an individual in custody unless it serves a legitimate criminal law-enforcement purpose.

- **Provide municipal IDs that also serve as stored value cards, library cards, parks-and-recreation membership cards, etc., to encourage broad use by seniors, youth, immigrants, and others.** The Elm City Resident Card in New Haven, Connecticut, is an example of this.

- **Adopt strong policies limiting racial profiling and discriminatory stop-and-frisk practices.** Nashville, Tennessee, for example, has a comprehensive training program for police officers aimed at preventing racial profiling.

Strengthen local economies and create jobs

Local governments have an important and fundamental role in economic development. They should pursue high-road economic-development strategies that attract and build stable, sustainable local economies.

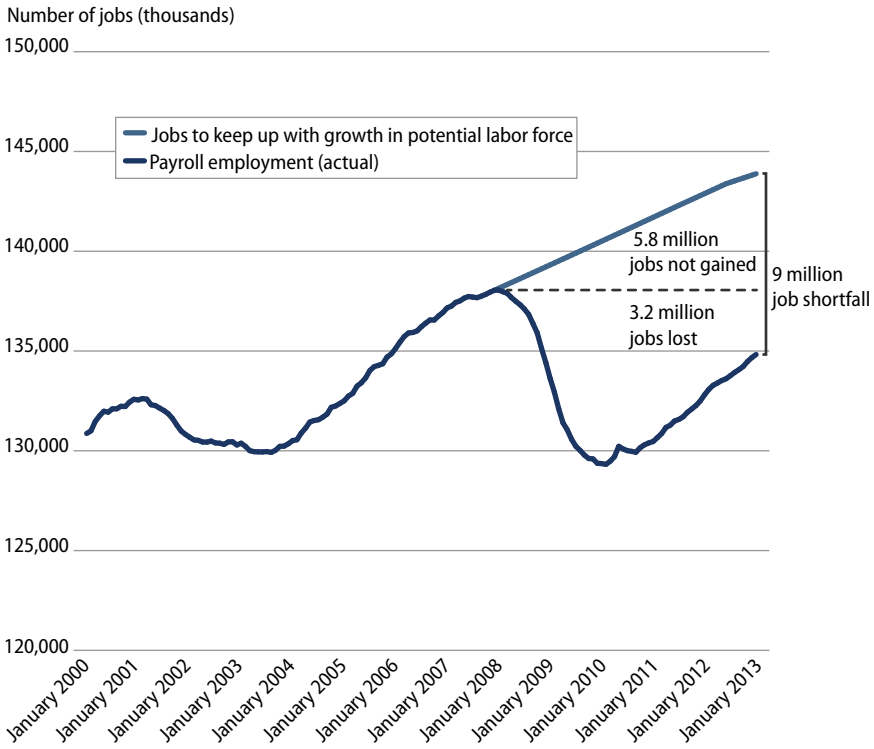
Too often, cities pursue low-road economic-development policies, competing against each other to see which locality can offer the greatest subsidy and the most favorable development terms for large national corporations, which stay as long as the subsidies keep flowing before pulling up stakes for the next locality.

Instead, local economic development should be focused on creating high-quality jobs that pay family-supporting wages. Raising take-home pay for low- and middle-income families directly benefits local economies, as these families purchase goods and services from local businesses. In all cases, economic development assistance should be attached to job-quality requirements and wage standards.

FIGURE 1

Recession has left a job shortfall of over 9 million

U.S. employment and the number of jobs needed to keep up with the growth in the potential labor force, 2000–2013



Note: Congressional Budget Office estimates of the potential labor force (found here: http://cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/43910_KeyAssumptionsProjectingPotentialGDP.xls) are used to calculate the number of jobs needed to keep up with the growth in the potential labor force.

Source: Authors' analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Employment Statistics public data series and Congressional Budget Office data

While maintaining a focus on good jobs, cities should map their regional economy to locate areas of potential competitive advantage, and develop those areas with the aid of better land-use policy. They should also modernize and make more efficient their local infrastructure and transportation networks; cultivate and strengthen their human capital, enhancing the skills of the local workforce in ways immediately relevant to the region's best employers; concentrate on growing local, place-based businesses rather than pursuing national chains; and focus on capturing the value of all of the above locally and sharing it broadly.

At its most basic level, asset mapping gives city leaders an inventory of key resources that can be used in economic development.

Below we outline strategies for achieving these goals.

Data-driven economic development

When approaching economic-development, or ED, strategy, cities often focus on business subsidies. While these may be responsive to existing businesses, they are not always strategic, and don't add up to a proactive, comprehensive economic development strategy.

In contrast, developing policies aimed at growing a city's existing assets—its industry clusters, natural capital, educational resources, talent and workforce, local supply chains, and exports—is a powerful economic-development strategy that builds on a city's strengths and resources. Asset mapping is the first step in the strategy.

At its most basic level, asset mapping gives city leaders an inventory of key resources that can be used in economic development. Beyond the initial survey, a more comprehensive asset mapping will result in an understanding of key networks and cultural attitudes that shape the city's economy, "gap" areas where investment is needed, and a baseline for measuring future economic-development progress.[6]

Workforce development is important in forming asset mapping and cluster strategies. The essential project to build human capital is a system that is more relevant and responsive to employers and more accessible to and supportive of working adults and prospective workers. Cities should focus on policy and program innovation that systematically builds a bridge from workers who need more skills to get decent jobs, to the region's better employers that offer decent work. To get started, cities should:

- **Prepare an asset map of the city or region's assets, including major and critical industries, critical firms in those industries, and value flows among those firms and others.** Include an assessment of human capital, investment, infrastructure, business performance, and key indicators such as income distribution and standard of living.

- **Identify economic clusters—groups of firms in a particular industry—in the area that are growing or poised for growth.** Research how these clusters function and why they succeed, and consult with members of the cluster to identify gaps and service needs that local service providers can fill to strengthen the cluster and further ground it in the local community.

- **Target economic development efforts to firms in these clusters and their supply chains.** Encourage and facilitate clusters by working with local education and training institutions to develop workforce skills and continually promote workforce training. Skill-development policies should be oriented toward filling discrete skill gaps in the local labor market that could otherwise inhibit cluster development.

- **Work with priority firms and/or clusters to map their supply chains.** Identify opportunities for existing local businesses within these supply chains and gaps where there are no local businesses. Focus economic development on attracting or growing businesses that can fit into these supply chains.

- **Identify, organize, and work with employers in a regional labor market to meet their shared needs.** Pay particular attention to a region's best employers; work with unions whenever possible to help identify and organize key sectors; and work on skill, retention, and advancement inside the firm, not just on connecting workers to the first rung in the ladder. Include shorter-term training options, which integrate basic and occupational skills, and are offered when low-wage workers can get to class.

- **Fund or otherwise support organizations that connect low-income individuals with training and support that allows them to complete college-level credentials in growing local industry sectors, as well as secure and retain good jobs.** Such training and support includes case management, job-readiness training, college navigation, housing, child care, and transportation, among others.

Economically targeted investments

Each city controls relatively large streams of money—for example, tax revenues, fees, and pension funds—which it collects, invests, and uses somehow. In both investment and expenditure, local government has an opportunity to leverage those dollars to create jobs, particularly for unemployed, underemployed, or hard-to-employ people.

This requires two things: First, finding ways to invest and spend money in ways that create jobs; and second, connecting local people to those jobs. In addition, local governments need to pay attention to where their investments are placed, and what they are used for.

Increasingly, under the rubric of economically targeted investments, or ETI, investors and policymakers are considering investment strategies that promote broad-based sustainable development. Economically targeted investments identify areas where profitable investments can be made, but which markets have missed due to inconsistent time horizons or imperfect information. Basically, economically targeted investments allow cities—or other institutional investors—to identify investment opportunities that make money and help strengthen the community. Cities wanting to better target their investments should:

- **Identify public projects that are good candidates for investment because they require upfront capital but provide revenue or savings over time.** Examples will likely include infrastructure projects such as water and sewer systems, landfills, and parking facilities, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, and housing developments.

- **Create guidelines for using city-controlled investments, such as pension funds, to finance these types of projects.** Guidelines should include the percentage of the total that may be invested in economically targeted investments, a transparent process to choose or solicit projects, job-quality guidelines, and policies excluding projects that harm public-sector jobs.[7]

- **Create common investment vehicles with which various entities—public and private pension funds, university endowments, and socially responsible investors, among others—can invest in ETI projects.**

Anchor institutions

Anchor institutions such as universities, airports, hospitals, and large cultural institutions are often critical to the economic well-being of metropolitan areas: An anchor is the largest employer in more than half of the top 100 cities by population. One in every 15 large hospitals and one in every eight colleges and universities is located in an inner city.[8] The purchasing power of these institutions is collectively in the billions of dollars, and they employ millions of people nationwide.[9] More importantly, they represent a significant proportion of the employment in their respective regions.[10]

Their economic heft, however, is not what makes them the keystone of an economic development strategy. It is their connection to place that makes them important—the fact that they are unlikely to pick up and leave like so many other businesses.

Some of these institutions are public, some are private, and some are in between. In the public cases, leveraging this economic impact to create well-paying jobs with benefits is somewhat easier because local governments have direct jurisdiction. But even in the private cases, local governments can work with these institutions to improve their influence on the local economy and surrounding neighborhoods. To improve their influence, local governments should:

- **Leverage the purchasing power of anchor institutions by setting local purchasing goals for contracting and procurement and including job-quality requirements, including wage and benefits standards, in their contracts.** Local governments should work with anchors to map their supply chains and redirect business to local and responsible firms.

- **Require or encourage anchor institutions to be responsible employers by providing affordable and accessible health care for workers and their dependents, offering paid sick leave, paying family-supporting wages, and providing initial and ongoing training to employees.** These standards should apply to contracted workers in addition to regular employees, and contractors should not be able to evade health care or paid-leave standards by breaking up service contracts into multiple part-time positions rather than using full-time staff.

- **Use permitting power to ensure that private contractors providing passenger services in airports are responsible.** They should provide standard wages, benefits, paid leave, and ensure stability of the workforce.

- **Encourage anchor institutions to adopt worker-retention policies for their contracts and a broad labor harmony policy applying to all service workers.** Policies should promote a stable and productive workforce, provide mechanisms for dispute resolution, and help avoid service interruptions.

- **Establish a program to promote hiring residents from surrounding neighborhoods.** This program could include job fairs, a drop-in recruiting center, training in resume writing and interview skills, or free professional development to current employees. Local governments should encourage anchor institutions to partner with first-source hiring programs that identify, screen, and refer potential candidates from low-income neighborhoods.

- **Create employer-assisted housing programs that target neighborhoods in need of investment and revitalization, and assist employees with rent, down payments, or home improvements.**

- **Work with hospitals to realize community benefits from their presence.** As major employers and centers of activity, anchor institutions can support employees and surrounding neighborhoods in a variety of ways.

- **Encourage anchor institutions to invest in local infrastructure and the viability of surrounding neighborhoods.** Anchors can take a proactive role in real-estate development as a way to spur economic development and to improve neighborhoods. This should be tied to community development so that residents are served rather than displaced.

- **Encourage anchor institutions to actively participate in cluster development, especially by incubating startup businesses.**

Local business support

Small businesses represent 99.7 percent of all employer firms and have generated 66 percent of new job growth over the past 15 years.[11] Local businesses keep a greater percentage of their profits in the local economy[12] and tend to be centrally located, thus making more efficient use of infrastructure, and are significantly less likely to relocate in the short term.[13] For all of those reasons, it makes sense that local governments are increasingly thinking about how to encourage the growth and startup of local businesses as a way to produce a more vital, stable, and sustainable local economy.

But the fact that a business is locally owned does not guarantee that the jobs it creates are of high quality or pay family-supporting wages. That's why cities should encourage the growth of local businesses that pay decent wages and encourage others to do so as well. Economic-development policy supporting local businesses is not a substitute for comprehensive wage and hour standards (see section on job quality), and as noted in that section, those standards should broadly apply to small—as well as large—businesses. In fact, such policies level the playing field and thus provide an advantage to high-road businesses. To encourage the growth of high-road local businesses, cities can:

- **Offer training and support for local businesses in navigating licensing and regulatory requirements, securing financing, developing a business plan, choosing a business entity form—ideally including discussion of worker co-ops and other employee-ownership options—and marketing.**
- **Use business incubators and research parks to support start-ups and promote technology transfer, where applicable.**
- **Facilitate access to private capital via micro lending partnerships with local lenders.**
- **Pursue an "economic gardening" approach that prioritizes growing local businesses over recruiting from elsewhere, and focuses on building infrastructure and training the workforce rather than direct subsidies.** This should include helping existing businesses save money via energy efficiency.

At a time when local governments are operating with reduced resources, it is essential that they evaluate and maximize the resources that they disperse.

Subsidy oversight

At a time when local governments are operating with reduced resources, it is essential that they evaluate and maximize the resources that they disperse. In part, that means assuring that taxpayer money is not spent on giveaways to corporations that will not return economic benefits to local communities. Moreover, such giveaways frequently pit local governments against each other, driving subsidy benefits up and economic-development conditions down. In these "races to the bottom," city governments are the losers; they can spend millions of dollars of scarce local revenue on bidding wars to entice businesses to locate within the city limits.

In order to sufficiently address these problems, local governments need to improve their oversight of economic-development subsidies, including placing conditions on these subsidies, publicizing the subsidies being allocated and the benefits being promised, and creating mechanisms with which they can hold corporations to their commitments. Specifically, local governments should:

- **Structure subsidies as contracts and place conditions on the subsidies, such as specific numbers of jobs that must be retained or created, or required wage and benefits standards.**

- **Publicly disclose company-specific information on subsidies received and jobs created in an up-to-date and easily accessible format to allow better evaluation of costs and benefits and discourage back-room dealing.**

- **Attach and enforce clawback provisions that allow governments to hold recipients of subsidies accountable if they fail to meet their promised economic-development goals.**

Invest in green and resilient infrastructure

Until recently, urban populations were declining, leaving cities without the populations and financial bases they needed to maintain and upgrade their infrastructure and services. At the same time, demand for those services increased. Today, cities are barely recovering from the recession; most are still reeling from the economic disaster that struck several years ago.

Now another storm is gathering: global climate disruption, which is already affecting cities in concrete ways, such as extreme weather events. These effects are compounded by cities' increasingly decrepit infrastructure. Cities have continued the historical trend of pushing external costs of economic development and infrastructure onto low-income neighborhoods, and the brunt of the financial collapse, crumbling infrastructure, and climactic turmoil have been borne by the poorest communities.

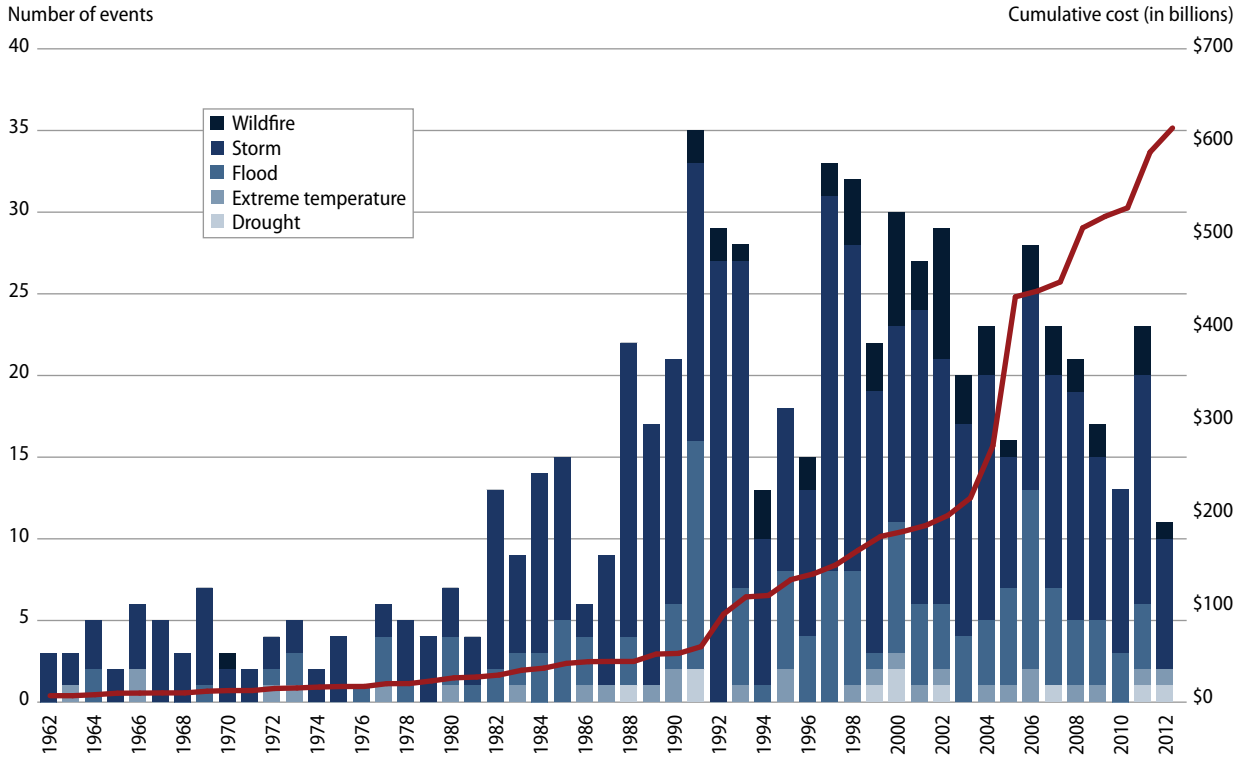
The physical infrastructure of cities and neighborhoods, but also the systems that make our economy possible—energy, transportation, food and water systems, and waste management—are critical to economic recovery and climate resilience. The connections here are obvious: Our already aging infrastructure is under increasing pressure as a result of climate disruption and the changing temperature and precipitation patterns it brings. The economy relies on these systems and affects our ability to construct and maintain them. As a whole, our infrastructure is aging, undermaintained, and largely inefficient—the impacts of which are not shared equally. There's tremendous opportunity for improvement and almost no money to make that improvement.

We need to maintain, upgrade, and replace our aging, outmoded infrastructure with greener, more efficient, and more effective infrastructure. In short, we need to build and rebuild better, not bigger or more. "Better" means not just efficient but also better service to the community, more jobs, more equitable outcomes, more healthy, and a positive environmental impact, among others. We also need to distribute infra-

FIGURE 2

Costing us billions of dollars

Extreme weather events in the United States



Source: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database www.emdat.be - Université Catholique de Louvain - Brussels - Belgium

structure costs more fairly. Through intelligent infrastructure investments, cities can save money, reduce their environmental impact, provide jobs to members of their community who need them, and mitigate climate change.

Land-use planning

A century ago, progressives tried to improve livability in cities by separating land uses. By the 1950s and with the full triumph of the automobile as America's mode of travel, however, this strategy began to backfire. Vast swaths of metro areas were devoted to low-density residential neighborhoods, requiring long commutes for work, school, and other destinations, which were all ghettoized in separate zones.

Today metro areas are struggling to push the pendulum back, away from rigidly exclusive zoning and car-centricity, to regain some of the economic and social

vitality that was lost in the rush to "modern" planning. Progress is happening; the move to lower density in U.S. urbanized areas has halted, and many cities and suburbs are relaxing restrictions on use and auto-orientation.

Now cities face another challenge: using land use and planning tools to adapt to climate change, especially extreme weather events. Cities should:

- **Rewrite zoning codes and comprehensive plans to require a mixture of uses and densities that foster travel by foot, bike, and transit.** Cities can go a step further and decline to regulate uses, and instead simply regulate the form that development should take, with rules on height, mass, and other physical elements, but not on the type of use.

- **Reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements, allow multiple sites to share parking spaces, and impose parking maximums.** Cities can price parking to remove an incentive to drive and ensure adequate parking supply.

- **Plan land use and transportation together, so that they support and reinforce each other.**

- **Carefully examine areas vulnerable to flooding and regulate new construction in them.** Cities should also consider other effects of climate change on land-use planning and create a mitigation and adaptation plan.

'Fix it first' and build complete streets

As we enter the 21st century, we are faced with a new set of transportation-infrastructure problems that demand new solutions. Our roads and bridges are falling into disrepair, the cost of adding roadway capacity is increasingly unaffordable, and streets are designed solely for cars. This design often reduces mobility for walkers, bikers, and transit riders, and is an inequitable and inefficient use of public funds. Responsible transportation infrastructure policy requires that we:

- **Adopt "fix-it-first" policies that emphasize the preventative maintenance and repair of existing infrastructure over infrastructure expansion.** These policies focus on maintaining and repairing existing streets, bridges, and other transportation infrastructure rather than spending money on expansion or new facilities.

- **Adopt complete streets policies or ordinances requiring the installation of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit accommodations on any new or reconstructed roadway.**

- **Ensure that developers pay for pedestrian, transit, and bicycle infrastructure through development impact fees, in addition to the sewers, street lights, and other infrastructure normally paid for with these fees.**

Public transit

Urban development that supports transit combines urban densities with a mixture of land uses that include employment, residential, and commercial.[14] This urban development plus the quality and frequency of transit service is critical to the success of a transit system. Transit that is able to move significant numbers of travelers provides a suite of economic, community, environmental, and social benefits. Transit is an inherently more efficient method of transportation than a single-occupancy or low-occupancy vehicle. It places a much lower demand on our roadway infrastructure, effectively freeing up limited public funds that cities may use to support other essential services. To support transit, cities should:

- **Establish long-term, dedicated, sustainable funding streams for public transportation.** Consider creating a Regional Transportation District to provide long-range planning, system build out, operations, and financial-management support for transit-system expansion.

- **Require new developments to build connected street networks, include transit service, accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, and incorporate a mixture of residential, employment, and commercial uses.** These will make transit a feasible and more appealing alternative to single-occupancy vehicle trips.

- **Develop partnerships between transit systems, municipalities, educational institutions, and local businesses to implement subsidized transit passes, guaranteed-ride-home programs, and limits on the availability of subsidized car parking.**

Freight transportation

As the economy has globalized, freight transportation has become more economically important and its effects on society have become more obvious. Whether by truck, train, ship, plane, or barge, freight transportation creates a variety of environmental, economic, and livability challenges. At the same time, it is critical to the economic health of cities.

Integrating freight transportation into planning activities is the best way to ensure that communities are designed in ways that foster the efficient flow of freight and economic growth while reducing the negative impacts of goods movement and the conflicts that degrade health, safety, and quality of life.

- **Work with private-sector industries to identify locations with access to key highways, rail, water corridors, and/or airports where freight-related businesses can be clustered and enact zoning ordinances to prevent nonindustrial uses in these areas.** Cities can use zoning to protect land around ports and rail terminals from full residential and commercial development as this can push freight-reliant industries to the urban periphery or cause land-use conflicts related to freight's noise, dust, and pollution.

- **Restrict the use of certain roads by commercial vehicles or vehicles over a certain weight or dimensions, and designate truck routes in core areas to provide better mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists on nontruck routes.** Strategies should be developed to reduce congestion and smooth freight pickup and delivery.

- **Enact restrictions limiting idling to five minutes or less.** Most idling restrictions provide exemptions in extreme temperatures, for vehicles using their engine to power auxiliary equipment, or other reasons.

- **Make sure that ports and trucking companies clean up their fleets, reduce air pollution, and treat workers fairly.**

Parks and public spaces

Public spaces—including plazas, streets, sidewalks, parks, and more—are vital to cities and contribute to the health and welfare of their citizens, business, and economies. Parks make cities more beautiful, enhance social and cultural vitality, promote health through activity, and increase the land value of surrounding areas.

Urban trees bring benefits of all sorts to cities. Over its lifetime, a single street tree repays the planting and maintenance cost more than 150 times in direct benefits—not including aesthetic, social, and natural benefits.[15] Cities can improve and increase their parkland and urban forests in a number of ways:

- **Create a plan to increase the quantity and quality of parkland in the city and to ensure that every resident has access to a park.** Cities can create new parks in derelict parking lots, on abandoned industrial sites, over highways, and on unused surfaces such as rooftops. New trails can be created on unused—and not useable in the future—railroad lines. Brownfield cleanup grant money or other grant funding can be used to repurpose brownfields into community gardens or parks. When creating new parks, consider the equity of park placement and access.

- **Temporarily or permanently close streets in or adjacent to parks, creating new space, and temporarily close downtown or major routes to create "open streets" available for nonmotorized use.**

- **Extend park hours and provide lighting—to sports fields and ski trails, among others—to increase the use of existing parks.**

- **Use a mix of general city revenue, bonding, philanthropy, corporate contributions, and special taxes—often sales taxes—to fund new parks.** Cities can charge developers of new residential or commercial buildings a fee related to their impact on the parks system, and use the funding to improve the system.

- **Protect and nurture existing trees on public property—mostly street trees and in parks—and plant more when possible.** Conduct tree inventories, including data on the age, health, and species of each tree on public property, and develop an urban forest master plan, including a goal of increasing canopy cover.

- **Incentivize private tree planting, potentially by offering utility rebates for those who plant trees that will shade their houses, reducing electricity demand.** Enlist citizens to help maintain city trees by offering training and support.

- **Leverage parks systems to train and employ unemployed or underemployed individuals—including youth or those from low-income backgrounds—via responsible programs that pay decent wages.** Provide training in parks-maintenance skills in conjunction with life-skills instruction and connections to future career opportunities such as arborists and landscapers.

Waste management

The first step to effectively dealing with solid waste is to develop a solid waste plan.

Managing solid waste is one of the basic services local governments provide. Municipalities in America rely heavily on landfills and incinerators to dispose of that waste. But these methods threaten our public health and natural ecosystems, and reduce property values and the general quality of life. In addition, many landfills are at or close to full capacity, and siting new ones is extremely difficult.

To deal with these issues, our waste-management systems must be updated. New technology and knowledge about how to effectively process waste offers promising results, and cities have already taken steps to update their waste-management systems. The old adage "reduce, reuse, recycle" still holds true, and can be an overall guide to approaching this issue. But the first step to effectively dealing with solid waste is to develop a solid waste plan. Cities should:

- **Adopt purchasing policies with a recycled content preference, and replace disposables with reusables or recyclables.** Require or give preference to vendors with take-back policies for products that are difficult to dispose of.

- **Require residents and businesses to participate in curbside pickup recycling programs.** Mandatory programs with financial penalties for noncompliance greatly increase recycling rates and are particularly useful with multifamily, large commercial, and institutional properties, especially when coupled with educational programs for tenants and building managers.

- **Require large public events to provide both garbage and recycling services to their attendees, and provide guidance on how best to do so.**

- **Require recycling in all city construction and demolition projects, and require construction or demolition projects of reasonable size to submit recycling plans.**

- **Require manufacturers to take responsibility for their products from cradle to grave through "retail-take-it-back" programs.** Cities should also ban the disposal of electronic waste in landfills, and provide a consumer electronics collection program if a take-back program is not available.

- **Allow city residents to drop off hazardous items at city waste facilities.**

- **Make the curbside collection of organic waste—yard waste and food scraps, for example—mandatory for residences, institutions, and businesses.** Process the collected materials in a biodigester and use or sell the products—natural gas and fertilizer, for example.

- **Capture biogases from landfills and use them to generate electricity or to operate vehicles.**

Urban water systems

Cities across the country are dealing with the dual realities of decaying infrastructure and increasingly severe weather due to climate change. The inability of this aging infrastructure to handle severe weather causes increased flooding, degraded drinking-water quality, lowered drinking-water reserves, increased illness, and diminished property values.

Replacing and augmenting aging "grey" water infrastructure—the "big pipes" solutions—with sustainable green infrastructure insulates against climate disruption, reduces pollution, protects local communities, and is ultimately cheaper than traditional cement solutions. Investing in green infrastructure that reduces consumption and uses natural processes to deal with water—water recycling, green roofs, porous pavement, tree planting, bioswales, rain gardens, water capture, and reducing infiltration and inflow to existing water systems—also creates good jobs. To get started, cities can:

- **Emphasize water conservation through low-flow toilet, faucet aerator, and low-flow showerhead rebates or direct-install programs.** Consider combining water-efficiency measures into energy-efficiency programs.

- **Protect drinking-water quality through a combination of watershed protection, minimizing pollutants, water treatment, and contaminant monitoring.** Protecting water sources involves mapping the zone from which a well draws water, identifying contaminant sources in that area, and planning interventions to address each of them.

- **Adopt the International Plumbing Code and Uniform Plumbing Code to legalize greywater from showers and washing to be used to flush toilets and for irrigation.** Require residential buildings to be constructed to include greywater accommodations, including separate pipes for sink, shower, and bathtub drains, and an outdoor connection for laundry greywater to allow landscaping use.

- **Approach storm-water planning systematically and comprehensively.** Include representatives from all relevant departments—water, sewerage, storm water, and even transportation and fire departments—to reach the most efficient and widely accepted solutions. Such planning should look at public and private property, and should consider solutions based in buildings (green roofs or rain barrels), streets (vegetated curb extensions and sidewalk planters), and landscaping (rain gardens).

- **Base storm-water fees on how much of the property is developed, and charge high enough rates to incentivize porous surfaces.** Collect storm-water fees from all properties including parking lots, even if they're not connected to the drinking-water system. Waive or significantly reduce these fees if wetlands, rain barrels, green roofs, pervious pavement, or other green infrastructure are installed.

- **Require low-impact development for public works—especially street construction—and private development.** Educate architects and contractors about green infrastructure techniques, potentially through forums and competitions.

- **Help homeowners who want or are required to address their water usage through a one-stop-shop model that can connect owners with technical assistance, contractors, rebates, and incentives, and help ensure quality control.**

Energy benchmarking and disclosure laws for buildings

By requiring the disclosure of energy use in a building when it's listed for sale—or on a periodic basis—local governments can provide prospective occupants, lenders, and investors with essential information, allowing them to compare how much they're likely to spend on energy—similar to how car shoppers can compare miles-per-gallon ratings. This creates an incentive for high-performing buildings, and an even stronger disincentive to be in the bottom tier. Cities should:

- **Require commercial building owners to disclose the energy use of their buildings on a fixed schedule—yearly—or when a building is put on the market, either to prospective buyers only or the public.** Most cities apply the law only to buildings over a certain size.

- **Pass an ordinance requiring that a certified energy rater assess residential property energy prior to the sale, with the results disclosed to prospective buyers.** This information should be paired with recommendations on how to improve the property's efficiency and information about any local energy-efficiency loan programs. Properties should be exempted if they are less than 10 years old and recently completed energy upgrades, or if they are eligible for low-income weatherization.

High-performance building requirements

The design of the buildings in which we live, work, eat, shop, relax, and play, has a tremendous impact on our quality of life, our environmental and carbon footprint, and the economic viability of our communities. Building codes can provide basic protection for all of these things.

With ambitious codes, we can move beyond merely protecting consumers and firms to creating incentives for the social, health, environmental, and economic outcomes that we want. Building to these specifications also creates more jobs. Energy codes in particular can save building occupants money, increase the productivity and health of occupants, and reduce climate pollution—all contributing to local economic development. Putting in place strong building codes is dramatically more effective and less costly than retrofitting existing buildings.

At a minimum, states, or localities in home-rule states, should adopt the most recent International Code Council codes, especially the International Energy Conservation Code, or IECC, and ASHRAE standards—the 2012 IECC for residential and commercial buildings or ASHRAE Standard 90.1–2010 for commercial—which are updated on a three-year cycle. If possible, these should be exceeded. Local governments should:

- **Advocate for the ability to set requirements that exceed state codes and where possible, develop and adopt "stretch codes" or high-performance building codes.** It's important to train inspectors on the new codes, too.

- **Encourage and reward builders who choose to meet more stringent requirements.** Some examples of possible rewards are tools density bonuses, rebates, expedited permitting, fee waivers, tax credits, and grants.

- **Require all public buildings—including those leased—meet certain standards such the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, designations.**

- **Review building and zoning codes for any provisions that prohibit or inhibit common-sense sustainability measures.**

Energy-efficiency retrofits of buildings

Our buildings consume more than 40 percent of energy used in the United States.[16] We waste a tremendous amount of this energy on heating and air conditioning that escapes the building, illuminating vacant spaces, and constantly running machinery. Reducing this waste creates jobs for those increasing the efficiency of the building, saves money for the building operator, increases occupant productivity and health, and reduces climate pollution. Even more impressively, it's an idea that can pay for itself: You can capture the value of the energy wasted and use that to pay for the cost of the building upgrades over time. For promoting energy efficiency in buildings, cities should:

- **Set aggressive targets for reducing the energy use of government buildings.** Pair efficiency investment with renewable energy generation where it makes financial sense to do so and fund support for training operations and maintenance workers in green building practices. If possible, provide technical support and access to low-cost funding to other institutions or units of government to do the same.

- **Design and fund comprehensive residential energy-efficiency programs that include an attractive financing offer, marketing and outreach, a simple structure that makes every step as easy as possible for the homeowner, and verification of the work to make certain that homeowners are getting the savings they paid for.**

- **Create commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy, or PACE, programs and support efforts to reinstate residential PACE programs at the federal level.** Property Assessed Clean Energy creates a municipal special assessment that is placed on a property—similar to an assessment for a new sidewalk—tied to the property-tax bill, and with the same recourse in the event of nonpayment.

- **Implement on-bill energy-efficiency finance programs in regions with municipal utilities or friendly investor-owned or cooperative utilities, providing energy efficiency as a monthly surcharge on the energy bill.**

- **Consider establishing a green bank that invests in energy-efficiency projects in both the public and private sectors, helping bridge the gap between what the private sector is willing to fund and what project developers are seeking.**

- **Use public money to leverage private investment.** By providing a loan-loss reserve, whereby some portion of a potential loss is covered in case of default, governments can attract private financing to the energy-efficiency retrofit market at lower rates than would otherwise be available.

Renewable energy generation

The installation of clean and renewable generation technologies such as solar, wind, and geothermal, stimulates the local economy, builds climate resilience, improves public health, and creates good jobs. Cities are in an excellent position to directly invest in renewable generation and to foster the creation of residential and commercial renewable projects of varying scales. Cities should:

- **Set a goal for renewable implementation, such as "Our city will be powered with 50 percent clean energy by 2020," providing a clear direction for utilities, residents, and local businesses to follow.** Mapping out the steps necessary to achieve that goal is also important. Where possible, renewable generation can

and should be integrated with other city programs such as building leasing and construction, energy-efficiency retrofit programs, and wastewater processing.

- **Install renewable generation at city facilities, paying back the investment over time through the avoided utility costs.** New buildings should be constructed to a high-performance, low-energy use standard and then energy needs should be met with onsite renewable generation.

- **Pursue financing options such as lease-purchase agreements (a form of lease to own), performance contracting, or power purchase agreements (where the government provides space but a private entity owns the technology) where direct financing isn't possible.**

- **Provide customers of municipally owned utilities with clean energy, starting with simply investing in it instead of other generation sources.** These utilities may be able to develop utility-scale wind or solar, or they may purchase clean generation capacity. If possible, utilities should allow feed-in tariffs that allow energy producers of different sizes to sell renewable energy back to the grid at a production cost-based price—varying according to the production technology implemented. If a municipal utility does not exist, cities can consider buying or creating one.

- **Negotiate community choice aggregation programs where municipalities aggregate consumers who wish to purchase renewable energy and then bid on their behalf, while still using existing utilities for transmission and distribution.**

- **Create a renewable energy lending program for commercial and residential properties.** These programs can operate either as a government-operated revolving loan fund (where loan repayments are then reloaned in turn), or in conjunction with a lender (bank, community development financial institution, or credit union), potentially in conjunction with credit enhancements.

- **Create bulk-buy renewable energy programs for either city buildings or for commercial buildings or residences, aggregating the purchasing and thus lowering the price.**

Smart grid

The electric grid—a huge, complex power distribution system—is in many ways woefully out of date and increasingly unreliable, especially now that climate change means more severe weather events.

The proposed solution is to make the grid "smart" by upgrading power plants, transmission lines, electric meters, and appliances so that they can communicate with each other and with the grid managers to provide information about supply, demand, and power interruptions.[17]

While the smart grid is primarily a federal, state, and utility venture, local governments are certainly affected and may have a more central role, especially if they control a municipal utility. Cities wanting to work on a local smart grid can instruct their utility, or partner with a private utility, to:

- **Install smart meters for electric, gas, and water systems.** Upgrade the municipal utility infrastructure if applicable and give customers easy ways to track their use.
- **Institute "time of use" rates, which better reflect the actual cost of power at any given time.**
- **Work to integrate renewable generation and storage, including electric vehicles, into the grid.** Emphasize demand management through energy efficiency and technology.

Raise wage and benefit standards

All jobs are not created equal. To workers, the difference is clear between jobs with low wages, few benefits, unsafe working conditions and the like, and jobs with decent wages, decent health care and pension benefits, and safe and healthy working conditions.

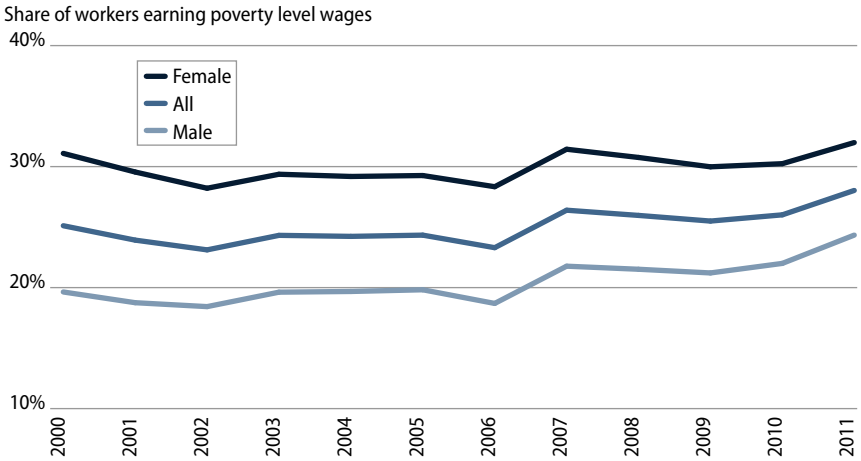
For cities, the distinction is clear as well. Low-road firms leave many workers still in poverty,[18] requiring public support for their health care and other basic needs. They also lower standards across the whole region, discouraging working training, unionization, and local reinvestment.

When more firms move onto the high road,[19] the entire community benefits. More workers attain stability through middle-class wages and the opportunity to develop skills to move up the career ladder; and more firms develop the capacity to compete on quality and innovation, essential for long-term success, instead of low costs.

FIGURE 3

Workers at the bottom of the labor market

The poverty-level hourly wage was $11.06 in 2011



Source: The State of Working America 12th edition.

Raise communitywide standards

Recent case studies confirm that raising wage floors and providing paid sick leave are critically important benefits for many workers.

Raising minimum job standards for all workers in a community—by setting baseline wage standards or a sick and safe leave ordinance—improves the ability of working people to provide and care for themselves and their families without having to draw on public assistance or risk losing their jobs. Recent case studies confirm that raising wage floors and providing paid sick leave are critically important benefits for many workers. These benefits do not lead to job losses, however, and in fact soon come to be valued as much by employers as by workers.[20] Moreover, they level the playing field for high-road businesses. Where not preempted by state law, cities should:

- **Enact municipal minimum-wage ordinances setting an appropriate minimum wage, indexing it to inflation, and providing a benefits supplement.**
- **Enact paid sick and safe leave ordinances that allow workers to take off work with pay when sick, caring for sick family members, or confronted with domestic or sexual violence.**
- **Enact wage-theft ordinances to ensure that workers actually receive the wages and benefits they are due.**

Raising job standards via government contracting, procurement, and service provision

Local governments do business with—and provide services and benefits to—many local firms. They can improve overall job standards in a community by only purchasing from, contracting with, and offering subsidies to firms that provide quality jobs.

Local tax dollars should not be used to subsidize low-road employers or to lower overall job standards. Nor should they be used to outsource government work absent evidence that the work will be performed better, and not just cheaper, by subcontracting. Requiring firms to meet minimum job standards ensures that contractors compete on the quality of service they provide and not on the wages they pay. Cities should:

- **Require all businesses receiving public contracts, leasing public property, receiving public franchises or commissions, or receiving public subsidies or tax expenditures to pay prevailing wages as determined by local collective bargaining to all comparable employees—service workers, as well as construction workers.** They should also pay a reasonable living wage, indexed to inflation and including a benefits supplement, to every employee not covered by a prevailing wage.

- **Adopt procurement and contracting policies that ensure the factories of companies that supply goods to the city are not sweatshops, regardless of where they are located.** Do not exempt businesses from job-standard requirements simply because they are "small" or "local."

- **Use cost-benefit analysis based on best-value contracting to ensure that contacts go to the contractors providing the best overall value to the city and not just the lowest bid.** This should be done before subcontracting government work. Municipalities should prepare an annual or biannual contracting plan that gives current employees and potential contractors adequate time to prepare quality proposals. They should also periodically assess all contracted services to determine if city employees could perform them more effectively and strengthen ethics rules to prevent improper influence in the awarding of government contracts.

- **Require new contractors to maintain the current—public or previous contractor's—workforce for a 90-day transition period and provide that workforce with right of first refusal to employment at the jobs they currently perform.**

Raising job standards via economic development

Large urban redevelopment projects—stadium districts, ports, mass transit, and airport-area projects, waterfront redevelopment, and the like—offer some of the best opportunities to create quality jobs for city residents. Developers invariably require city assistance and approvals and often benefit directly from city infrastructure spending, subsidies, or tax preferences. In exchange for city and neighborhood support for urban redevelopment projects, cities should require developers to:

- **Negotiate community-workforce agreements that include project labor agreements with local building trades unions and targeted hiring provisions designed to get low-income and neighborhood residents into construction careers.**

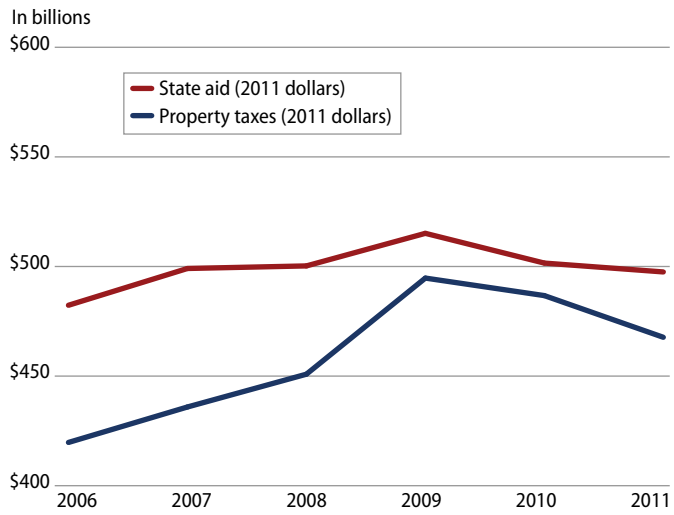
- **Negotiate community-benefits agreements with authentic representatives of affected communities to ensure that the benefits of redevelopment, including quality jobs, job training, and green-space amenities, are made available to local communities.**

Use progressive municipal revenue sources

Local government provides the majority of basic services for daily life: streets and sidewalks; garbage and recycling removal; water, sewer, and storm water systems; public transit; public housing; police, fire, and ambulance services; parks; libraries; public health; planning and zoning; education; and much more.

In the wake of the recent recession, local governments have been hit particularly hard. Rather than cut services to the bone and send cities into a death spiral, municipalities need to figure out ways to maintain revenues, allowing them to support services and quality of life and giving them resources to revitalize the local economy. We discuss here tools that cities can use to improve their revenue picture progressively.

FIGURE 4
Local revenue sources



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Quarterly Summary of State & Local Taxes

Progressive municipal tax policy

Cities that rely on the property tax were devastated by the decreases in property value that followed the collapse of the housing market. Despite state-imposed caps on revenue raising and well-funded antitax movements, local governments should consider a variety of reforms that raise revenues and make local tax structures more progressive. These reforms include:

- **If property taxes must be raised to fund vital city services, adopt progressive reforms to the property tax.** These might include: limiting business exemptions; allowing generous homestead deductions; allowing for property tax deferrals; or providing for property tax "circuit breakers," which offset property

taxes—usually by giving a credit—when a property tax bill exceeds a certain percentage of a taxpayer's income.[21]

- **Implement a payment in lieu of taxes, or PILOT, program for property owned by tax-exempt organizations.**

- **Keep regressive taxes such as the sales tax low, but since sales taxes are an essential revenue measure in most localities, apply them as widely as possible, including on Internet sales.** Minimize exemptions for favored industries, and consider sales tax exemptions on necessities for low-income individuals.

- **Where permitted by state law, institute city-level income taxes with a graduated, progressive rate structure, large standard deductions, and means-tested tax credits.** Consider creation of a city- or county-level earned income tax credit, or EITC, linked to federal and state earned income tax credits.

Value-capture strategies

Large public infrastructure investments can substantially increase the value of adjacent land, as improvements such as transportation, schools, and quality of life play an important role in location choices made by employers, employees, and the public. Capturing and monetizing the value of this benefit is a smart way to generate revenue for operations and maintenance of the facility or construction funding for new infrastructure. Local governments should consider a range of value-capture tools, including:

- **Sell or lease air rights to generate revenues; contribute to dense, urban, transit-oriented development; and eliminate eyesores such as open parking garages and rail yards.**

- **Reform and target tax increment financing, or TIF.** Reforms to consider include requiring reimbursement of subsidies—clawback—if developers do not fulfill their promises under redevelopment agreements; requiring cost-benefit analysis to take into account the effect of a tax increment financing on other taxing districts outside the sponsoring jurisdiction; establishing a strong TIF policy that makes greenfield development ineligible and aligns TIF district establishment with city goals; and establishing minimum job creation and wage guidelines for TIF projects.

- **Consider taxing land at a higher rate—split-rate taxation—to create an incentive to develop high-value downtown properties while reducing incentives for speculative land acquisition on the outskirts of cities.**

- **Use special assessment districts, or SADs, to fund basic infrastructure improvements, including energy efficiency and renewable energy measures.** The principle behind special assessment districts is that the infrastructure improvement will increase the property value within the district, so it is fair to ask the property owners within the district to pay for a portion of the improvement.

Pricing and user fees

User-generated revenue sources can help cities bridge funding gaps without raising sales or property tax rates. In addition to generating much-needed revenue for operations and maintenance of particular infrastructure systems, putting a price on city services can help manage finite system capacity, moderating demand with pricing based on peak-use periods.

User-generated revenue sources can help cities bridge funding gaps without raising sales or property tax rates.

The progressive approach to pricing and user fees means pricing goods and services so that service costs are equitably distributed among users and so price signals result in more moderate use. Progressive pricing also includes avoiding regressive fees whenever possible. In cases where low-income households may see an increase in cost as a result of a proposed fee, accommodations should be made. Among the measures cities should consider are:

- **Minimize regressive user fees on public services such as roads, public transit, and libraries (though see the section on progressive pricing structures for more on user fees).**

- **Implement conservation pricing for municipal water service, with a tiered structure wherein the water used within the first tier is the least expensive, and subsequent water use is charged at a higher rate or rates.**

- **Link storm water fees to impervious surface area, with assistance programs to help low-income customers pay their storm water bills.**

- **Use impact fees to encourage smart growth by linking charges to the actual impact a development will have on municipal services.**

- **Use transportation utility fees, or TUFs, wherein property owners are charged fees in proportion to their use of the municipal transportation network, to more equitably distribute the costs of the system and incent fewer car trips.**

- **Institute a vehicle miles traveled, or VMT, fee system as both a stable revenue source in an era of declining gas-tax revenues and as a demand-management tool.**

- **Use variable tolling (where localities have control of highway tolls), cordon charges, and dynamic pricing of city parking to both generate revenue and manage demand.**

Leveraging private capital

In a perfect world, cities would generate sufficient revenue and spend public money on public goods such as infrastructure. Cities, however, are reeling from an economic recession and are frequently hamstrung by federal and state tax codes. Therefore, it seems clear that private capital will be part of the solution for paying for needed infrastructure improvements. So the question facing cities and towns today is not so much whether to rely on private financing, but how best to integrate private financing and manage relationships with private firms to protect the public interest and settle on the best deals possible. Among the tools cities should consider are:

- **Judicious use of public-private partnerships, or P3s, to fund infrastructure projects.** This includes a dedicated team to manage the relationship and monitor the project(s), extensive project screening to identify the best projects, rigorous cost-benefit analysis using a life-cycle costing approach to weigh using a public-private partnership for funding versus traditional public finance tools, required wage and benefits standards, and transparent, competitive bidding processes.

- **Establishment of infrastructure financing facilities, such as the newly minted Chicago Infrastructure Trust, to match private capital with infrastructure needs and manage relationships.**

- **Piloting social impact bonds to use private investment to fund social benefits.**

Provide good housing for all

Shelter is one of the most fundamental human needs. Housing should be safe, well built, and healthy. It should also be affordable, which is generally defined as costing no more than 30 percent of a household's income.

Local governments should have a strong preference for housing that meets local needs. To identify those needs, cities should create comprehensive housing plans based on good data. Local governments should strive to create mixed-income neighborhoods centered on schools, with good access to employment, other basic needs such as food and recreation, and transit.

High-quality housing

High-quality building and maintenance standards, along with robust enforcement, help ensure that families have safe and healthy places to live. Building and maintenance codes can help ensure that a city's housing stock is kept in good condition, providing a safe environment for homeowners and renters alike. To promote high-quality housing, cities should:

- **Adopt strong building, fire, and property maintenance codes based on national and international standards such as the International Code Council and the National Fire Protection Association.**

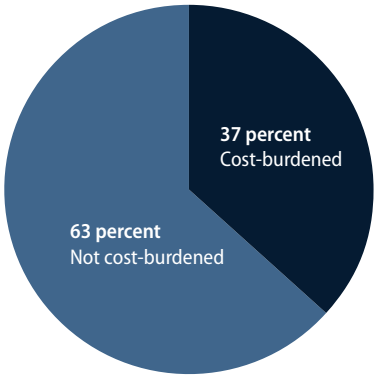
- **Begin a targeted, proactive building code inspection process on the basis of geography (neighborhoods with an active revitalization effort), type of building (rental properties), or both (neighborhoods with high densities of student rental**

FIGURE 5

Cost of housing a burden to U.S. households

Homeowners

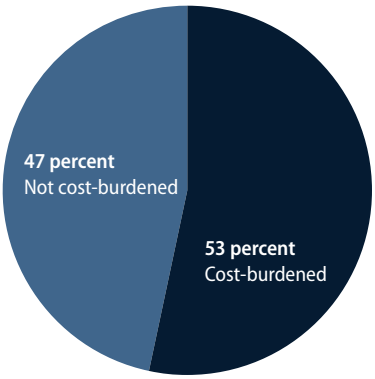
Percentage of mortgaged owners spending 30 percent or more of household income on selected monthly owner costs, 2011.



Note: Selected monthly owner costs are the sum of debt payments (e.g., mortgage or home equity loans), taxes, insurance, utility and fuel costs, and if applicable, other fees (e.g., condominium fees or manufactured home community lot rents).

Renters

Percentage of renter-occupied units spending 30 percent or more of household income on rent and utilities, 2011.



Source: 2011 American Community Survey. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2012.

properties). Use fees paid by rental property owners when registering their property to administer the inspection program.

- **Expedite building-inspection cases by creating a board of administrative-law judges to hear them.**

- **Establish a nuisance abatement process under which local governments may fix physical problems at a property and bill the owner for the costs if the owner is unresponsive to citations.** Local governments need to walk a fine line in addressing chronic nuisances, as too little enforcement allows the problem to continue, but excessive or punitive enforcement may cause the owner to abandon the property, which only exacerbates the problem.

- **For more difficult problems such as poor management practices and high levels of police calls, among others, establish thresholds that, once passed, trigger mandatory meetings between city staff and landlords and set deadlines for abatement actions.**

- **Develop clear standards for in-building accessory dwelling units, or ADUs, such as basement or attic apartments, and work with owners to bring these units to code.**

- **Provide free training and information for landlords on maintenance codes, fair housing law, best practices, and more.** Require all owners of rental property to register with the city and provide one or more contacts with the authority to respond to emergencies or health and safety issues. Consider an annual license for operators of multifamily properties that is granted only if the property is up to code and compliant with lead-paint rules, as well as revocable if the property owner knowingly allows illegal activity on the premises or fails to address code violations.

Fair housing

The Federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, country of origin, family status, and disability. Communities should take innovative steps to expand upon this requirement and commitment to fair housing for all. To do so, cities should:

- **Extend fair-housing protections to additional classes of people.** Consider prohibiting discrimination on the basis of source of income, arrest or conviction record, gender identity, sexual orientation, previous housing status, and citizenship status.

- **Fund fair-housing testing services and bring enforcement actions against housing providers who discriminate on the basis of protected classes.**

- **Conduct education and outreach on fair housing law and tenants' rights, especially in vulnerable or limited-English communities.**

Stabilize neighborhoods

America has been hit with a housing crisis on a scale unseen in recent history. As a result, cities across the country have been forced to deal with abandoned homes, deteriorating neighborhoods, and falling property values.

The costs of abandonment and foreclosure to communities are staggering. It's estimated that each foreclosure costs municipalities $34,000 in direct costs such as inspections, police and fire calls, and unpaid water and sewage bills.[22] A nearby foreclosure can reduce the value of a home by more than $7,000,[23] and surrounding homes can lose more than $200,000 in aggregate value when a neighbor goes into foreclosure.[24] To address this crisis, cities need to:

- **Fund foreclosure prevention counseling by nonprofits using community development block grants, or CDBGs, or other resources, and spread the word about prevention services via city communication methods such as a 311 service, a website, and notices in municipal bills, among others.** Cities can also participate in the Freddie Mac "Don't Borrow Trouble" campaign that includes public awareness, consumer education, and access to counseling and loan restructuring.

- **If the state uses a court-based foreclosure process, implement mandatory mediation programs between homeowners and banks.** Many localities have implemented mediation programs aimed at bringing homeowners and banks to agreement in an effort to avert foreclosures.

- **Prohibit banks or lenders that foreclose on residential properties from evicting tenants just because of the foreclosure.**

- **Set up early warning systems to track property- and neighborhood-level data that can signal disinvestment, deteriorating neighborhoods, or the development of problem properties.** Require vacant properties to be registered, and consider a fee or ongoing charges, including liens, for inspection and any abatement measures the city may take.

- **Offer affordable home improvement loans or mortgage refinancing, either directly or with partners such as community development finance institutions.**

- **Consider ways to lower household expenses and raise household income, particularly for low-income households.** These could include energy-efficiency programs, widespread availability of public transit, access to affordable healthy food, and instituting wage and benefit standards.

- **Encourage refinancing options for families whose home is underwater—meaning they own more on their home than it is worth.** Provide financial or other incentives for homeowners with government-sponsored entity loans to refinance through the Home Affordable Refinance Program. For privately owned loans for which there is no other available option, consider purchasing the mortgages, reducing the principal to what the home is actually worth rather than what is owed on the original mortgage, and refinancing them—if investors will not sell them, consider using eminent domain to obtain the mortgages.

- **Create a land bank that converts vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties into productive uses such as affordable housing, urban gardens, local businesses, and parks.** Grant the land bank the authority to streamline the tax-foreclosure process and to acquire property in code violation or under title dispute. Allow the land bank to sell properties at market rate to the private sector, or below market rate to projects that serve the public interest.

Preserve affordable housing

The availability of affordable housing has been declining for decades.[25] In addition, the current recession has hurt household incomes and altered what is affordable

for families. Nearly half of all renters pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing, and only one-third of low-income renters receive housing assistance.[26]

We need to preserve as much of the existing affordable housing stock as possible. But affordable units created with public funds are only required to remain affordable for a short time period, and for many that period is ending. In addition, the burst of the housing bubble left many property owners struggling financially, and has caused some landlords to go into default or foreclosure. Others have stopped investing in the upkeep and improvement of their properties. In some housing markets, "predatory equity" firms—speculators that promise impossibly high rates of return on housing investments—are buying affordable housing complexes with the intent of forcing out the current tenants and raising rents high enough to fulfill those promises. To reverse the trend and preserve affordable housing, cities should:

We need to preserve as much of the existing affordable housing stock as possible.

- **Institute a landlord registration or license program for all multifamily housing operators, and consider including all non-owner-occupied housing.**

- **Create a task force or staff initiative tasked with identifying and tracking multifamily properties with the potential for problems such as neglect, foreclosure, or predatory purchase.** Empower the task force or initiative to use a variety of tools, including staff expertise, existing programs and funding, political pressure, and tenant education and organizing, to convince landlords to invest in their properties or sell to someone who will.

- **Enact tenant education and protection ordinances such as just-cause eviction laws, and develop clear, accessible enforcement mechanisms for tenants' rights and programs to protect, educate, and empower low-income tenants.**

- **Require review of all demolition permits, especially those of existing housing stock, and provide a way to review postdemolition land use even if it is otherwise by right.** Consider a demolition tax or fee to help prevent the unnecessary demolition of useful buildings or a pattern of "demolition by neglect."

- **Consider a "no net loss" housing policy, where developers would be required to replace housing units before demolishing any, or to contribute to a fund that would do so.**

- **When affordable housing is demolished or converted to market rate, require landlords to assist low-income tenants in finding suitable, affordable housing.** This might include case management or even financial assistance.

- **If possible under state law, adopt a rehabilitation code that connects the level of improvements required in existing buildings with the scale of the initial project.** Even if small repairs trigger a requirement to bring the entire building up to the same code that new construction is subject to, there is a substantial disincentive to do those repairs.

- **Determine how many and which properties in your municipality are "timing out" of affordability, and develop a plan to maintain them as affordable as possible.** Tactics may include outright purchase by the city or a public housing entity, or partnering with nonprofit affordable housing providers or the tenants themselves to help finance a purchase.

- **Require that all affordable housing owners provide a minimum of one year's notice to the city and to each tenant before converting to market rate or to condominiums.** If a tenant's lease expires during the notice period, it must be extended until the end of that period.

- **Wherever possible, usually as a condition of funding, reserve the right of first refusal for the city, tenants, or both in the case of a conversion to market rate.** Allow tenants to assign their right to buy to an entity that has experience buying and running affordable housing.

- **Establish grant and loan programs to provide property owners with funds for rehabilitation or to refinance debt.** Require in return improved conditions for tenants and neighbors, and a guarantee of continued affordability. Consider tailoring financing programs to different classes of buildings or types of owners based on the building stock and housing market in the jurisdiction.

Create affordable housing

While preserving affordable housing is almost always easier and cheaper than building it new, the creation of affordable units is an important part of any comprehensive housing plan. And in the current economic climate, it is more impor-

tant than ever that families have access to affordable housing. There are distinct differences between local housing markets, and what works in one market may not work in another.

Cities should commit to the creation of affordable housing as a policy goal, and conduct a detailed assessment of the current housing stock and market in their region, in cooperation with neighboring and overlapping governments. Consider population trends, particularly the aging of the baby boomers, the balance between affordable rental and affordable homeownership, the location and type of housing created (size of building and number of bedrooms), and the level of affordability. Based on this, cities should develop a comprehensive housing plan that includes specific numeric goals for the creation of affordable housing units, based on the assessed need in their jurisdiction.

In general, affordable housing should be close to employment centers and public transit, located in mixed-income neighborhoods and in some cases buildings, distributed among school attendance areas, and consist of a variety of types—from mobile homes and backyard cottages, to large multifamily complexes, to specialized or supportive housing situations. Such a plan should be the basis for further decision making. In addition, cities should:

- **Work with other governments in the region.** Housing plans will be more effective if they are regional.

- **Develop specific policies that favor infill development, particularly on sites near employment and transportation options.** Consider identifying a preapproved floor plan or site layout to make the approval of neighborhood infill easier.

- **Ensure that the zoning code allows for the adaptive reuse of existing buildings as affordable housing.** Consider streamlined permitting for projects converting commercial buildings to affordable residential or live and work units.

- **Promote accessory dwelling units as a way to increase density in existing neighborhoods and create affordable housing.** Consider identifying a preapproved floor plan to make the creation of these units easier.

- **Develop a mandatory inclusionary zoning policy based on the specifics of the local housing market.** The policy should cover units owned and rented. Developments of all sizes should be covered, even buildings with few units. The percentage of affordable units required should be high—consider 20 percent. Developers willing to produce low- and very low-income housing should receive additional incentives. The units should remain affordable for the longest possible time, preferably in perpetuity. There should be some meaningful, nonmonetary incentive for developers who participate (see next bullet for examples).

- **Consider offering incentives to developers of affordable housing.** These could include reducing or waiving development or permit fees, granting additional area or height to projects, offering expedited permitting, waiving requirements such as parking minimums, or reducing lot sizes and setbacks. Any housing-development incentives should require permanent, or at least long-term affordability in return for the incentive.

- **Instruct public or community-development authorities that develop affordable housing projects directly or in partnership with private or nonprofit sector partners to coordinate with the area's housing plan, and to focus on providing the types of housing that the private market is least likely to produce on its own.** In most cases, this is likely to be units that are affordable for very low-income individuals and families, or supportive housing for particular demographics. Give priority for funding to projects that accept vouchers, or require them to do so as a condition of funding.

- **Encourage public-housing authorities to educate landlords on, as well as market, the housing choice voucher program—better known as Section 8—to increase acceptance.** Rigorously enforce laws prohibiting housing discrimination, particularly on the basis of source of income.

- **Encourage public-housing authorities to improve their communication with—and offer more assistance to—voucher recipients.** Public-housing authorities should simplify briefings and informational materials so that families can better understand their options, and they should provide better information about transportation, services, and amenities available in different neighborhoods coupled with information about available units. Some families may need more direct assistance locating housing or transportation during the housing search process to expand the geography of their search.

- **Pay attention to the availability or production of supportive housing.** Needed services may include case management, substance abuse and mental health counseling, child care, youth programing, gardening or urban agriculture, food banks, reentry services, adult education and English as a second language, or ESL, programs, employment programs, and financial literacy programs, among others. Pay particular attention to providing supportive housing for seniors, people with disabilities, and the recently or chronically homeless.

- **Ensure that housing cooperatives are allowed in residential areas under the zoning code and support shared equity housing to promote affordable homeownership.**

Fund affordable housing

The critical component in both preserving and creating affordable housing is funding. Publicly managed housing requires both upfront construction funding and ongoing operations and maintenance support. Private projects usually require a public contribution in the construction or rehabilitation phase, but may also need operating support, particularly for supportive housing. Other costs that should be considered are site acquisition and predevelopment costs.

While the funding available for affordable housing is generally insufficient to meet the need, it is available from a myriad of sources. To adequately fund affordable housing, cities can:

- **Use federal funds such as community development block grants, or CDBG, and HOME to meet the housing plan's goals.** Target these funds to the highest-need housing, which will usually be for low- and very low-income families.

- **Create a segregated, dedicated affordable housing trust fund that can only be used for the preservation and creation of affordable housing.** Allowed uses should match up with the goals of the local government housing plan, and funds should be allocated accordingly. Funds can be used for grants, loans, or both. Identify a reliable source of funding to capitalize and replenish the trust fund.

- **Consider the following sources to capitalize the affordable housing trust fund: special levies, bond issuances, air rights, proceeds from sales of municipal property, revenue from fees, and real estate transfer taxes.**

- **Cities with a significant tourism industry that produces high numbers of low-wage jobs should consider a tourism or hotel and motel room tax to fund workforce housing.**

- **Consider using tax increment financing, or TIF, to support affordable housing.** In addition to supporting eligible, tax-generating projects that contain affordable housing with tax increment financing, set aside a portion of the increment generated in TIF districts to fund affordable housing.

House the homeless

Homelessness is a national problem that affects people of all backgrounds. Based on the latest data available, there are more than 600,000 homeless individuals on any given night, almost 20 percent of whom are chronically homeless. More than a quarter of these people have a severe mental illness, and almost 35 percent of them have chronic substance abuse issues. In addition, more than 10 percent of them are veterans. Over the course of a year, more than 1.5 million individuals will be homeless.[27] The number-one reason for homelessness is the lack of affordable housing, exacerbated by individual challenges such as substance abuse, disability, and mental and physical health.

The costs of homelessness to society are very high. Medical treatment and hospitalization, police intervention and incarceration, and emergency shelter expenses add up quickly, making homelessness very expensive for the local governments who must deal with it. In response, cities can:

- **Develop a comprehensive plan using data on the local homeless population and the services available to them.**

- **Ensure that your community has services that connect vulnerable populations with emergency services, cash assistance, and case management.** Offer emergency rental-assistance programs to help families avoid eviction and subsequent homelessness.

- **Develop a plan to house individuals in vulnerable populations, particularly those leaving institutions such as prison, foster care, or treatment for mental illness.** Prevention programs should work with institutions to create a clear path to housing for these individuals that includes case management, access to services, and housing assistance.

- **Consider creating a housing support center to coordinate resources from various city departments into a one-stop shop for housing needs.**

- **Provide emergency shelter for the homeless.** Shelters should, whenever possible, offer clients a range of services such as substance abuse and mental health counseling and referrals, education and job-training assistance, criminal justice re-entry services, storage for belongings, laundry, and so forth. They also should be well-connected to other prevention and housing services. Contracts should be structured to give shelters incentives to move people into permanent housing while discouraging shelters from dealing only with the easiest clients by encouraging them to serve those with the most barriers to housing. Shelters should be discouraged from using time limits or other sanctions that limit the time in shelter but do not contribute to rehousing.

- **Focus on rapid rehousing of individuals in shelter and provide services to recently rehoused individuals to ensure their long-term stability.**

- **Adopt a "housing first" strategy that removes barriers to housing, such as requiring drug and alcohol treatment, and provides access to services on site or via other mechanisms.**

Strengthen the education system

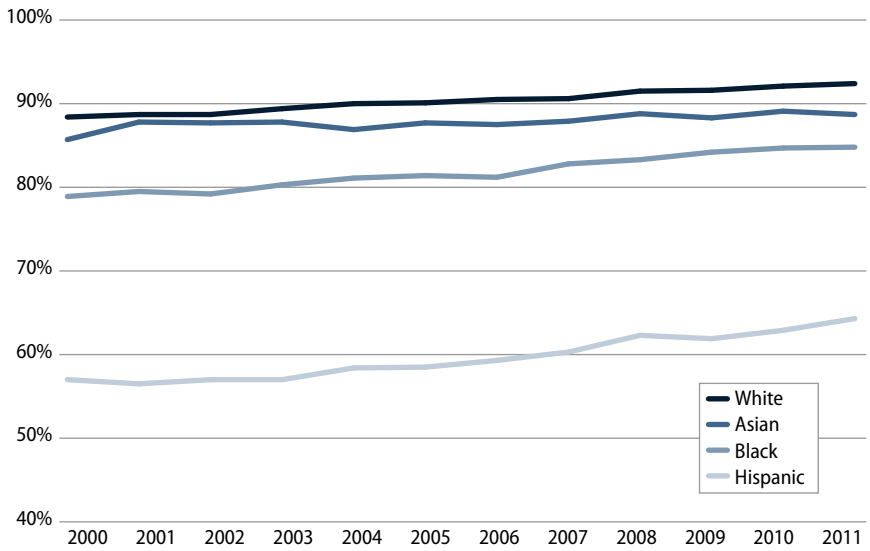
Strong public education is a lynchpin of strong cities. Excellent schools attract young families, build the skills of future workers, and reduce costs of social services and criminal-justice systems. Weak schools undermine property values, reinforce ruinous inequality, and provide weaker human capital for future development. School locations directly drive housing markets, neighborhood quality, and transportation systems.

City governments have little direct control over this critical infrastructure but must find ways to connect with it, given the intertwined fates of schools and cities. Fortunately, throughout the nation, partnerships and innovation are bringing new models and success. Starting with pre-K programs and moving onto innovations to connect youth to higher education, cities are using new partnerships with school districts, teachers, parents, unions, and the business community to build excellence in education.

FIGURE 6

The educational achievement gap

Percentage of persons ages 25 and over with a high school degree or equivalent



Source: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_008.asp

School districts can and should implement many of the other policies recommended in this summary. For example:

Cities are using new partnerships with school districts, teachers, parents, unions, and the business community to build excellence in education.

- **The siting of schools should incorporate good land-use policy.**
- **School districts, like any other building owner, can save money with energy efficiency, renewable energy, water efficiency, and good storm water management.**
- **The health of students affects their educational performance, and schools can improve the health of young people.**
- **School districts are major employers, and they should consider policies to improve job quality.**

In addition, school districts should be proactive about abating health hazards (such as PCBs, asbestos, lead, and toxic mold) in school buildings and ensuring a sufficient operational budget to maintain safe and healthy school environments.

Promote and support early child care and education, including universal pre-K

The foundation for learning is established in the earliest years. But all too often working families with young children struggle to find high-quality and affordable care and education. Child care assistance can help, yet federal and state assistance serves only one in six eligible children.[28] Meanwhile, the child care and early-learning workforce—which remains a key career opportunity for many women—is one of the lowest paid in the country, making it difficult to recruit and retain a stable and skilled workforce.

The benefits of investing in our young children are clear. Early childhood education is a critical investment that pays off in communities. And failing to invest in quality early education costs more in the long run.[29] The National Institute for Early Education Research has found that high-quality early learning programs could cut the achievement gap by 40 percent.[30] In terms of economics, a universal pre-K program would result in annual benefits exceeding annual costs within nine years of program implementation. Overall benefits of a national program could exceed costs by an 8-1 ratio, based on budget savings, increased earnings, and reduced crime.[31] Furthermore, universal pre-K programs have significant public support: Recent polls demonstrate a majority of Americans favor candidates and programs that support universal pre-K.[32] Cities should promote and support universal pre-K and take other steps to invest in early care and education such as:

- **Coordinate with state, school district, and early childhood education leaders to create a framework for universal early learning.** This framework should prioritize an integrated approach to early care and learning for children from birth to age 5. It should recognize the needs of working families for full-day, full-year services and include city-based strategies to establish and measure success on the pre-K to third grade educational pipeline.

- **Work with key partners to improve the knowledge, skills, and education of early care and education teachers.** Cities should support and reward teachers for improving their skills and qualifications, raise compensation and use other efforts to decrease turnover and stabilize the workforce, and bring postsecondary education systems and early childhood education systems in a region together to measure and build the skills of the early childhood education workforce.

- **Support and promote parent and family involvement in pre-K education programs.**

Partnerships to strengthen K-12 education

Great public education is an essential element of equal opportunity and democratic citizenship. No doubt, there are significant federal and state constraints on funding and innovation in the system. Even so, communities can improve the quality of education, the performance of students, and eliminate the achievement gap that confronts even relatively strong school systems. Local governments should work with school districts to:

- **Enlist teachers in finding innovative solutions to school problems by building and supporting successful, long-term partnerships between districts, teachers, and their unions.**

- **Enlist parents' involvement in and commitment to schools and their children's success.**

- **Focus on retaining new teachers by building supportive workplaces and career pathways for teachers.**

- **Build a strong community commitment to schools with teachers, parents, administrators, unions, and community leaders all focused on solving problems.**

Strengthen city-school partnerships to increase the reach of schools

Schools are an incredible community resource but can become even more valuable if their use extends beyond the traditional bell schedule. Increasing learning time by extending the school day and/or year, and using afterschool and summer programming, can help eliminate achievement gaps. Parental participation, enrichment opportunities, attendance, and test scores can all be enhanced with more learning time in and outside of school, and investment in out-of-school programs for youth can help reduce the community's costs of juvenile-justice systems. Cities should:

- **Partner with school districts to support and fund a redesigned and expanded school day or year as well as afterschool and summer programming.** Work together to coordinate easy access and transportation to programs.

- **Support programs that get chronically absent students back into school.** In particular, cities must ensure that truancy reduction policy is not contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline.

- **Ensure that students get to school safely and efficiently.** Work with schools to plan and build safe walkable and bikeable routes to school and to ensure that transit systems serve the needs of students.

- **Implement programs to reduce hunger and to provide healthy food in and around schools.** This includes getting every deserving child access to all benefits available under the National School Lunch Program.

- **Partner with school districts to allow school buildings to serve community and civic purposes.** These include polling places, community meetings, sites for disseminating information from city agencies, neighborhood centers, or delivery points for social work or public health services.

Focus on success for disconnected youth

Too many youth—ages 16 to 24—lack connection to employment or education. These "disconnected" youth suffered in the Great Recession as employment opportunities evaporated, and these jobs have been slow to return. Local governments can direct attention, resources, and community innovation to solving this disconnect and getting these youth on a path to success in a number of ways:

- **Provide the leadership and framework to establish local collaboration and accountability to this population.**

- **Support targeted investments to keep kids in school.** Local governments can play a key role in providing youth with the opportunity to access the support they need to stay in school by funding targeted outreach, onsite support in schools, and mentoring programs.

- **Connect youth to education relevant for learning and earning.**

- **Support career academies to connect at-risk youth more quickly to college.**

Build healthy cities

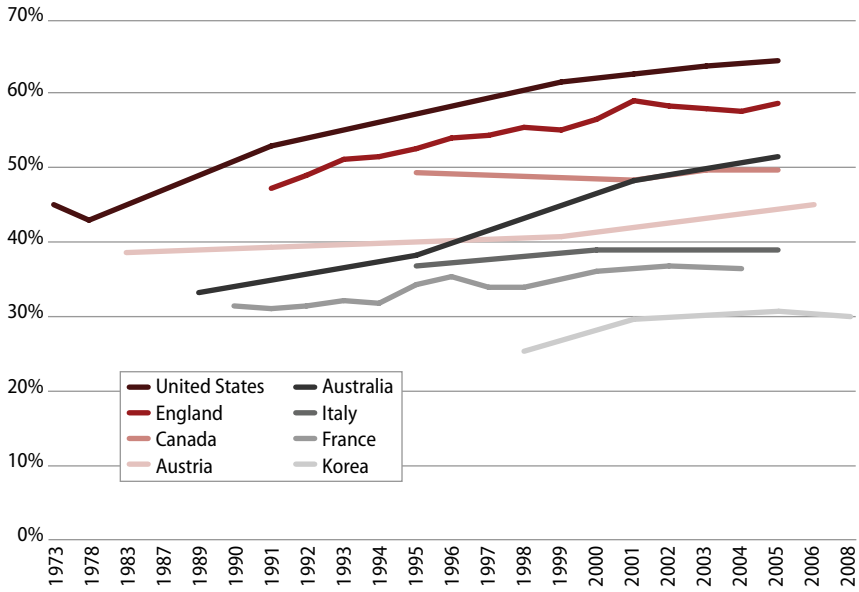
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that chronic diseases account for about 75 percent of health care costs and 70 percent of deaths.[33] In light of this epidemic, disease prevention, principally through health and wellness promotion, is critically important.

While the causes of chronic disease reach deep into our society and far beyond the purview of local government, innovative leaders can fight chronic disease by using health as a framework for planning, policies, and decision making. Local governments should prioritize funding and resources to tackle this collective, structural health problem. Each of the strategies in this section offers innovative and effective tools for local governments to invest in the health of their populations.

FIGURE 7

Obesity rates around the world

Percent of population that is overweight and obese



Source: OECD analysis of national health survey data.

Develop a comprehensive, citywide wellness plan

In recent years, many cities got creative to promote health and wellness, and reduce and prevent chronic diseases among their residents. They coordinated with stakeholders on communitywide health goals and placed an emphasis on healthy eating, active living, and physical activity. "Wellness" is defined as promoting good physical and mental health. It spans much of the work of city government, from public infrastructure, to transportation, to community programming. Cities can:

- **Incorporate wellness into all aspects of city planning.** Wellness is a framework for efforts ranging from building sustainable housing, to enhancing walkability and public spaces for physical activity, to making school menus healthier.

- **Focus stakeholders on a shared, well-defined, communitywide goal, setting a common agenda and sharing progress.** Use evidence-based practices to increase opportunities to be active and eat healthier. Examples of proven strategies include creating a healthy restaurant scorecard and a citywide walking guide.

Redefine public health to focus on health in all policies

Progressive local governments understand that most areas of their work affect public health. They are therefore redefining traditional public health roles to focus on prevention and planning to address the pressing health crisis of chronic, noncommunicable diseases and the ways in which economic conditions, the built environment, and social systems impact health. Cities should:

- **Use evidence and data to support a broader, more inclusive definition of public health.** Cities have an enormous range of data to help identify areas of greatest need, and to promote effective interventions to address specific needs. The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps are a tremendous tool for guiding efforts, but they can also motivate local government action.

- **Use impact assessments to determine a proposed policy's effect on population health.** This process ensures that health staff have a voice in planning, which can increase health benefits and equity concerns in the development process.

Increase access to healthy, local food

Within cities, residents face stark disparities in their access to fresh, healthy produce, with low-income communities often experiencing the most limited access to this produce. Inequitable access to food perpetuates poor health among low-income populations and undermines efforts to improve public health and promote community. While locating fresh food within a community does not, on its own, directly enhance the health of neighborhood residents, it is a critical component of a comprehensive effort to improve health. To increase access to healthy food, cities can:

- **Diversify farmers' market customers and vendors.** Implement low-cost strategies to increase the number of markets such as providing affordable public land and free advertising, and ensuring zoning codes allow and protect markets.

- **Support local markets' efforts to establish and promote the use of electronic benefits transfer, or EBT, at markets or fresh food vendors.** Cities should connect fresh food vendors with U.S. Department of Agriculture resources to expand the use of an electronic benefits transfer, which increases market sales and provides fresh foods to EBT customers. Cities should also pursue opportunities to supplement EBT use with widely available "matching" programs for EBT customers shopping at fresh produce stands.

- **Adopt or update zoning and land-use policies that authorize and protect growing produce in urban areas.** Cities can support urban farms by making public land available (for free or at nominal cost); supporting zoning to allow for agricultural innovation, such as rooftop and vertical farms; and encouraging or authorizing urban farmers to sell produce locally.

- **Support community gardens, either through funding, making municipal land and water available, or partnering to operate a garden program.**

- **Expand traditional retail food options via grant and loan programs to encourage supermarket development.** Options here include providing local entrepreneurs with on-the-job training and education to open and operate successful grocery stores; providing convenient public transportation to grocery stores; offering education and support for bodega owners to expand their existing selection to include healthy options; and working with nonprofits and local vendors to bring fresh food directly to underserved areas through mobile produce markets.

Workplace wellness programs

Employers face continually increasing, unsustainable health care costs, as well as an employee population affected by heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. After years of shifting costs to employees and reducing their overall health care benefits, many employers look to wellness programs as a proven, effective means of retaining quality workers, improving employee health, and reducing health care costs. Such programs are an excellent use of resources for

A holistic workplace wellness program focuses on prevention and promotes physical, behavioral, and mental health.

public employees. They result in healthier, more effective workers, many of whom provide direct service to the public, as well as reduced absenteeism. Cities should:

- **Implement a comprehensive wellness program for employees.** A holistic workplace wellness program focuses on prevention and promotes physical, behavioral, and mental health. Common program components are health risk assessments, which are often tied to lower employee premiums; behavior modification, using incentives for participation; nutrition education and access to healthy food at worksites; and chronic disease management.

- **Improve accommodations for breastfeeding mothers.** This promotes wellness and enhanced morale for working mothers of young children, and reduces their absenteeism because of lower rates of illness among breastfed infants.

Reducing childhood obesity through physical activity

Childhood obesity is perhaps the most pressing health issue in today's society. More than a third of the nation's youth are either overweight or obese.[34] Along with access to healthy food, physical activity is critical to prevent and reduce obesity. Local governments should prioritize funding and resources to provide opportunities for physical activity for children that are easy to access, in a safe environment, and supported by increased programming. In particular, they should:

- **Focus on pedestrian safety to promote active school transportation, including implementing traffic-calming and complete-streets policies.** Local governments can partner with the Safe Routes to School, or SRTS, program to adopt a framework and funding plan for individual schools.

- **Ensure easy access to crime-free recreational space.** The long-term, low-cost Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, or CPTED, approach enhances the aesthetics of public spaces, encourages social interaction, and, most importantly, prioritizes safety.

- **Provide physical education and other support services to complement the availability of safe recreation space.** Many cities have created innovative programming, using limited space, through "play streets," when cities close blocks or entire streets to traffic and provide programming.

Protect civil rights

The vast majority of civil rights issues are controlled by federal and state legislation and regulation. But cities have a vital role to play in the laws and policies ensuring the protection of public health, safety, and general welfare; maintaining good open government; and providing every individual with an equal opportunity to participate fully in city life.

Cities not only play a significant role in eliminating discrimination, but also in eliminating less obvious barriers to social and political participation related to real or perceived fears and concerns, as well as the unseen or misunderstood needs of residents. Cities should be proactive in their support of community members, in particular of those who may find it difficult to express their concerns. And they should actively seek community feedback to ensure that all areas of the community are represented.

Safeguarding the rights of city residents and ensuring equal treatment and universal access to city life is critical to maintaining a vibrant and successful community and encouraging a thriving local economy. In order to accomplish this, cities must be proactive in eliminating discrimination at the local level and protecting against destructive practices at the federal and state levels. At the same time, they should encourage residents to participate in proactive policies, services, and programs, with the goal of greater access to services and job opportunities and universal integration into city life.

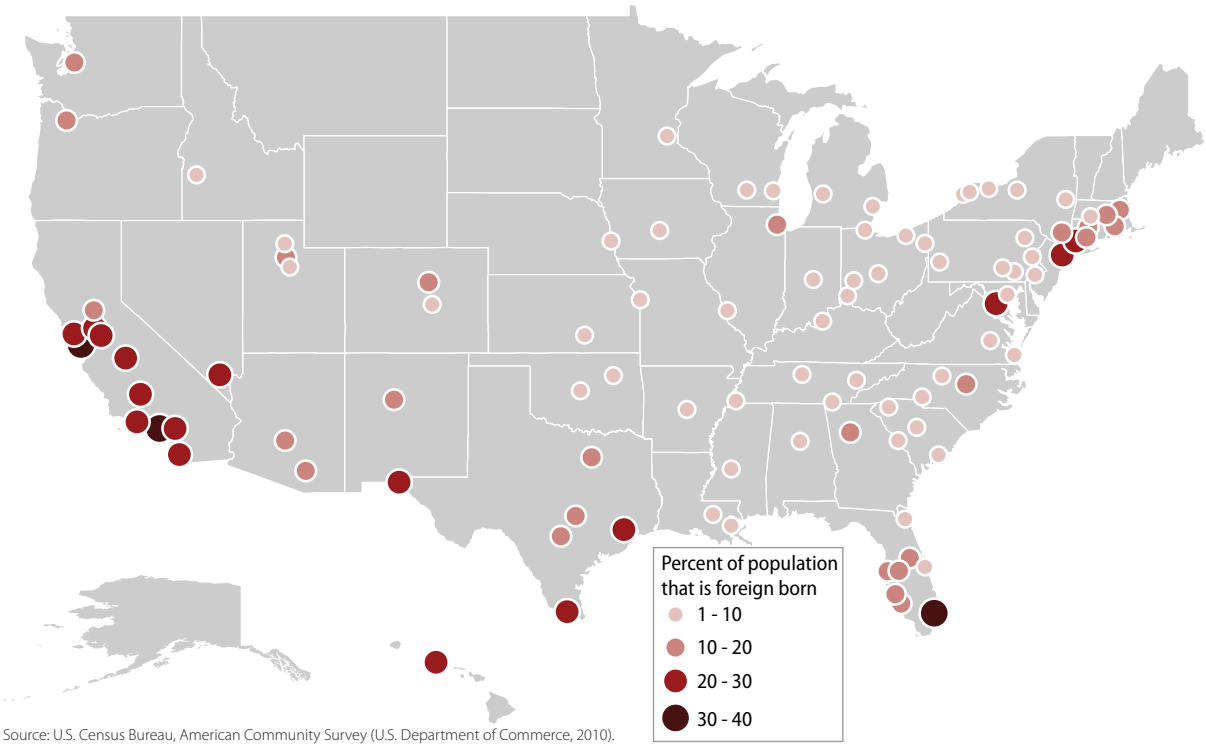
Voting

Over the past several years, numerous states have taken steps that effectively limit the right of citizens to cast a vote in a fair and open election. For instance, states require photo identification to vote, place restrictions on early voting, eliminate same-day registration, and draw district lines that greatly reduce the power of an individual vote.

FIGURE 8

A nation of immigrants

Percent of the foreign-born population in the top 100 metropolitan areas by population, 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010).

Though voting laws are primarily determined at the state and federal levels, municipalities can combat some of the current regressive state practices. Cities should:

- **Ensure every resident's right to vote by providing sufficient polling locations, elections staff, and ballots.**

- **Create an independent bipartisan or nonpartisan commission charged with overseeing the redistricting process.** Districts should be drawn to ensure full representation of racial and ethnic minorities, but without further segregating them politically. Neighborhoods and communities of interest should be kept intact, and the districts should remain neutral with respect to political parties, incumbents, and other candidates. Commissions should hold public hearings and encourage public comment and input before, during, and upon completion of district drawing.

- **Locate polling places in close proximity to public transportation and population concentrations for ease of access.** Polling for local, state, and federal elections should be in the same location if possible to lessen confusion.

- **Implement campaign-financing programs that provide public funds while requiring spending and contribution limits.** Additionally, place limits and prohibitions on corporate contributions and contributions from businesses that hold city contracts.

- **Engage in robust voter-education efforts.** These could include outreach programs involving presentations, publication of voting and voter-registration guides, and constant updating of websites.

- **Eliminate barriers to voting.** Offer extended hours for early voting in addition to absentee ballots, simplify the absentee voting process where possible, and provide ballots and translation services in multiple languages at polls.

- **Consider allowing residents to vote at any polling place—not just their own—to increase turnout.**

Open government

Citizen access to government information and functions plays an essential role in maintaining a vital and responsive democracy. Adopting an open-government strategy can significantly benefit cities by enhancing civic engagement, increasing government accountability, improving policy, and improving the city's ability to respond to constituents. To ensure open government, cities should:

- **Pass sunshine ordinances mandating robust access requirements for public hearings and records.** Require clerk's offices to not only maintain and make available records, but also to respond to information requests in a timely manner, providing the greatest amount of information and assistance possible. Also establish strong enforcement requirements, including an oversight committee or agency division tasked with monitoring and enforcing the ordinance provisions.

- **Require all city departments, agencies, and programs to establish open data policies and public partnership initiatives for policy, city service, communication development and improvement, and problem solving.**

- **Establish social-media policies for agencies and departments.** These should designate specific staff to handle posting and interagency coordination, and establish and clearly post a comment policy for online conduct.

- **Conduct robust public-engagement processes.** These should go far beyond the standard public hearing model and reach out especially to underrepresented communities.

Enforcing employment laws

The scale of wage theft in this country is one indication of how flagrantly low-road employers violate even the minimal protections the law provides for American workers.

Federal and state enforcement of employment law has been scaled back dramatically over the past three decades in the face of tight budgets along with outright hostility toward workers' rights from some elected officials. Furthermore, the working world has drastically changed since most of the employment law enforcement apparatus was created 50 or more years ago, and traditional means of enforcing workplace law are less effective. Very few workers, and even fewer low-wage or immigrant workers, have the time, money, or wherewithal to pursue legal remedies against unscrupulous employers in small claims court.

Increasingly, low-road employers have come to see obeying employment law as optional. The scale of wage theft in this country is one indication of how flagrantly low-road employers violate even the minimal protections the law provides for American workers. To combat this problem, local governments can:

- **Pass wage-theft ordinances.** These include late payment fines and penalties targeting employers who are chronically late in paying wages due, an agency requirement to investigate high-violation industries, and outreach programs that work with existing community groups to reach the most vulnerable workers.

- **Pass a minimum-wage and job-standards ordinance that establishes an enforcement office.** Where there is no home-rule authority, cities should still fund an enforcement office.

Public safety and policing reforms

A strong economy requires a safe environment. Building and maintaining successful businesses in communities where people do not feel safe is extremely difficult.

Overall crime rates in the United States have been declining for the past 20 years, and some U.S. cities are safer now than they have been in 50 years.[35] But progress

has been uneven, and even in cities that have seen large reductions in crime, some neighborhoods struggle with the perception or reality that they are not safe.

Local law enforcement must strike a careful and often precarious balance between protecting the public safety and safeguarding individual rights and freedoms. Most recently, local law-enforcement agencies have adopted community policing models, encouraging interaction, communication, and partnership with community members to achieve public safety goals.

But unacceptably high rates of racial profiling continue despite efforts at all levels of government and consistent public outcry. Law-enforcement officials continue to push the boundaries of the Fourth Amendment. Additionally, review of officer performance and disciplinary actions continue to be selective and ineffective in many jurisdictions.

Meanwhile, federal agencies, backed by federal legislation, have adopted unprecedented policies and practices such as the Patriot Act, overstepping traditionally held views of privacy and individual security. What's more, in 1980, 1 in every 156 males aged 18 to 64 was in prison or jail—by 2008 the rate was 1 in 48. The United States now puts people away at a rate of 50 percent higher than when the U.S. crime rate peaked in 1992.[36]

Because housing is segregated by race and class, a small number of communities—almost all poor, mostly African American, inner-city neighborhoods with high unemployment rates—are disproportionately harmed by the strategies that continue to dominate criminal justice. In response, cities should adopt urban public safety strategies that provide everyone with a safe, prosperous neighborhood. In particular, cities need to:

Adopt resolutions in opposition to the Patriot Act and subsequent legislation, and other legislation or policy restricting the liberties of community members.

- **Establish community-policing policies, including training for officers on community-policing principles and best practices.**

- **Adopt laws banning race as a factor in police investigations.** Mayors' offices should work with city police departments to establish training on stereotypes in policing and partner with organizations in community outreach to facilitate sharing perspectives.

- **Establish citizen-review boards for law enforcement.** Alternatively, cities should establish an independent investigation department that oversees review of law enforcement.

- **Establish clear requirements on searches.** Officers should be required to inform individuals of their right to refuse a search and be explicit about when an officer may perform a search without consent under the law.

- **Adopt laws and policies requiring officers to identify themselves during law-enforcement-related contact with community members.** This includes not only wearing nameplates and providing a name, rank, shield number, and command when asked, but also requiring officers to provide the reason for the stop or interaction and contact information for comments or complaints.

Immigration enforcement

Until recently, it was generally accepted that only the federal government had the authority to enforce immigration law. Over the past several years, however, local law enforcement agencies have begun to play a significant role in immigration enforcement through the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, and the Secure Communities, or S-Comm, program.

Local enforcement of immigration law often comes at a very high cost to cities, local law enforcement agencies, and the communities they are committed to protect and serve. It imposes huge financial burdens on already struggling jurisdictions, and erodes trust from immigrants that may already distrust or fear law enforcement officers. The result is an unwillingness to contact law enforcement even in emergency situations or when a crime has been committed, which not only decreases the rate at which crime is reported and isolates immigrants from city services and aspects of social life, but also highlights immigrant communities as targets for crime. Cities should:

- **Pass laws and adopt policy limiting the situations in which law enforcement will comply with ICE detainer requests under the S-Comm program.** This includes only holding individuals who are charged or have been convicted of serious felony offenses and requiring the Immigration and Customs Enforcement to pay for expenses associated with complying with hold requests.

- **Adopt policy supporting the use and purposes of the U Visa to clearly convey the city's position to law enforcement.** The U Visa, created under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000,[37] is an immigration benefit[38] that offers a visa to immigrants who provide ongoing assistance to law enforcement in the investigation of a crime. Mayors' offices and police departments should establish clear policies and protocols for U Visa applications, including procedures governing law enforcement interaction with community members who are possibly eligible for a U Visa, but have yet to apply.

- **Provide training sessions on deferred action, the program that allows certain young undocumented immigrants to request deferral of deportation.** Also provide information on organizations with the resources to assist with the deferred action process.

Overcoming barriers to social participation for immigrants

Over the past several decades, the United States has seen huge increases in immigration and immigrant populations. Unsurprisingly, immigration has become a prominent political issue at every level of government.

But with the exception of a few recent actions, the federal government's reaction to the growing immigrant populations has been increasingly hostile, whereas reactions to these changes have been quite varied at the state and local levels. In the absence of a national immigrant-integration policy, cities must take a central role in developing and implementing immigrant-integration programs. To do so, they can:

- **Develop immigrant-friendly communication policies.** These include providing translation services for all city services and activities, in addition to translated documents and websites.

- **Establish an office of immigrant affairs or a similar multipurpose agency.** This office would serve immigrants and address integration challenges, including legal immigration status.

- **Provide municipal identification cards or agree to accept other forms of ID such as a national ID issued by a foreign government or an ID issued by certain nongovernmental organizations.**

- **Prohibit inquiry into an individual's immigration status.** Cities should also establish policies prohibiting reporting of status unless mandated by law, denial of city services on the basis of immigration status, and law enforcement from requesting documents for the sole purpose of determining immigration status.

- **Adopt a comprehensive equity policy for every city agency and department.** These policies should extend to every demographic to ensure principles of equity in opportunity and access to services, programs, and events for all residents are embedded in city governments.

Hiring practices

Throughout U.S. history, jobs in municipal government have provided a pathway for members of immigrant and minority ethnic communities into the middle class.

Although federal law now prohibits discrimination in municipal employment, certain hiring practices still block many minorities from municipal employment. Beyond the push from federal laws, city managers are increasingly improving hiring practices because doing so can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of local government, and even help spur improvements in private-sector hiring practices. To promote a fair and open hiring process, cities should:

- **Require the demographics of the municipal government workforce to be monitored and compared to the city population and the relevant labor market.** Cities should work with human resource staffers where the workforce does not adequately reflect the diversity of the community.

- **Adopt comprehensive laws mandating steps to remedy the effects of racial bias and racism on employment opportunities for people of color.**

- **Establish a policy for all city hiring to prohibit inquiry into an applicant's criminal history until they are a finalist for a position, and then only for related offenses.**

- **Establish policies such as project labor agreements and community workforce agreements, which leverage city-contracting power to ensure contractors follow specified best practices.**

- **Establish first-source hiring policies as part of economic assistance.** This requires recipients to look first to local sources of labor when they hire new workers. Cities should also incorporate some type of enforcement mechanism into agreements with beneficiaries.

Americans with Disabilities Act compliance

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 36.3 million noninstitutionalized people in the United States, or roughly 12 percent of the population, live with a disability.[39] People with disabilities have the right to participate equally in the world around them. Yet they often face physical, communication, attitudinal, systemic, or other barriers as a part of daily life.

The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, is a comprehensive civil rights law that requires cities to make "reasonable modifications" to ensure access to government services, programs, and activities. But a city is not required to make modifications resulting in a fundamental alteration in the nature of the service, activity, or program or undue financial and administrative burdens.

Beyond the explicit requirements listed, cities should take several steps to effectively carry out policies and meet the spirit of ADA's requirements. Cities should consider how current policies, procedures, and practices may create intangible barriers to accessing services. Most importantly, cities should view Americans with Disabilities Act compliance as an ongoing process of adaptation and education focused on understanding and making sure every individual is able to fully participate in community life. Cities should:

- **Remain up to date on current assistive technology and consider all possible barriers to program access.** This includes considerations of individuals with hidden disabilities when establishing ADA policy. In addition, establish policy to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to public service.

- **Go beyond ADA requirements to ensure that physical barriers do not prevent individuals with disabilities from meaningful participation in city services, programs, and activities.**

- **Provide training to city employees, and training and outreach to community members before, during, and after creation of policy.** Hold open meetings to receive input from members of the community during policy development.

Gun control

Almost 1 million people have died due to gun homicides, accidents, or suicides over the past three decades,[40] costing an estimated $2 billion per year for treating gunshot wounds.[41]

The cost of gun violence is not borne equally by the general population, either. In 2007 black men ages 15 to 34 were 15 times more likely to be victims of criminal homicide than white non-Hispanic men in the same age group. Homicide is the leading cause of death for this group, and is now the second-leading cause of death for Hispanic males in this age group.[42]

Federal and state legislators have done little to address the crime statistics; instead they have passed pro-gun laws and allowed gun control laws to expire. This "hands off" policy has shifted the cost of gun control to local governments. Making matters worse, recent Supreme Court rulings have greatly limited the regulatory powers of cities. In addition to court rulings, state legislatures have been making it more difficult for many cities to implement gun control laws. Even in this environment, cities can do the following to reduce gun violence and regulate firearms:

- **Adopt strong firearm sale and possession regulations.** These should limit the sale and possession of firearms to certain areas, and require the reporting of lost or stolen guns.

- **Require all firearms sold to be equipped with microstamp technology, beginning in 2013.** Microstamping works by using the part of a gun that strikes the bullet when it is fired to imprint the gun's unique numeric code onto segments of the bullet.[43]

- **Establish special police units and use monitoring technology to quickly identify and respond to instances of gunfire.**

- **Create a firearm-tracking database integrating data from multiple jurisdictions and linked to other databases for ease of tracking and identification.**

- **Work with police departments to establish a strategy for undercover sting operations on unlicensed private sellers or licensed sellers who do not abide by gun laws.**

- **Use procurement power to incent gun manufacturers to voluntarily reform production and sales practices.**

Conclusion

While they often don't get the respect they deserve in our state and national politics, cities and the metropolitan region they anchor are, in fact, most of America. Today and even more so in the future, well-governed "high-road" cities are the safe operating place for most of humanity.

American cities are widely innovating in policies that redeem their enormous promise. Using the resources they have, cities are enacting policies and practices to rebuild a thriving and inclusive middle class, assure the opportunity for a healthy and productive life for all, and begin the much-needed transition to a more environmentally sustainable set of housing, land use, transportation, and energy policies. "Cities at Work" attempts to give you some flavor of this very promising innovation.

We are sure that this guide will need to be updated by the time it's published; that's how fast and how widely cities are doing new, innovative things. We invite the reader to help in keeping track of this innovation. If you know of some new promising urban law or policy that you haven't seen here, or that's not up at ALICE (www.alicelaw.org), please write to us at citiesatwork@cows.org.

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— Joel Rogers & Satya Rhodes-Conway, COWS

Endnotes

1 Throughout this report summary, unless explicitly distinguishing suburbs from their central cities, we use "city" and "metro" interchangeably. We also use "city" and "local government" interchangeably, but note that villages, towns, counties, school districts, and other local governments can and should implement many of the policies we suggest.

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