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— First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

# OPINION

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## Affordable Housing Benefits Entire Community

by John Bigley, Chief Operating Officer, Urban Housing Communities

When you think of a housing community with amenities such as granite countertops, energy efficient appliances, well appointed outdoor entertainment areas with pools and barbeques, and beautifully landscaped gardens, does affordable apartment housing come to mind? It should.

In recent years, low income housing has come out of the shadows and into the new millennium with developments residents and the community can be proud of. Those still harboring a not-in-my-backyard viewpoint should take a fresh look at some of the properties that have re-created and re-defined affordable housing.

Horizons at Indio, an 80-unit property for seniors developed by Urban Housing Communities (UHC) and its non-profit partner, Heritage Community Housing, Inc. (HCH), is a good example of a successful and attractive affordable housing community. Award-winning architectural firm KTG Y Group, Inc. designed the 7.78 acre site with well-appointed apartments, generous community amenities, and green building features which reduce the resident costs as a result of the energy efficient elements.

There are several undisputed truths about our current housing dilemma: Many families and residents are facing foreclosures and need new, safe, affordable places to live; unemployment numbers are on the rise and many of the employed are trying to manage with salaries not keeping up with the cost of living; renters are not immune to the economic downturn and many are struggling to pay high rent; the homeless population will increase if adequate and affordable housing is not available.

The need for affordable housing is apparent, aside from the fact that cities and counties have mandated low income housing requirements that need to be met. City leaders and concerned residents should not think of affordable housing as an unwelcome neighbor. Low income developments, when done well, are not only attractive and successful, but can strengthen a community.

Affordable housing is an integral link in maintaining healthy communities. It's important for residents of a resort area such as the Coachella Valley to remember not everyone can afford a million dollar home. The workers behind the scenes, who are already contributing members of our luxury resort society, need and deserve a comfortable, attractive and affordable place to live. Without housing options for a portion of the population, the health of the entire community diminishes.

As a mission-driven for-profit developer of affordable housing, UHC's work is guided by a strong desire to improve communities while providing the best possible outcome for all private and public stakeholders. At UHC, we believe building livable homes requires consideration of community and civic needs. We meet these needs by collaborating with private, public and not-for-profit partners.

Affordable housing can be designed to meet any city's requirements, as long as the approach is measured and thoughtful. Smart, quality housing is a product of socially responsible design and economic return. Developing strong relationships with established lenders and tax credit investors sustains and enriches affordable housing communities.

We have found good design and materials increase the lifetime of our communities and inspire engaged and motivated residents. Our residents care for their homes. When our residents no longer have to worry about not having a roof over their heads, they are able to take advantage of opportunities and maximize their potential.

Affordable housing communities can be a lifelong solution, or stepping-stone in a resident's journey. Either way, the community can be attractive, safe and uplifting not only for the residents, but for an entire city or county.