

No Place Like Home:
Cognitive Elicitation Interviews on Housing¹

In May and June of 2019, ASO Communications conducted 52 cognitive elicitation interviews to determine the underlying assumptions, dominant frames, and preferred arguments of advocates for fair and equitable housing. Interviewees ranged from leaders of progressive housing organizations to affected community members and from artists creating content about housing to union organizers helping their members confront housing issues. Respondents were promised complete anonymity and, as such, any potentially identifying details have been redacted. Otherwise, remarks appear as stated with filler words (e.g. umm, uh, like) removed.

What follows is a summary of major themes emerging from these anonymous conversations.² Obviously, it's challenging to encapsulate around 30 hours of transcribed speech from a range of individuals as diverse as our movements for progressive change in the housing sector. The emphasis here, given the purpose of this process, is on novel frameworks for a powerful shared narrative.

Because participants were responding to deliberately broad and foundational questions, their speech reveals underlying reasoning about HOUSING, HOME, RENT, DEVELOPMENT³ and related issues. This is critically different from rehearsed talking points or intentional policy arguments constructed to make a case. In short, interview responses are closer to what people intuitively *feel*, where writing is very much what people consciously *think*.

Conceptual obstacles to overcome

Below, we'll delve into how the words of our advocates illuminate thinking about housing and help uncover novel frames and metaphors while interrogating which of our default approaches merit questioning. But first, we must set some criteria for evaluating which words, phrases, and frames seem to serve us and which it might be best to ditch.

Unsurprisingly, given the depth of expertise and breadth of vantage points among our interviewees, they had plenty to offer in terms of diagnosing what would need to shift in order to have the changes we want put into place. These respondents have wrestled intimately with what's getting in the way and with which arguments from the opposition are hardest to rebut. The repeated refrains to these questions formed three overarching themes.

The first of these is moving people away from default beliefs that housing is the problem merely of individuals or families. If we're going to engender desire for

¹ The author wishes to thank Joseph Reid for his stellar management and execution of the interview process.

² See Appendix A for interview protocol.

³ Text in small caps refers to an underlying frame or concept as opposed to the word used in its literal meaning.

collective solutions, as well as inspire collective action to demand them, HOUSING must be understood as a social concern.

Respondents were quick to identify this as a core communication challenge. And they viewed this as why individuals default to myopic self-interest to the detriment of agitating for collective change:

I think it's that sense of like, 'Well, I made it.' **I would like** a house with a yard and an avocado tree and, you know what mean? So, I can—I get where they're like, 'My neighborhood is *cute*, and **I want** it to stay cute. And the place where I live, I moved there **because I liked how it was when I moved there**. And **I don't want** it to change.' I kinda get that. So that I feel is the most—It's not political, that's the thing. It's very, **very personal**. I mean, there's no argument to be had with people about that.

You know the issue of building multi-family, densely populated apartments in places that don't traditionally have those kinds of housing arrangements and the impact that that's going to have on the local community is hard to explain to people when they see their community changing. And '**it's good for somebody else' is not a good—that's not a good message**. We need to figure out how to deliver information in a way that **makes other people feel like they have some self-interest** that's being met as well. 'Cause what people hear is there are gonna be **more school kids, my taxes are gonna go up, I'm paying for somebody else**...I feel like we're in 1985 talking about healthcare. Like, we're way behind on the benefit of everyone having a safe, affordable place to call home being a **public benefit that everyone**—that lowers everybody's cost of living and increases their quality of life. We don't talk about it that way at all. **It's all about a unit and helping this one**. We celebrate **putting one family** in a habitat home, which is *great* for that family, but the **community benefit** to that doesn't ever get well expressed.

People don't get how their **personal preferences and their desire** to—legitimate desire—to build assets through property value has a **deleterious effect on other people**. They don't think about that from, 'Because **I want to live** in this kind of neighborhood and have *this* kind of house, and don't want *these* kinds of houses near me, because I think that's my one way of building assets,' right, 'then **I don't understand the adverse impact that has on other people**.' I think that's probably the most misunderstood.

And I think that the harder part is we're gonna need to shift from having people who own a home have that be a giant lottery jackpot **personal savings vehicle**...To me, that feels really hard and really different from other social issues because **that's such an ingrained American idea that you buy a home and then you retire there or you sell it off and reuse that money to retire somewhere else**. And I also think we need to change what it means to be a renter in terms of security, affordability and just dignity, so that we can have a more full range of options that are honored.

I wish people understood that housing was something that we relate to in big classes. I feel like some people, **their housing issue as a renter isn't related** to the housing issues that people are facing as homeless people, or isn't related to the housing issue that people have a low-income homeowners. And I feel like

housing is just such an individual problem that someone has. I wish people could feel more confident in being bold enough to speak the truth of **how housing is really a broader economic issue**, one that **connects us all together** as different sectors and classes of people.

The tendency to understand HOUSING through the lens of individualism creates a vicious cycle: People self-isolate through their housing choices, which then hampers efforts to enact collective solutions to housing:

Here's another thing, which is like, I think from WWII on 'til now but maybe [inaudible] people moving back into the cities, housing in the suburbs is bad for suburban people. **It's not how people should live. It's isolating**, it's bad for the environment, it's bad for education, it's bad on their side too. It's soul-killing, and it's why I think people are moving out. **Housing should never be about isolation and separation.** And so I don't work in that world, I don't live in that world, but when I'm in those spaces and when I talk to people, my friends who grew up in the suburbs and moved to the city or whatever, or I'm out in the boonies—and I don't mean rural towns, I mean suburbs and exurbs—like, **this is not community**, this is not how we're designed. I think it's a false sense of safety, not a real sense of community.

Because, on a basic level, how can you work on or think about or do anything else if your basic needs aren't met? Including where you're going to live. And so, if you're struggling to pay the rent **it's hard to think about global climate change or it's hard to think about what's bigger than what's going on in your daily life.** And like I said, if you care about your community, it's my neighbors, my friends, my students. It's also all the problems of America that just keep coming back. And so the whitewashing of cities like Oakland, like New York-- I grew up in [city], and that was a very big part of the identity of the city, and even as white kids growing up we *knew* that this was a Black city...Housing policies are at the center of racism in America, and racism is at the center of housing policies. And it's fucking visceral, it's brutal, it's violent, but it goes by these euphemisms of development and all these things that...it's painful. And I say that as a human and as an activist, but even as an organizer, how, here in [city] as people are getting pushed farther and farther out, **it's hard to frickin' organize people** when people live two and three hours away and they're commuting two and three hours away. **You can't do community organizing without the community.** It's destabilizing our communities, and when you do that it affects all the other issues that any of us work on anyway.

A second core job for our messaging that interviewees underscored is to exit the MARKET frame and enter the HUMAN one. Many respondents raised the concern of our damaging tendency to view HOUSING AS A COMMODITY from which to derive ever more wealth and income:

That they're trying to run a business and they're trying to live off of other people living off of them. Like, you know, like, **'I'm running a business here.'** They don't see it like **it's my home.** I get it this is your source of income, but this is also my home. The idea of property rights as being something sacred.

As long as we live in a system where some people are valued less, some people's lives are valued less, some people's labor is valued less, then we'll continue to

have an unequal system too. Housing is a system just like any other system, and I think it's core. As long as housing is **something that is a means for profit and is a commodity**, we'll continue to have an issue. I think the whole idea or the whole system of housing being a commodity that you buy and sell is what needs to change in order for real change to happen.

We need regulations on rent gouging and we need to build more affordable housing. And ultimately in the final analysis, what we need is to **take housing off of the private market and decommodify housing**. And that's what we're trying to do. And through greater protections for renters, in the form of rent control and other things that enables us to have non-profit and community acquisitions of land so that we can slowly bring more properties and land into community ownership and not private ownership.

Third, and finally, respondents held up the understandable feeling of futility at trying to change what seems a completely entrenched and impossible problem. If people can't imagine things can be different, it's impossible to have join an effort to promote change:

Like we have this sad story about what the world is and how we got here, but I think how we get to that **radical imagination we have to ask the question: how do you want to live?** What kind of housing do you want to live in when you grow up? Do you want to stay in the neighborhood where you currently live? Do you feel like you want to live a life where you're paying rent to a landlord every month, or do you see something beyond that? Do you want live in community, or do you want to live by yourself?

We need to be talking about homes. We need to be talking about the simple truths that **we can guarantee homes for everyone** in this country.

The other side has the benefit of our dominant narrative being so entrenched in neoliberal ideology. Like, **people buy that shit**. They actually--the general public in the United States is **so lacking in imagination that our economy could be structured differently, that we could be providing housing differently**, that we shouldn't have to necessarily pay money to a landlord for housing. They buy those arguments way more than they buy ours, and they think we're crazy and radical even when we can point to examples in history not so long ago when housing was provided differently, our economy was structured differently. Other countries' economies are structured differently and it works. So I really all of the arguments hard to rebut insofar as a rebuttal--in my head, a rebuttal is what it is but when I'm trying to organize a base of people to rebut those arguments collectively, it's a lot more difficult because the dominant narrative has such a stronghold on our political imagination. And I should say this includes the people in our own freaking base, or people who should identify with us, right?...But like that's what the dominant narrative has so defined what housing can look like as that, as opposed to the decent well-maintained, invested-in places that white working class folks got to live in in the late '20s and '30s New Deal era when that was actually a map of investment that the federal government made.

And people are really mean about housing. And that **reduces our array of viable options** culturally to solve this crisis, and that's part of why we can't get out of it, is like people are like, 'Oh, well, my community doesn't *do* tiny homes. My

community doesn't *do* trailers. My community doesn't *do* apartment buildings. My community doesn't *do* suburbs.' And I think a lot of that stuff is true, there's reasons for that, but it's also a weirdly self-defeating type of thing that **reduces our creativity and our capacity to try new things**...And I think we **need to give ourselves more space if we're going to solve this issue to experiment** and be wrong and go again. Like there's **so many cool housing things!** Like straw bale houses, tiny houses, apartment complexes, houses built in circles with communal kitchens and there just all different stuff you can do with housing, and I feel like we mostly don't try it or it's all on the fringe.

We really need to shift into a mindset that everyone needs a home, everyone deserves a home and **we can make sure that everyone has a home**. That this is something that is a basic need that we can make sure everyone has, and it's not even really that difficult if we **shift our thinking about the necessity and possibility there**, and the benefits that we're all going to get.

There's no reason that we cannot guarantee that everyone in America has a safe, accessible, healthy, truly affordable home. And **what it takes is some political imagination**.

While we've parsed these three challenges apart in order to bring them into clearer view, they're not at all neatly delineated. Indeed, the tendency to view HOUSING as a personal issue derives from and reinforces its role as a commodity and vice versa. In turn, these perceptions inhibit our ability to imagine different or better approaches not merely to structuring HOUSING but to the broader makeup of our economy and how it supports – or defies – human needs. One respondent touched, to some degree, on all of these conceptual obstacles blended into a core opposition or status-quo affirming tale:

Every time there is a sale of a property it's about **extracting the most amount of money** and it becomes more and more challenging for people to own their home. And then it also deprioritizes the people. It continues to **reinforce property over people**. So, we need to change and redirect the priority that housing, land, is around stability not wealth generation. And turn to other programs and methods for creating that stability. Some people purchase a home to turn that profit, but there's other **people who purchase a home because they don't have retirement**, so they're looking at their home as an opportunity for when they retire...There's **other methods to ensure education, health, retirement**, all the things that in my experience with my family and friends why they want to purchase a home that I think we can be able to bring down that focus. That the owning property and real estate and the pumping that up as the wealth piece would be a big thing that needs to change.

With these core communications obstacles in mind, we turn now to consider how our advocates reason about HOUSING.

Defining our terms

We began our conversations by asking very basic questions: What is *housing*; What is *home*? These queries force seasoned advocates, first-hand observers of housing problems, and policy experts to reveal their own unconscious

assumptions rather than offering up the talking points and details they're accustomed to supplying. With this, we're able to see into their underlying reasoning.

Housing versus home

As we'd expect, participants offered notably different definitions of *housing* and *home*. The former triggered people to characterize the physical:

Housing is the **physical structures** that we sleep, eat, and play in.

Housing is basic **shelter**.

The first superficial reaction I have to that word is **shelter**, the place to be safe from the elements, from the rest of the world.

"Home," in contrast, brings up emotions, attachments and aspirations:

Home is where you **flourish**. Home includes neighborhood, resources, access to family. You know, family is defined by yourself. Home is community.

The place that you go to sleep at night that you have **an emotional connection** to.

Home is **where people raise a family, age in place, get their needs met**, come home from a long day and eat and replenish, and sleep and regroup. Home is a place where you have community around you. And that you're in a neighborhood or a building or a place. I suppose your neighborhood could be you're in the middle of the woods and nobody else is around you, and that's what you choose to. But home creates that place where aspects of your life could be fulfilled. Whereas housing could be like the place where you sleep, and then you know you're traveling all day or you live your life elsewhere.

I guess the distinction for me would be like community and family. **Where you have some good stories to tell.**

Home is sanctuary. It's where you can **be whoever you want to be**. It's respect and it should not be threatened...It should be protected and nurtured also because if you have a good home, if you have a safe home, you also have peace of mind. If you don't, you don't have any of that.

I think a home for me is **a base to establish oneself, to manifest your ideas and the way you want to live your life**, and bring people together, your friends, you family. And that way you can share with them too, your vision of what you want to create. And like I said, it's the manifestation of your base.

I think that home is **where you center your life** in terms of your family. It's like the center of everything.

Home is an environment that **people create that is a safe space**. It is a place where people feel **a sense of belonging that's usually connected to family**, and community and history.

It's a place where people come home to at the end of the day. Rest and **be with themselves and their family.**

Indeed, many respondents were explicit in eschewing "housing" as a label, feeling that "home"—as the more emotion-laden term—proves more effective at drawing in and retaining listeners:

A home is a place that people feel safe and loved and cared for. Which is why we don't say housing if we can ever avoid it, because it's **not evocative** and it doesn't—there's no reaction that moves people. Housing is a--**literally no one has a doormat that says 'Housing Sweet Housing.'**

But housing, that **word always seems like a term to me** and not the thing I think of when I think of my home.

Home is deeper than housing. And home is not just the 4 walls or the 12 stories of the building.

A home is a place that people feel safe and loved and cared for. Which is why **we don't say housing** if we can ever avoid it, because it's not evocative and it doesn't – there's no reaction that moves people.

People don't say that they're going to go home to their housing, though. It's a technical term for something that everyone – to me, **it's a technical term** for something that should be a basic, fundamental right for everyone to have.

Precisely because *home* inspires so much feeling, it's understood through a highly personal frame. Thus, associations with HOME were centered around *individual* or *family* desires as these and many of the above examples attest:

Home is a place where **you have control over your environment**, where you're able to be in a place that **feels welcoming to you**, that feels like you can get a respite from physical rain and personal rain, you know like emotional rain.

Home is **the places that are our own**, the places that we can safely leave things and people and come back to them.

I would say that home is a place that **people make their own**, and that is--they make their own for the purposes of **their own wellbeing**, to help **their families thrive.**

I think home is **a place to have privacy and make personal memories**, and sort of the stable core of **your personal life** that then allows you to have that and go out into the world and interact at work and with friends and with neighbors and with family.

Home is **where people feel ownership**, where people feel loved and supported.

Home is where I have the security and comfort of where my belongings are, where my family is, where I can spend time most **up to my own choices and volition**, good times and bad times.

There are a lot of words for home too, but I think at its basic it's a kind of an emotional connection that feels somewhat **customized and individualized to a person or a family** in housing.

Indeed, some respondents articulated the distinction between *housing* and *home* precisely in terms of the former being a public good and the latter a private domain:

Housing is sort of the collective, and home is the individual's space. I also think of home that is closely tied to family, closely tied to safety and security...Your first understanding of home is where your parents are and where you grow up. And it's where you raise your family.

Home is kinda similar to housing but somewhat more personalized. **Housing is what everybody should have; home is what you create in the space that you have.**

This suggests an unexpected dilemma. Where *home* performs the vital task of conjuring emotion, it does so by bringing to the fore the idea of privacy and individuality. And from there, it's basically no distance to calling to mind the individualism we're attempting to counter or at least send to the background. In contrast, *housing* lacks feeling but tamps down on the tendency to consider this issue as something entirely personal, not collective.

This suggests that it may be worth considering *housing* versus *home* an empirical question. However, doing so must take into account the likely reality that even if the former proved more effective at inspiring desire for collective action, advocates may be unwilling to take up this messaging given their preference for talking about *home*.

Helping shift from the INDIVIDUAL to the SOCIAL is one among our narrative needs. Another, as noted above, is contending with the dominant perception of HOUSING AS MARKET GOOD that exists for profit, not people. With this in mind, we turn to another possible way to describe this issue.

A place to live

Another topline label avoids both *housing* and *home*. Many respondents applied a phrase as substitute or explanation for these nouns, bringing more action into the frame:

In my mind, **a place to live**. It's where you're safe.

It is the place **where people live**.

Housing is **where people live**.

I would say it's really important that everyone has **a good place to live**, and that everyone has a home.

I think the housing issue matters because every human being certainly in the US and maybe everywhere needs a place to call home or housing. And so it is foundational in that we do not have a society where there is an expectation that you would not be **able to live indoors** and have that safety and security of a home or a house.

People need a **place to stay**, a place to leave off, to grow, and **to live** and die. Housing is a secure place to be a part of a family or an existence within your family, as a **safe place to congregate, to live**, and to formulate ideas that we think of as family.

People should have the **ability to live where they want and connected to the people that they love**.

Where you live—You should **be able to live** without having to die to live, like to kill yourself just working to able to afford a place to live. It should be like the air we breathe. It should be free. It should be something that's just part of the fabric of society that take care of each other.

Striking in its simplicity, and even its obviousness, shifting from a THING to reconnecting this issue to where and how we live brings humanity to the fore. And with it, an opportunity to question a current core messaging approach: the RIGHTS frame for HOUSING.

Need versus right

Understandably, many respondents were caught off guard when responding to the question of why housing matters precisely because it is so all encompassing, so elemental. Trying to articulate the importance of HOUSING, many interviewees referenced basic survival:

It's sort of the number one **fundamental baseline** of somebody's ability to **survive and thrive**.

It's kind of a **fundamental part of human life** that is necessary in order for everything else to come together.

The housing matters because home is **where everything starts**, in a sense. It's where you start your day, where you end your day. When you don't have a stable home, it affects every other part of your life. So, it's so connected to everything. And because you know it's one of the most basic rights, in my opinion, to be able to not have to sleep in the rain or the snow. It's just such a—**We can understand it for animals; we need to understand it for ourselves too.**

Housing is something that's **fundamental to every person**. Every person needs a **place to rest their head** and know that they have somewhere safe to go.

Like housing is often seen as this means for profit or a means to make money or a means to start a business or something like that, and I wish it was seen instead as it's a basic right like having clean water or having access to good food. It's just **part of what we need as being human**.

Respondents found the juxtaposition of how fundamental a need housing is with its present role as source of income especially jarring:

We basically have an entirely privately-run housing market. Even our public housing is privately run. And **people are making money off of other people protecting themselves from the elements**, which seems like a sort of **fundamental post-caveman thing everybody needs**, right? Like some people are getting paid—a lot—to build homes for lower income folks that does not in any way translate into improving the structural inequity, except to keep those people from being without a home and potentially getting a leg up in a generation or two.

We also found this frame describing HOUSING as core to life expressed in the negative. Meaning, the *lack* of housing was characterized as an inhibitor to living your life:

I learned this when I was in—when I first had my first real job—this definition, this phrase called ‘house poor.’ I was like, ‘The hell is that?’ It’s like you have a house but **you can’t do shit else**. Like, you can’t call off, you know, you can’t do nothing else because it could all come tumbling down. I just don’t think it should be like that.

And they also need to understand that it’s **hard to live your life everyday** and your home or housing is in jeopardy. It is very hard. It’s hard to maintain a job because you’re not able to go home and be comfortable sleeping at night, and then you’re not knowing that hey any day now I can get an eviction, or hey any day my landlord can go up on the rent, or anything.

The centrality a safe habitat plays in survival raises the question as to whether commonplace *rights* language is actually diminishing our potency. We think of RIGHTS as residing in a scene where there are laws and social conventions, not human beings in our purest and most raw form. Granted, this is not universally true as we see in the final quotation above where the respondent likens *needs* like water and food to housing using the phrase “basic right.”

Asserting the *right to housing*, which some respondents did with the “housing is a human right” refrain, is meant to position it as non-negotiable. But it’s an empirical question whether RIGHTS language hits this mark.

While we heard about *rights* in our interviews, more frequently people tended to talk about *needs* - albeit sometimes mixed with references to *rights*:

Human dignity is really important to me and just sort of guides my worldview. And a sort of sense of fairness and justice, and that there are **basic things that humans need** in order for their humanity to be realized, and that’s the responsibility of society as a whole, it’s not just an individual responsibility.

It matters because **we need air and water and food to be alive, and home and housing is along those lines**. To go on the – not a cliché, but we have to have conversations about how housing is a human right, in the same breath that we say all of our other human rights. Having adequate housing and proper housing

is one of our fundamental rights that we in a highly--in *any* society, we should be able to have.

Because it's **like oxygen**. It's so **intrinsic** to our sort of ability to lead dignified, human lives that it's almost impossible to be ok in the world without a home, whatever that means to you in whatever form. So, it's **as vital as food, water, clean air**, all the those material conditions you need to actually healthfully live on this planet as humans.

The people that are renting – the people who are the owners, the landlords – they are allowed to make profits, but **we need to survive** also. It's something that **we need**, like we need food, clothing. Housing is not a luxury. **You need to have it**. And I think that people blame the minimum wage, but – and I do agree in some part of that – but in some way I do agree, but not enough because when you are about to rent they ask you that you have to make three times the amount of the rent in order for you to find a place, to get a place.

In fact, we found some respondents expressing concern over rights-based appeals:

It's a **fundamental human need**. I **wouldn't even say right**. Although I believe it's a right, but you know, it's the **one of the basic things** that **humans need** to not just thrive but survive.

I believe that everyone has **the right—even though we don't use that**—that word doesn't help us politically, but it's such a fundamental base for a decent quality of life. And for opportunity for children and for you know a healthy life for seniors. So, I feel like it's really **the core fundamental** to so much the rest of life.

To be sure, the latter objection emerges from perceived lack of efficacy. But the former quotation above evinces the reasoning that *rights* are less primal than *needs*.

We see some respondents unconsciously reckoning with how thoughts of *rights* unhelpfully supersede human needs:

I think housing is the **key component of human life and dignity** on this earth. Oxygen is free—now—but land is expensive. Why is it that way? Who owns the land? We came in, we saw all these things; **they were there for us**. We just **need to take care of them, protect them**. But when somebody come and snatch it, say 'I own that now, you don't own it. **Now I have rights, you don't have rights,**' it's an issue and it keeps going from there.

Rights, to some respondents, evoke the frame of PROPERTY RIGHTS and exclusive ownership. If we're going to move away from these dominant ideas, we may be better served speaking in the language of *need* and related concepts. Shifting from *home* or *housing* to *place to live* has the ability to perform this function: moving us from the object to what the object enables in human-centered terms.

HOUSING AS FOUNDATION

Among the many aims present in written advocacy, we find a desire to connect HOUSING to other pivotal issues like health, education, job opportunities and family wellbeing. The rightful impetus behind this approach in present-day advocacy seems two-fold: First, a desire to amplify housing issues by enlarging the potential “choir” to include advocates from other realms. Second, it’s an attempt to exit the realm of COMMODITY and individual responsibility by likening HOUSING to issues like education and healthcare that, at least to some degree, are construed as public goods and social endeavors.

Presently, the bridge from HOUSING to these other sectors is generally explicit—constructed through overt assertions. Another approach to connecting housing to HEALTH, in particular, that we noted in our previous language analysis posits housing problems as being like DISEASES and access to residences as CURES.

Interviewees didn’t use this metaphor. Instead, many offered expressions of HOUSING AS FOUNDATION:

Housing is **the foundation** of what makes people whole.

It’s really the **basic building block** of people’s lives, and then building up around that, communities.

It’s **stability**. In my mind, that’s how I think about it. It’s stability, it’s safety, it’s security.

Housing for me is more than just four walls. For me it’s **the base** of my family. So for me, housing is everything. If we don’t have **a stable home, everything falls**, if we don’t have that **support**. I’m homeless. I want you to know that I’m homeless. And when you lose your house, **it starts like a domino; everything’s going to fall**. And when I lost my house, I lost a lot of memories and some other things that I’d rather not remember because it hurts. My kids grew up in the house so we were stable, we were together. All the memories that we made in our house, like, were left there. It’s more than just...just a house.

Housing is fundamental to any and everything that happens. It is extremely difficult to do anything productive with one’s life if they do not have a place where they feel safe, where they can rest and recuperate, where they can plan and strategize and think about their future, where they cannot worry about the livelihood of their children or members of their family who may be vulnerable that they are concerned about. I think that there are a ton of examples in our society that prove how seminal housing is. You think about someone who’s being released from prison, they have to give a valid address before they’re allowed to leave. It’s so important that if they can’t give an address, they can’t be released from prison, even if they’ve served their time. In terms of healthcare, people aren’t able to get home healthcare aids or providers if they don’t have a legal residence. So, despite whatever condition they may have that will require them to receive treatment, if they don’t have a safe place for someone to give that treatment, they aren’t going to receive it. As well as a ton of other things, right? Only recently people weren’t allowed to get a voter registration card unless they

were able to give a valid address, right? And so, I think that **our society deems that housing is critical, even if public policy may not demonstrate that.**

Potentially, this frame, expressed metaphorically and literally, as in the final quotation above, affords us an opportunity to connect housing to other issues in a way that seems natural to advocates. Where the DISEASE metaphor arguably calls up connection to HEALTH but not, say, EDUCATION, FOUNDATION is more universal.

Further, as noted in the previous report and explored in greater detail below, establishing human agency in the problems that we describe is a key challenge. Utilizing the language of *stability, foundation, cornerstone*, and so forth may more readily connect housing to multiple domains while also foregrounding human decision making. DISEASES are rarely understood as caused deliberately. In contrast, FOUNDATIONS are construed as person-made.

The language of FOUNDATION likely also affords us connection to a proven means to characterize inequity: the notion of *barriers, obstacles* or *impediments* put deliberately before people because of their race, their place of origin, or other inherent identities.

Yet, it's also worth noting that the above expressions of HOUSING AS FOUNDATION still posit the individual or family as the relevant actors on the scene. However, this was not the only form this metaphor took.

Albeit less frequently, we found some interviewees using FOUNDATION language to describe housing's role in society, not just in the life of the individual:

And it is **the foundation of a civilized society.**

It's the **foundation of opportunity** in this country.

That if you think about it as a lever, increasingly as people think about it as a lever to achieve other social goals, or as bad housing policy is a thing that **undermines our overall national stability** that that starts to change what the political possibilities are, and then to be in the right place and have the right ideas to shape that.

And it's why I've always believed in organizing, which is that I feel like you have to—we have to start to shift how we think about housing. And not just as a commodity but as **a basic infrastructure** for making America a stronger place.

Whether HOUSING AS FOUNDATION is an effective simplifying structure is an empirical question beyond the realm of this analytic evaluation. In subsequent testing, it seems worthwhile both to experiment with this notion broadly and in terms of attempting to draw connections to other issues.

HOUSING AS HORTICULTURE

Another conceptual metaphor found among respondents situates explanations for HOUSING in the PLANT realm. In this frame, we hear HOUSING spoken about as HORTICULTURAL, with talk of *roots* and *growth*:

One of the great rights that we haven't explored enough is **the right to be rooted in a place**...And place is connected to time in the sense that **I don't think you can create place quickly**. So, it involves knowing the people around you, knowing your neighbors, knowing the businesses, having a relationship that is created over time and cultivated. So, the problem with housing right now at least in the US is there doesn't seem to be a very good recognition of **the value of rootedness** or the ability to stay in one place for a long time. That and what comes from that doesn't seem to be valued. It's like a garden or something: you need to **cultivate it** over time. And I feel like if you're moving all the time, you can't create home, actually. Or place. So, to me, there's a fundamental issue of if you *want* to stay in the same place you should be able to. Or if you want to raise your children in the place where you were raised you should be able to. That's not necessarily possible for a lot of people now.

Housing is a place where we have the—where **our dreams are hatched**, where **our plans are hatched**, where **we either feel nourished** and supported or precarious and unsafe...If it's a home that you feel safe and secure and **rooted in**, it gives you the ability to go out into the world and have a level of capacity and ability that if you don't have that, you feel very compromised. And I think it is a place where your memories also can live, so it gets imprinted with the sort of living that you do with your family and your friends and your community. And again, if it's a home it becomes a place that supports that, and **nurtures that and allows it to grow**, and if it isn't...it makes it more challenging for those **things to flourish**.

And then I would say I also just personally draw so much of my ability to do anything in the world or be myself through being mentally and physically **rooted in a physical place** where I live, in terms of a neighborhood and in terms of a place where I can close my door and have my stuff and have my people and all that, that I think that it's personally a huge draw for me too that way.

Here, we find a mix of the INDIVIDUAL and the SOCIAL. The first example above does not lead with or foreground the INDIVIDUAL but rather indicates a broad-based need among us all. The latter two, however, return once again to the dominant pattern of seeing housing through the lens of what it enables or inhibits for us as seemingly independent actors.

This question of shifting from the INDIVIDUAL to the SOCIAL is such a vital one that we turn more deeply to it now. We explore potential avenues—which will require empirical investigation—for creating this conceptual bridge.

From Me to We

One way interviewees connected individuals' needs for housing to social questions was simply by positing these as sequential. In essence, having a stable

and nurturing place to live allows individuals to link to, maintain ties with, and create community:

I want to have that space where I'm safe, where I can have a homestead for myself and for my family. **Where I can build community.**

It should give you that base to **jump off of for your other pursuits** that are maybe **more creative or more altruistic or more future-oriented**. And the other reason why it matters is that there is a certain level of **material security you need to effectively participate in these political spaces** that are supposedly completely open, these economic spaces that are supposedly meritocratic—which we know that they aren't but those are still useful ideals to hold up, if you know what I mean? So those are useful fictions. Like your home, if it's a meritocratic society, then we'll get better results or whatever, and if people have housing that gives them that stability then we're more likely to get that. And then also in terms of political system, we supposedly have an open political system, and if people have more—You know there's that kinda famous saying in, and this is really, really nerdy, but in John Locke in *On Liberty* where he says that you have to have a pair of leather shoes to go participate in a public debate or else people just laugh at you. And that's from his time but I think that there are still things like that, like you have to bathe and you have to wear reasonably clean clothes or else, no matter what people say their values are, most organizations and most governing bodies won't really take you seriously unless you have those things, and housing is the most efficient route to many of those things. If you have your own shower you don't have to worry about it.

I think there's a lot also that's built up around societal views, having a house and then having a home where there's those interactions that create that stability. That if you don't have that, there's that perception of just othering, **of being not a strong contributor to society**. So, it matters for our wellbeing to be able to have a place where we can rest, where we can eat, where we can play, where we can fight, where we can engage in conflict and resolution.

And housing's also a place to **go to cultivate community** and a family and all the iterations and ways that people see that for themselves.

However, none of these nor other examples within this frame lead with nor center HOUSING AS SOCIAL. Rather, they accept (or at least fail to contend with) HOUSING AS INDIVIDUAL issue and bridge from there to social needs and endeavors.

Universal experience

A second approach to moving from the dominant INDIVIDUAL understanding toward a collective one involves emphasizing the universality of home and near universality of challenges with housing:

I'd start off by talking about their house and asking if they like their house, and what do they have there that's important to them, and what do they do at home, and who lives there with them. Do they live near the things that matter to them, like a park or a school or places to go ride a bike? And I would ask them if they

thought it was fair or right that **some people had that and other people just couldn't afford it**; they didn't have it. And I would try to have them think about what it means for them to have a home, and then talk about the people who don't have one.

And this **can happen to anyone**. Even if we are in the middle class or think that we can afford some place to live. Things can happen from one day to another. And if you love your home, it's all your perspective, all your hope and goals. And that the housing crisis is getting worse. And we're really seeing a lot of families, myself, my neighbors, my friends, the kids that are going with my kids to school. It's very important because **we never know who's going to be affected**, and it can be your family members, your friends, your neighbors. **This can happen to anyone, and actually it's happening to everyone.**

In addition to the empathy for the people that are going through housing challenges, I would think there are challenges—**housing challenges challenge all of us**. There are ways that **everybody is impacted**. So, I do think greater numbers of people need to both understand the precariousness of the situation for their tenant neighbor, as well as see and identify with the solution that would—**the solution for their tenant neighbor is also a solution to their own problems, their own quality of life problems**. Because I think right now the way that a lot of times it's posed is that the solutions for tenants are headaches or more challenges for homeowners. And homeowners translates to voters, which translates to legislators. So, I think we need to really convince homeowners that the things that would benefit tenants would benefit homeowners as well in their communities and the things that they care about: the quality of life and community that they want to live in.

And it's a thing that **almost everybody knows somebody who's struggling** to pay for it. And so, it's **a unifying issue and a unifying challenge** for people Black and white and brown, urban, rural and suburban. And I think it's got this parable of the boiling frog, that it's a thing that has been such a problem and so expensive for so long, it's just become understood as a thing that is naturally and incredibly expensive thing. And that makes it both undervalued as an issue and a challenge, and hugely potential-filled as an issue—a potential policy thrust.

What is the **damage that's done to everyone** by the fact that so many people are so stretched for housing so much of the time?

But I also think for the broader public, having an understanding of **the housing crisis as a shared crisis**. That it's not these people over here are experiencing this, but it's like **so many people are experiencing it, so many are housing insecure** and they are people that we know, and they are people who are part of our lives and that has **a real impact on all of us in every part of our society**, and we need to feel responsible for that.

What's striking about these examples above is that they don't focus, as we're accustomed to seeing in current advocacy, on the acute problems of specific groups or individuals. They begin from the assumption of near-ubiquity.

Using the commonality of problems with housing as a jumping off point to then turn to the exacerbated challenges and specific harms to groups may prove more

effective than leading with the particular. This default may be feeding into the tendency to see housing as an individual concern. And, again, the challenge of exiting the personal toward the collective is one many respondents underscored, as in this example:

I feel like people get it on some level, but once you start talking about housing, it's like **people stop getting it**. It's like they're all experiencing it in their own lives but **the debate about housing is somehow weirdly divorced from the experience that people are actually having** with their own homes and know in their personal lives.

If nothing else, the frame of UNIVERSALITY is a worthy reminder to apply a proven technique of moving from abstractions to rooting messaging in tangible lived experience. Especially in response to describing this issue to a child, respondents used language that made the intangible (e.g. "housing insecurity") real and thus more pressing:

The way that I would explain it to them is say, it's really important for you to be in a place that's fun, healthy, that you feel safe in, and right now there's lots of families who are living different experiences for that. There are some kids who do not have **a room to themselves**. You know, they may share it with other families, but everybody's together. You have bathrooms that should function. **If you go to the toilet, you should be able to flush it...** We all need a door, a window and a roof.

And that the fact that the biggest challenge that that person is facing is that they don't have **a bed to lay their head on each night...** But I also think that you could understand that at a pretty basic level that it would be **better to sleep in a bed than to sleep outside in a tent**.

In addition to bridging from the personal to the social and making the commonness of housing focal, some respondents evinced the ability to exit the default to individualism—at least some of the time.

From shaping people to shaping society

In lieu of talking about the hardships certain people or groups face as an entry point, some respondents pondered how society itself gets shaped by housing policy choices:

I've been doing this for a while, where I see it also as an important intersection of racial justice, right? Like, **who gets to live where and why**. Who gets to live safely and why.

And I think our approach to quote unquote housing and **who can and can't live in certain kinds of housing** or make decisions about the conditions of their housing is a much larger question about **who gets to be an active participant in American life**, or global life.

It was loud and clear across every region in the state that housing affordability was the number one issue for people. And I think if we're not willing to listen to

that we're going to continue to limit the potential that we could have in creating the most robust solutions, whether that's policy, whether that's housing cooperatives, whether that's land trusts, whether that's a million different things because we're limiting our own understanding and imagination around **how our communities can look** and how people can reinvest in where they choose to live.

That this conversation is much bigger than rent control or rent regulation, that this conversation has to be about how we're building our cities and **who we're building it for**, and how that translates to who we're building the country for.

I don't think **we can have a society that is fully functional and inclusive and economically hospitable** if we don't have housing. And if people don't have something beyond housing, like they feel safe in their home, they have access to their community, and jobs and transportation. So housing is what makes—what actually **makes community**. It's what determined like so many aspects of people's future: housing determines where you go to school; and it determines access to jobs; it determines sometimes what you're exposed to in terms of different people and mentorship. So, I think housing is just critical to **the development of a person and of society**.

We really try to **shift from housing problems to talking about displacement** and the more human problems that come out of housing issues. So, it **matters on a lot of levels**. It matters to individuals and families, and it certainly matters to communities and entire cities. And really in a way it matters to our entire country. I think the displacement crisis is causing tremendous suffering for individuals and families who are forced into a position of paying out the nose for their homes and commuting exorbitant amounts of time just to make ends meet. The displacement crisis matters on that level of individual and family suffering, and it matters to our communities because it has impact of dissolving the political and economic power of black and brown communities, and resegregating cities--or whitewashing cities, really.

One respondent had a particular take on this question of who gets to live where that, again, leads with the social not the individual:

There are probably **thousands if not millions of people stuck in nursing homes** who—elderly and people with disabilities—if there was enough funding could really move out of the nursing homes and live in a condo or back at their own home. And nobody wants to live in a nursing home if they can avoid it, and we need to think about those folks too.

As with previous patterns noted, whether or not this one will prove effective in our advocacy is a question for future testing.

Finally, because many in our advocate sample have direct experience with housing problems, we found the shift from *me to we* made real through activism:

And so it's a stability issue that I want to help people see us, see me as a tenant, as a viable member of the community, see me as a low-income person of color single mother as a viable entity; not someone who can just be tossed out even though I pay my rent on time every month, even though I take care of my unit. Why am I not seen as a viable member and a business partner of my landlord? At

first I was sad and then I got angry, and then I still go through moments where obviously I still feel sad about it because I really want my children to know that they can make **a difference through organizing their community and through making strong community ties**. Because **if we all look out for each other we can really move mountains**. And through that no-cause eviction **I helped organize my building, I helped all of my neighbors sue our landlord**, we got a great settlement and we are still staying in contact trying to further strengthen those community ties across the nation with other tenants and other tenant leaders. **Thinking bigger than just what's in front of their face**, you know?

So, I think shifting the mindset that tenants have no control, when really **we have a lot of control if we just tap into it and access it**. And it's a scary thing to try to tap into that and access it because we're all afraid we're going to get evicted. I think also statutes that exist in [state] that might not exist in other states are those statutes like the right to organize, which can help folks who feel scared. When there are statutes in place protecting people, that could help us move towards really dismantling what's going on.

Contending with the default to individualism is a concern not just for building appetite and credibility for our solutions. It's also a major fault-line in how we understand the source of housing problems. Thus, we turn next to what our interviewees conveyed about causation.

People do things

Despite the tendency to shield actors from view notable in current written advocacy, many respondents voiced the importance of making clear that deliberate human choices are at the center of this issue. And this applies both in terms of how we got into our present situation and inspiring desire to take up the reins and alter it:

Our neighborhoods and communities look the way they look because of very **specific and deliberate social engineering and government-sponsored racist housing policies**. And I think that very often there's a willingness to completely disregard the systems that created neighborhoods as they are.

And if we don't reconcile the fact that we as **stakeholders in the region can actually be different** about how we approach these issues, like **it's not the gods are gonna come down and give us a new reality**. Climate change may intervene and take us all out. But until then **the humans are the ones that actually set up the policy framework by which we operate and humans can change it**. And the sort of throw your hands up like we don't know what to do or we don't know how to do it is bullshit.

In my neighborhood a lot of houses were foreclosed but I'm sure none of us are **looking into who actually bought these places**, and are they getting rehabbed, and if so are these just all rental units. I think **people need to see or connect the housing crisis to blaming an actual—blaming institutions** and not just individuals for being responsible homebuyer or for not having a job that pays them well enough.

I think with an older child I would also talk about some of the factors that have created those things. That they're not things that have to happen and that they're things that **we make choices** about and are allowing to happen in the way that we choose to spend public money or in the way that we write our public policies.

I think I would say something like, we've **made a decision as a society** that we aren't going to build the necessary housing for everybody who lives in our community because we think the costs are too high. That's a decision that we have made, and it's not right but that's why we, some people have housing and some people don't.

I was politicized by coming back to study evictions and like really distraught and made sick to find out that more than half of the city I grew up in and considered my home didn't have any of the things that I sort of took for granted when I grew up here. And further made sick to find out that my neighbors in the cozy, white, lavish, lush parts of the city **quite literally made their money off the backs of other people in the city** on the basis of selling them housing when they were at their most desperate and whatnot. So that's a little bit of what brought me to the work. And I think the big picture is I'm really angry about **people in power who use their power to exploit people who don't have any**.

There's no reason why housing has to be commodified to such a point where people are being put out of their communities not by their own choice because of the rising rent costs. These factors at play that we feel like we don't have control over, but really we do. Because **we choose the lawmakers that are letting these things happen. We choose to pay our rent every month**, when really we don't have to do that...Renters are this huge part of the economy, and I feel we are really looked down—we are not thought of as equal partners in the economy that we help thrive through our rents.

That we have a power as people to truly change this and not rely on the market. That the concepts and free market, and economy, and real estate, **those were all created by man, by humans**, and that if we truly want to solve homelessness, housing crisis, that we have to get into a direction of a different system where we don't have land as a real estate and we're not banking on land and real estate ownership as a primary source of wealth generation. And if we don't tackle that we will not be at a place where we can have homes for everybody.

We see in the above an attachment to narrating intentional causation. To be sure, this isn't necessarily the same as calling out bad actors or naming villains. But, this more pointed approach was also integral to the way many respondents articulated this issue:

We're in our mobile park are going through an issue right now where **a predator buyer has taken us over**. And this basically would be like the second time where **someone has come in and forced me from my home**, and it's just not ok.

It's gotten so expensive and I think that's due in part because **the real estate investors who have lost all mooring** and are more focused on how valuable their portfolio is than their humanity.

Our previous **corporate management company decided** not to pay our water bill twice in a period of four months. And that impacted not just my unit where I lived and my partner and our rights and our ability to access water, but our whole building and our neighbors. And just knowing that that **management company would rather invest money in new properties and other things instead of taking care of their responsibilities**, and that it required for me to refer them to [state] law that they're required to offer safe running water and hot water for them to actually turn it back on is absolutely ridiculous. **That people are treating each other in this way?** And this dynamic that is so divisive for corporate monetary gain.

I also think we need to **call out the people and institutions who have exploited the world** as it is to make enormous profits, including people like our landlord-in-chief the President of the United States who's made his fortune in real estate and development on down, right? There are **local actors in every city and community across the country where they've made their livelihood selling safety to desperate people**, and some of them go to sleep at night thinking they're doing a social good and that needs to be called out.

Who is benefitting from screwing all these people out of housing? And we need to actually think about the fact that **there are actors who benefit** from this as a way of exerting pressure to change it.

It matters because communities are really being torn apart because of either **individual greed or corporate greed**.

I think it's really a vision of community ownership and a place where no one is unstable because of **someone else's greed**.

I don't know whether that's exactly your framing, but it's particularly challenging to unearth this—people's—the dominant narrative about private property rights and that I need to be able to do whatever I want with my property. Because, if you own a restaurant you can't do whatever you want with that restaurant. You can't serve food that is old and rotten. It has to meet health standards in the same way housing as a whole system needs to be seen as you are taking on a public responsibility, a community responsibility as a landlord. And it is not purely about private property rights and **your right to do whatever you want with your property at someone else's expense**.

I think the thing that I would say most people don't know is that **tenants are very vulnerable to the whims of their landlord**. Because there aren't for the most part, meaning for tenants across the state, there are no legal protections that provide again protections against **the whims of their landlord**.

Some people don't have enough money to afford a nice home because **the people that built homes haven't built the types of homes that a teacher or a nurse or a gas station attendant can afford**.

I would say that there are **people in this world who are greedy** and take more than they need and **they are making it hard** for people to live in a good way, to live in a way that feels safe for their families.

As notable above, *greed* is definitely the operative word for our respondents. This suggests it's worth testing.

Apart from getting pointed about villains, many respondents automatically characterized housing as an interplay between haves and have-nots:

I think a child would come at this from a **fairness** perspective. If **somebody has fifteen houses somebody else shouldn't have no houses**. Everyone should have a place that they can afford to call home.

And there are **a lot of people who have a lot of money** is who all the houses are being built for. And so **teachers and nurses and people that work at a restaurant** can't afford it because nobody's built the kinds of homes that they could afford.

And I guess more specifically what I mean by that is like we as a country have **decided to prioritize certain people and certain ways of life** and write that into law. I think one of the best examples of this is in the mortgage interest deduction, which is this massive subsidy that we give to homeowners on their first and second home that allows them to write off their mortgage and the cost of that to us as taxpayers in America is about \$70 billion which is double—almost double the size of the entire budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development. And that's like a clear example of us **prioritizing homeowner who are disproportionately white upper-class people in this country over all of the millions of renters, rent-burdened people, people in public housing who desperately need assistance** from the federal government and are getting less and less every year, are fighting for scraps. Even those who get assistance from the government are dealing with toxic mold, and disinvestment and unsafe conditions and the like. That sounds reductive, I guess, but it's as simple as like we have literally **enshrined into law that certain people are more important and their lives matter more** and that makes it easier for them to get housing, get support for their housing, stay in the same house for longer.

The vast majority of **housing subsidy goes to people to buy more than one, and the wealthier and the bigger homes** that they can because with the home mortgage interest deduction, that's how our whole system is set up with those incentives. It doesn't incentivize maximizing homeownership across the majority of the population; it maximizes those people with wealth to shelter their wealth in more homes: bigger homes, more luxurious homes. So that is fundamentally an inequity of the entire housing system at the national level and we need to reorder those priorities and reinvest those resources in serving the basic needs—the basic housing needs—of people across the country.

Whether or not this *99 versus 1 percent* approach, to borrow a familiar expression of this frame, works is another empirical question. It does serve to highlight how those contending with housing challenges aren't merely wrong-acting individuals but rather members of a huge category. With this, it may help foreground the collective nature of this concern. Whether it also clarifies the need for policy redress and incentivizes group action is worth examining.

Finally, moving from clear characterization of the origin of our problems, we turn now to motivating listeners to want and work for our desired solutions.

Saying what we're for

As described in the previous analysis, an effective narrative must indicate what we're for, not merely elaborate what we're fighting. Without a clear articulation of how the world can and will look if we act, newcomers are unlikely to join our cause and believers will have trouble remaining activated. In this issue, a significant barrier to reaching target audiences is not built of the plausibility of our opponents' claims. It's constructed of the cynicism that there's no point in doing anything about a futile situation.

Many respondents brought up how describing solutions to HOUSING, in particular, is challenging. Several lamented a prevailing assumption about this issue: that we can and must build our way out of it. Sometimes shorthanded to us as NIMBY vs. YIMBY, some respondents view their messaging challenge as a rejection of both these inadequate and reductive stances that leaves them hindered for quickly and clearly indicating what they're for.

Building without attention to controlling costs for renters and displacement of long-time communities is unacceptable. At the same time, blanket aversion to building—or refusal to create mixed-use structures in places dominated by single family dwellings—is also a barrier to our solutions.

One immediate idea—also raised in the previous report—is to be more precise and deliberate in characterizing how we view construction. A shift, for example, from the directive to *build* while also underscoring the need for more places for people to live: “The baseline is we need to **create** a lot more homes.”

A less compact approach may be to shift from discussions of *building* to *rehabilitation* or *refurbishing*, as this admittedly imprecise example attempts to do:

There needs to be a housing construction boom that happens in this country. And it doesn't have to be entirely new construction. The lion's share of it could be **rehabilitation of existing housing**, which is infinitely more affordable...All the places in this country where you find the highest numbers of people displaced, the highest numbers of people who are homeless, the highest numbers of people who are rent-burdened, you also have **a glut of vacant and abandoned properties**. It just doesn't make sense, right? The obvious question is who's benefiting from that. You have homeless people literally walking past vacant properties. And so there needs to be investment to rehab those properties, to put people in there.

Beyond the vital but incomplete question of how we characterize having sufficient livable spaces in which to reside, we pushed our respondents to provide us a tangible sense of how things ought to be, or how the world would look when we resolve this issue.

Happily, in this case, participants were able to supply us with very clear ideas. This is remarkable both because, across progressive advocacy, this tends to trip

people up, and, in this particular issue, describing a “beautiful tomorrow” seems challenging.

A handful of themes were interwoven into nearly every respondent’s vision: community connection, human well-being, and creative solutions. We heard elements of these over and over again as these illustrative examples attest:

That people who have historically been living and making their neighborhoods are the ones who live in them, and are living in community, and so are collaborating with each other on how they are building their home, on how they live together, are deciding how much they’re gonna pay for their housing, are contributing to their homes in many different ways with many different skills.

You’re talking to people who maybe don’t have the same background as you, or don’t do the same thing everyday, or just have different perspectives on life. And you’re getting along and kind of supporting each other... There’s people moving with purpose; they’re happy... They feel like they have somewhere to be—not necessarily somewhere to be but they’re exuding a sense of purpose. They might just be lounging or sitting in the park and chatting with each other, but there’s not a sense of you know depression or destitution about it... Business are open. Things are clean. People feel safe. You’re making eye contact and smiling with people you pass on the sidewalk.

There’s...space where community owns that space and they feel ownership and they feel comfortable being in that space and sharing that space with people from different backgrounds with different identities. I think being more conscious about our land and our planet and the way we use it. And so that probably would mean having access to fresh food that’s near you within walking distance, a public transportation system that doesn’t cost money that can get you to wherever it is you need to get. It would mean having communities being maybe in a city or in a building or in space where they have creative guidelines together of how they want to live. And that could include things like maybe in this community we don’t call the police and we have a different form of safety, and we have a different way of approaching how we live together. Or in this community, this is how we make rules together and this is how we share the space together... The art that’s in the alleys or the city... reflects the people that live there and is created by the people that live there, and it represents their own language. Whatever art form would be able to portray this is what we created together.

And there’s a group of young people that are mostly brown and Black in jeans and sweatshirts and as they’re walking by, those neighbors they actually greet and engage them instead of feeling fear and suspicion. And the youth feel safe and not threatened by walking through this neighborhood. As they’re walking to the corner, they see somebody who seems to be without a home, and they engage him and talk to them, and they’re able to walk them over to a place that they know that has resources, where they connect them to having a home. Coming back to the neighbors, they’re talking about another neighbor down the street that’s selling their home and that the neighbor prioritized another local family and keeping being fair in the pricing and not moving it up higher. And they actually went a step further in putting their home in a community trust, land trust where there is a share of equity, where they’re able to have some resources

for their needs for their next home and yet also keep the pricing for the next family. And the environment is including people of different cultures and religion. And as people are seeing each other walk through the neighborhood, engaging in shopping or recreation, there isn't a fear or suspicion that a family that's Muslim is next to them enjoying a picnic. And the sense of being safe with each other allows for a very natural desegregation of spaces while honoring everybody's culture, and there's development happening that allows for more homes to be built that support the growing population we have here in [city] at all ages, at all income brackets.

I think I would see people working and enjoying their work. I think I would see people being able to walk around their neighborhood, walk their kids to school, and feeling safe. I think I would see more joy and more peace.

So you have executives, you have teachers and firefighters and police, and you have service workers, you have bus drivers and restaurant waitresses and you have ambulance drivers, and you have a neighborhood where people from the highest income brackets to the lowest income brackets can live together in the same area. And thereby their kids attend the same schools; they go to the same movie theatres and grocery stores and churches. I think ultimately for me this is about to have a thriving democracy, to have a thriving economy, to have a just and equitable society, it essentially means integration. And that means economic integration and by extension racial integration as well.

Every neighborhood has some publicly owned housing that is dedicated for the uplift of people in—you know, lower-income folks. Public housing oftentimes is also mixed income, so it's got lower-income people living next to upper-income people, whether in the same building or the same complex. The schools are more integrated. People walk to work. They walk to the store. They bike when they've got to get further. There's robust, really great bus service and streetcar service running throughout because there's enough people in enough places to make it worthwhile and work to have that kind of great transit. Any neighborhood with a lot of commerce and a lot of jobs, there's also more housing. There's larger apartments. You see fewer and fewer single-family houses or even triplexes or fourplexes as you get closer to commercial areas, which are much more dense. You have many more people living above shops and near where they work.

I really like the phrase 'four floors and corner stores' as a vision for how we want to see some neighborhoods change and transform where people have many of their daily needs easily accessible to them in their neighborhoods near where they live.

We start to see people living more holistic lives. In downtown areas I'd see more human activity. Like people wouldn't feel if they were out and about like they need to buy something. So, where there are hubs of lots of people, I see a world where there's a lot more culture happening. People just gathering daily to practice music or play music. People gathering to exchange cultural items or cook meals for people...I imagine people have shorter work days and less hectic lives. I imagine more areas for people to rest. And I imagine people having easy access to being able to get to and from places, and the places they'd live would be more—they'd be more self-actualized in their homes.

And I think that that looks like people who have some security and stability in where they live. They're invested in making that community a good place, having their children go to school there, volunteering in the school, having nice parks and libraries and public transportation and other facilities that make it a nice place to be. I think people having street parties and block parties, and having people really invested in their own spaces, their own physical spaces where they're working on their gardens and they're being creative on how they paint their house or their apartment, or they incorporate art into their physical space. And I think a process where people are not so atomized and fragmented, where there's a coming together in those physical and community spaces, so that people know their neighbors, know who some of the local decision makers are, have access to them to be able to talk about issues that come up in their community.

We would see parents being comfortable letting their kids walk to school because they were able to afford to live nearby where that schools was. We would see families being able to stay put in a neighborhood, not having to chase rent... That some of the fundamental connectivity in our community that can grow and flourish when people aren't trapped in the day-to-day of trying to think, 'Where am I going to sleep tonight? Where is my child gonna sleep tonight? What groceries are we going to forgo so we can pay that rent?' That that alleviation of that stress creates a new time for energy and creativity and dreaming. And time to de-stress and to enjoy time with family. It would give an opportunity, for instance, again with people in the same neighborhoods, for people to realize, 'Wow, Mrs. Jones, we haven't seen too much of her since her husband passed away, maybe we should stop by and talk to her. Oh, wow, she's really interesting and in fact now the kids like to go over and play there.' All that stuff becomes possible when people can put their roots down, when they don't have to answer this commodity question of can they afford this fundamental.

Granted, many of these vision statements may extend beyond what could seem attainable our base. And some elements of them may be too communal to retain the support of enough of the middle to generate robust demand.

Nonetheless, they illustrate a compelling, tangible, picture of the aims of our efforts. And, notably, they are construed nearly without exception from a default assumption that housing is a social issue.

Which particular expressions and how many will serve us best in public facing messaging is a question to take up in the next phase. For now, these examples provide us a rich array of descriptors to select.

Next Steps

With this and the previous language analysis now completed, we turn our attention to the task before us. The written and spoken words considered so far have provided a sense of what's problematic and promising in the current discourse around each of our core issues and the intersections between them. These assumptions will now need empirical testing.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. What is housing?

And what is home?

2. Why does this issue matter?

PROBE: And for you, personally, why do you work on this issue?

3. What do you wish people believed or “got” about this issue that they simply don’t?

4. Why do some people have a very easy time finding and paying for housing and others don’t?

5. How would you explain this issue to a young child?

6. What would need to change in order to resolve or at least make significant improvements on this issue?

7. Which argument from your opposition, however you define that, do you find hardest to rebut?

8. Now, I want you to imagine how things *ought* to be. I want you to describe this for me, not necessarily in terms of your preferred policies – although it’s totally fine to reference those. What I’d like is a sense of what wandering through your own city or town and let’s say we’re making several stops in different places, looks, feels and sounds like if things were actually functioning as you’d want them to be.

9. Is there anything else you’d like to share with me that you haven’t had the chance to say?