

**NCSHA 2008**  
**Entry Description**  
**The New York State Division of Housing & Community Renewal (DHCR)**  
**Category: Creative Media**  
**Entry Name: Affordable Housing Works!**

*"To build a better city is to work at the heart of a civilization"*

—James Rouse, urban visionary (From DHCR's Affordable Housing Works! PSA featuring Edward Norton, grandson of James Rouse)

*"Affordable housing attracts new jobs and helps preserve property values. It allows firefighters, teachers, and nurses to live in the communities they serve; and seniors to stay in the towns they call home.*

*Affordable housing has changed over the years. This is affordable housing today. Take another look."*—  
From Transcript of DHCR's Affordable Housing Works! PSA

**Background**

Governor Paterson has made affordable housing a priority of his administration because of the integral role it plays in making communities better places to live and work. This new commitment has increased DHCR's presence in communities and allowed the agency to make significant investments across the state.

At the same time, added attention to housing and community renewal has underscored the roadblocks DHCR faces in our efforts to create and preserve safe, affordable homes for working families, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. One of the obstacles we encounter most consistently is a lack of community support, which often delays construction, drives up costs, and sometimes kills projects all together. In our conversations with community leaders, elected officials and our non-profit and for-profit partners, we hear time and again the myths and misconceptions about what affordable housing looks like, what impact it has on communities, and who affordable housing is for.

**Campaign Overview and Objective**

Against the backdrop of an increased commitment to housing and an economic downturn that has made access to affordable homes increasingly critical to people in New York and across the country, DHCR began developing a strategy for overcoming negative stereotypes and attitudes about affordable housing.

The highlight of our campaign was a series of television and radio commercials featuring three celebrities who donated their time and talent to our mission: filmmaker Edward Norton is a partner in Enterprise Green Communities and a vocal and passionate advocate for green affordable housing for low-income people. Former NFL football player Tiki Barber is undertaking community development initiatives throughout the country. And former Major League baseball player Mo Vaughn rehabilitates affordable housing developments and helps revitalize New York neighborhoods.

The campaign consisted of five television commercials and two radio commercials that DHCR previewed at conferences, speaking engagements, and on our web site and the web sites of our partners across the state before airing on broadcast stations statewide for a four-week period.

We determined that our outreach needed to be visual in nature to clearly demonstrate that affordable housing today is attractive and fits in to the surrounding community. It needed to concisely convey this message to a broad public audience, as well as to local officials and community leaders. It needed to be positive and interesting. It needed a call to action. And it needed to be cost-effective.

The public service commercials feature photos and video of attractive affordable housing complexes DHCR has helped develop in recent years. The message is clear... "this is affordable housing today." Viewers are encouraged to "take another look" and rethink their position on affordable housing. The overriding theme is that affordable housing works. It works for families. It works for communities. It works for businesses. The spots culminated in a call to action: Visit [www.affordablehousingworks.org](http://www.affordablehousingworks.org).

By creating a stand alone web site as part of our campaign, we achieved two goals: 1.) to have a place for people to view photos of actual developments in their communities and the people who live there, and to learn a little bit about how they contribute to quality of life. 2.) to develop a permanent vehicle for DHCR and our sister agency, HFA/SONYMA to showcase high quality, attractive developments and rehabilitation projects.

### **Innovation**

DHCR's Affordable Housing Works! Campaign is innovative for several reasons. It incorporates celebrities who have a stake in and commitment to affordable housing and community development, its message links affordable housing to the overall health of communities, and it reinforces the idea that affordable housing and community development impact each of us. In addition, the campaign incorporates a sustainable, permanent, non-static element, ie: the new web site to showcase developments.

### Green element

In addition, one of the commercials focuses specifically on green affordable housing and the value of energy efficiency and sustainable building to our families and cities.

### **Reaching our Audience and Achieving Measurable Results**

Our goal was to reach the general public, as well as community leaders and advocates and elected officials, and to get people talking.

We achieved our goal by presenting our commercials at conferences throughout the state beginning in May 2008, and at training sessions and on our web site. Our partners included links to our PSAs and web site on their sites and in their newsletters. Our commissioner talked about the campaign and showed the spots at speaking engagements and conferences around the state and in media interviews. And approximately 800 television announcements were aired in every market across the state (average 200 tv spots weekly) and approximately 4000 radio announcements over the four-week period.

The result was an influx of emails and calls to both DHCR and our production partner praising our message and our innovative, high quality commercials.

### **Providing Benefits that Outweigh Costs**

DHCR sought out celebrities who care about our mission and were willing to participate in our campaign at no cost. We also used various vehicles for delivering our message, including publications of our industry partners and speaking venues.

In addition, we worked with the New York State Broadcasters Association, taking advantage of a program they offer to assure our PSAs were aired, but at a fraction of the cost of a straight media buy.

On the production end, our in-house public relations staff wrote the scripts and co-produced the spots alongside New York Network, a state-affiliated production facility which offers high quality service for a third of the cost of larger production houses.

### **Replicability**

Every HFA can benefit from working in an environment that welcomes and embraces the development and preservation of affordable housing and that sees the long-term positive impact of decent, safe housing on their communities.

With that in mind, DHCR designed our public service announcements with a universal message: affordable housing works—for everyone. We are offering our creative product to our sister agencies throughout the country and our local partners in the housing and development communities so that they can continue the message.

In addition, our partnership with the New York State Broadcasters Association in airing the spots is beneficial in this regard because they have affiliates and cost-effective programs throughout the country.

### **Achieving Strategic Objectives**

In undertaking this campaign, DHCR viewed our efforts in two stages. First, we sought to produce a quality commercial about the value of affordable housing, and establish a web site to showcase our product. Phase One utilized our partners, their communication vehicles, our web site, media interviews, and broadcasting the spots. We have succeeded in reaching our audience and beginning the long road of changing public perception.

Phase Two of our campaign includes outreach to our sister agencies in other states to present them with the opportunity to take our creative vehicle and adapt it for their state.

We are also working in-house on a film to complement our campaign, which focuses on mayors in cities and villages around the New York State who are leaders in affordable housing and can speak to the positive impact on their communities and be seen as shining examples. We will distribute this video to our partners and legislative leaders, along with our commercials, and we will seek free media in an effort to create a symphony with the message: Affordable Housing Works!