

Draft – FINAL - UPDATED

Feb. 19, 2010

ECHO Questions and Answers

15 Minute Conversation

"AFFORDABLE HOUSING"

HOSTS: Remind audience that this program will address a very complex issue, and that viewers should be ready with pen and paper to write down phone numbers and web site information to follow up on the points made in the program.

1. What is affordable housing?

Sample Answer:

- It is lower cost housing that fits a family's budget
- There is a shortage of low cost housing, so you should sign up right away.
 - Sometimes the wait is short, but it can be a long wait; for some it could take months, or even sometimes several years.
 - The wait depends on the size of unit you want and your income.
- Government provides subsidies for some housing, which may be given through community organizations.
- Housing should be 1/3 of a family's income or less.

2. Our goal is to get people into homes. What kinds of housing do people seek?

Sample Answer:

- There are three kinds of housing needs:
 1. Homeless people who need immediate shelter.
 2. People that want to rent a home, and
 3. People who are ready to buy a home.

3. What if a homeless person or family needs shelter immediately?

Sample Answer:

- Your county human services agency will help you find a place to sleep. The agency may refer you to a shelter. If you are in a rural county, the agency may provide a voucher for a motel.
 - You can also call 2-1-1.
- This is a place to stay for about 30 days, not a long-term solution.
- While you are there, you should apply for long-term housing.
- Because shelters are often crowded, you may have to move to different ones.

4. What is a lease?

Sample answer:

- A lease is a legal contract for renting a home or apartment.
- The lease spells out the responsibilities of the landlord and tenant.
- Most leases are written, but some are verbal.
 - Watch out! A verbal lease puts you at risk because the rules are not clear.
- Cultural note: It may have been common in our former countries to always have verbal agreements, but that is unwise here.
 - Even within our own community, there are people who should not be trusted.
- Read the lease carefully before you sign it. You may need assistance.
- Having a lease helps establish credit history

5. Are there different kinds of leases?

Sample answer:

- Yes, there are federal leases and many private leases.
- Federal leases have different requirements.
- But most leases are for private homes and apartments.

6. What should people look for in a lease?

Sample Answer:

- Length of time to stay in the home.
- Amount of damage deposit.
- When to give notice for moving out.
 - Usually a month before you move out.
- Number of people who can stay in home.
- Whether children or pets are allowed.
- Who pays for utilities (renter or landlord)

7. What is important to know for a new renter?

Sample Answer:

- Get familiar with appliances.
- Take photos of existing damage when you move in.
- Know your rights.
- For added protection, get renter's insurance.

8. What kind of rights do renters have?

Sample Answer:

- Landlord must obey the lease.
- Everything should work properly – water, heat, appliances etc.
- Landlord cannot decide to remove a tenant without first filing an eviction notice.
- Landlord must fix unsafe or unsanitary damage in apartment.
- Landlord cannot discriminate

9. What duties do renters have?

Sample Answer:

- Pay Rent
- Obey law
- Act respectfully
- Don't damage property

10. Do landlords investigate renters?

Sample Answer:

- Many landlords do a background check of renters.
- They may check:
 - Credit rating
 - Criminal background
 - Rental history
 - Employment history
- Landlord has the right to charge you for these checks.
- Note: Many landlords will rent to responsible undocumented workers; even public housing can rent to undocumented workers if they have children who are citizens.

11. If the landlord violates the lease, what can you do about it?

Sample Answer:

- Examples of landlords being unfair.
 - Not repairing plumbing or heating problems.
 - Changing the rent without giving at least a month's notice.
 - Accepting rent payments and not paying the mortgage.
- These problems show why you need a lease.
- Cultural note: You do not need to be afraid or ashamed about asserting your rights.
 - The landlord is not allowed to retaliate.
- Organizations that can help.
 - Home Line
 - SMLRS/Legal Aid
 - If in Section 8 Public Housing, call Housing Agency.

12. What should you do if you want to buy a house?

Sample answer:

- Find out about approved lenders and trusted experts.
 - Home Ownership Center
 - Minnesota Housing
 - City Hall
- Take a class on owning a home.
- Watch out for deals that may be too good to be true.
 - (Even from members of your community)
- Before you trust a lender, get more than one reference and check it out.
- You usually need money for a down payment and closing costs.
- See if you qualify for any first-time home buyer's programs
 - Or other programs
- Give it a lot of thought – it is a big commitment.

13. What is a mortgage loan?

Sample Answer:

- A mortgage loan is a special kind of a loan used to purchase a home.
- Instead of paying rent to the landlord, you pay a mortgage payment to the bank every month
- A mortgage agreement is very complicated, so you need expert advice before you sign it.
- After taking a class, talk with a lender about different mortgage products.

14. What should I know about the mortgage process?

Sample Answer:

- You have the right to switch loan officers.
 - It is not a permanent decision
- Shop around

15. What happens if I have trouble paying back the mortgage?

Sample Answer:

- You should seek help as soon as you know you have a problem.
- If you don't pay the mortgage, the mortgage company can take away your home in a process called "foreclosure."
- You can talk to your mortgage company or bank about foreclosure prevention.
- There are some new federal programs to lower the monthly amount of your mortgage payment. Ask a foreclosure counselor or your mortgage company.
- You can have a "short sale" – sell your house for less than you paid.

16. What can I expect from my bank when I think I can't pay mortgage?

Sample Answer:

- Banks may not listen to you if you haven't missed a payment yet.
- Be persistent – keep trying to tell them you need mortgage help.

17. I've paid someone to do a loan modification for me, and now nothing has happened. What can I do?

Sample answer:

- You should not pay someone to do a loan modification.
- Foreclosure counselors in Minnesota do this for free.
- You can file a complaint with the Minnesota Attorney General's Office.
 - The number is 1-800-657-3787 (Call between 8am and 5pm on business days.)

18. If I get a foreclosure notice for my house, what do I do?

Sample Answer:

- The foreclosure process is complicated. It takes several months.
- Do not panic; Do not move out.
- Contact an agency that can help:
 - MN Home Ownership Center
 - www.hocmn.org or (651) 659-9336
 - Homeline
 - www.homelinemn.org or (866) 866-3546
 - Legal Aid
 - www.midmnlegal.org or 612-332-1441
 - SMRLS – Southern Minnesota Region Legal Services
 - www.SMRLS.org
 - Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
 - www.mnhousing.gov or 1.800.657.3769

19. If I rent a home and my landlord gets a foreclosure notice, what do I do?

Sample answer:

- Renters should follow the same steps as homeowners:
 - Don't panic; Don't move out.
- The process takes several months, so check out the above-mentioned agencies for help.

20. We've mentioned a lot of agencies that can help you. You can find all of them listed on our website along with additional information

Sample answer:

- **HOSTS READ:** For more information on affordable housing questions, visit www.echominnesota.org.

21. Do you have anything else you'd like to add on this subject?

Sample answer:

- Don't give up.
- Seek reliable experts.
- Misc. advice.