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August 13, 2018

Ms. Cara Pavlicek, Village Manager
Village of Oak Park
123 Madison Street
Oak Park, IL 60302

RE: Partner Agency Budget Request for 2019

Dear Ms. Pavlicek,

The Oak Park Regional Housing Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and a Partner Agency with the Village of Oak Park. The Housing Center's mission is to achieve meaningful and lasting racial diversity in Oak Park and the region. To that end, the Housing Center works in Oak Park to promote diversity and integration in the community's rental housing market.

In order to continue our mission, the Housing Center is requesting support of \$425,000 in General Funds, the same amount we received in 2018. Although we were informed that we will see an increase of CDBG funding to the amount of \$33,618 for FY2018, our CDBG funds are strictly reserved for salaries. As such, we intend to use our General Fund dollars to help support the day-to-day operating expenses and additional salaries that are essential to the work we do. We understand that such financial support is significant, however, \$425,000 would account for only 34% of our total draft operating budget of \$1,232,993 for 2019. This funding is critical to provide the continued services that supports racial integration within the Village.

With the continued support from the Village, in 2019 the Housing Center intends to focus efforts on improving the technical infrastructure of our program and examining our outreach and marketing strategies. We know that our numbers have decreased from previous years and we share the community's concern. Over the twelve-month period ending June 30, 2018, the Housing Center served over 2,000 households looking to move to Oak Park. Of those households, 614 moved to Oak Park and 397, a rate of 65%, of those moves either sustained or improved the integration of the village. (Moves always lag behind registrations by about 3 months as people search for apartments and we work to get follow up information on their move.) Although we cannot at this time quantify the impact those affirmative moves and registrations have on the Village overall, the fact that Oak Park remains one of the most integrated communities in the county says something about the work we are doing here.

We understand the importance of being fiscally responsible to the tax payers who help support the Housing Center through our Village funding. The money we receive will not get spent haphazardly. It must be spent with intention and purpose.

Beginning in 2018 and continuing through 2019, we are critically examining our outreach methods and advertising dollars. We want to make sure that every dollar spent is intentional in bringing a rate of return that helps us meet our mission and the vision of an integrated Oak Park. Although our marketing budget has remained stagnant for about 10 years now we understand that different avenues may need to be explored. As a staff we review our online marketing content every 2 months and make adjustments as needed. Also, following up on some suggestions I received from community residents, we are hiring someone to focus more time on our online presence through social media, website content and Google Analytics. This will be essential in making sure people can find us easily and we remain technologically relevant.

We have also continued our outreach efforts to local employers and colleges. Although we use Zillow and other on-line advertising platforms we also understand the importance of targeting local employers to make sure their staff and students who are moving to Oak Park are aware of our services. That is something Zillow cannot do. With our funding from the Village, we will continue to proceed with more intention and critical analysis to make sure those dollars spent are having an impact we all want to see in the community.

Integration- this community value is what differentiates Oak Park from the rest of the region and most of the country. In our Comprehensive Plan, Envision Oak Park, adopted in 2014 by the Village, integration is mentioned over a dozen times in the first four pages of Section 7: Neighborhoods, Housing, & Diversity. The neighboring community of River Forest has no mention of integration in their comprehensive plan. Neither does Naperville or Elmhurst. For the last 50 years, our community has been at the forefront of this issue. We recognized early on that it's not only about embracing diversity but integration has to be present in order to have the community we envision.

Chicago is one of the most diverse cities in the country. However, it is also one of the most segregated. Our comprehensive plan recognizes that diversity alone does not create a community where people of all races and cultures live side by side with one another. That is why integration is a value not only held by community residents but is specifically included in our comprehensive plan. Fifty years ago we recognized that segregation was caused by deliberate and intentional government action. The Housing Center was created to combat the rampant segregation that was occurring on the west side of Chicago. The Village of Oak Park has, for the last 47 years, been the leader in understanding that the only way to combat the intentional actions that caused segregation is to take intentional action to combat it. The Housing Center has been the Partner Agency within the Village whose mission is to work toward this community value. It is this partnership that is responsible for the integration we see today.

Every day, people come into our office requesting help in finding an apartment. In the simplest terms, that is what we do- we help people find apartments. But that is not why we exist. That is not our mission. Helping people find apartments is a tool that we use to help maintain community integration. Every week, potential renters come to our office asking for assistance in finding their new home. They also come with ideas of where they want to live. It is not uncommon for us to hear, "I don't want to live East of Ridgeland," "Not on Austin," "I want to live in the good part of Oak Park," and "I was told to stay away from anything east or south." Within the last month we have even had people say to us flatly, "I don't want to live near Black people." We combat explicit and implicit biases on a daily basis. By sitting with the client, addressing their concerns and actually showing them apartments that support integration, we are able to disrupt these biases that would not otherwise be addressed. Zillow and other online apartment finding platforms don't do that. To compare us to Zillow is not accurate. It's apples and oranges. Whereas people self-select where they want to look for apartments on Zillow, we sit down with the person and help people expand their options when looking for an apartment. We don't tell people where to move. We open up their possibilities.

Last month, in July, Redfin CEO Glenn Kelman, addressed the housing industry's role in perpetuating segregation. In a talk he gave in San Francisco he spoke about how the system seems set up to help white customers get into white neighborhoods. Likewise, Natalie Moore wrote a piece last month regarding the show House Hunters and noticed how white people were only shown homes in white neighborhoods. Both Kelman and Moore have recognized how segregation is continued. This is why the Housing Center exists. This is why we need your continued financial support. Zillow, Apartments.com, Trulia and other platforms can't do what the Housing Center does in Oak Park. People's implicit biases, if not addressed will lead to continued segregation. Redfin is just now catching on to what the Village of Oak Park realized years ago. Deliberate action is needed to combat residential segregation.

The Housing Center disrupts the process that creates and sustains segregation. We do what no one else does in Oak Park. We live the goals set out in not only section 7 of the comprehensive plan that discusses neighborhoods and housing but we also impact the goals created in section 11 of the plan focused on community life and engagement. But we don't do this alone. As a partner agency with the Village, our government has supported the efforts needed to create a truly integrated community. And this work must continue.

Our service is essential to the community's social and economic well-being. Without the Housing Center, Oak Park would not have the integrated character it enjoys today. Our advertising and marketing of the community ensures that a diverse demand, reflective of the region, is continuously seeking housing in Oak Park. Our rental advising service provides prospective residents with factual information about the opportunities in the community and improves their understanding about neighborhood quality. This service is essential to overcome new residents' misperceptions and stereotypes, based largely on racial attitudes, about where to move in Oak Park.

In order to combat possible discrimination, the Housing Center also informs each of our clients about their fair housing rights and the remedies available at Village Hall. This work supports the efforts of the Village's fair housing task force recommendations and strategies.

We ensure a desirable supply of rental units as well. Annually we work with over 200 property owners, ranging from some of Oak Park's largest landlords to the owners of 2-flats, condominiums, and single-family homes. Over the past 12 months, we have listed over 900 units in Oak Park.

Our technical assistance ensures that landlords act in compliance with fair housing law, provides advice on marketing and unit improvements, and serves as a helpful resource for questions ranging from rental pricing to parking to tenant selection. This collaboration also ensures that landlords understand the value of diversity within their buildings.

A significant portion of this work happens directly with property owners enrolled in the Village's Multi-Family Housing Incentives Program (MFHIP). The Housing Center markets the units in the program and assists all the participating landlords. Our assistance ensures that units in the program remain attractive and that they will be rented in a timely fashion. Indeed, in a typical year Housing Center clients rent approximately 85% of all MFHIP units and at a significantly higher integration rate than would otherwise occur.

The Housing Center continues to be essential to the Village's core values as outlined in the Village's Diversity Statement, our Comprehensive Plan, and many other ordinances and resolutions. Our work is at the heart of a diverse, welcoming, and increasingly equitable community. Furthermore, the Housing Center adds additional value to the community. By effectively integrating housing in Oak Park, our schools, parks, businesses, and social networks are integrated as well. By promoting the community as an attractive and welcoming place to live, we further a sense of place that fosters harmony and affinity among all residents. And, by promoting

inclusion in the community, we turn diversity into an asset that promotes strong and stable property values in the community. In addition to supporting our necessary services, an investment in the Housing Center pays dividends to the community through these added values, both tangible and intangible.

Funding from Village Hall is essential to the Housing Center. We appreciate our strong and long-standing partnership with the Village of Oak Park and look forward to continuing to work with the Village in sustaining a diverse, inclusive, and prosperous community.

Sincerely,



Michele Rodriguez Taylor
Interim Executive Director

cc: Tammie Grossman, Director Customer Development Services