

# THE BOND BUYER

## **NLC: City leaders need to invest in anti-displacement, transportation, housing**

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City leaders will be forced to invest more money on anti-displacement strategies, improved transportation options and affordable housing in the coming decade as workers move away from commuting long distances and rely more on local services.

That was detailed in a National League of Cities report on how entrepreneurial city leaders can shape the future of work, which cites Federal Reserve data that 53% of employees work remotely or could do their work remotely if employers allowed them to and where 89% of workers cited commuting as the largest reason why remote work was preferable.



"The future of our local economies is in the hands of today's city leaders. By preparing for tomorrow's workplaces now, we can use technological changes to our advantage and ensure cities remain place of opportunity for everyone," said Clarence Anthony, CEO and executive director of NLC.

Cities with shorter commutes have also led to higher rates of returning to offices than those with longer commutes, "suggesting the strain of long commutes from downtown offices to affordable housing might be coming to an end," the NLC report said.

"This structural change will not just impact remote workers, it will require changes to the built environment," the report said. "Flexible work means workers will spend more time and a greater share of their income in the neighborhood where they live, increasing demand for new and existing neighborhood retail, restaurants, coffee shops, coworking spaces and childcare centers."

This could also create an environment in cities where displacement is more regular and will likely create siloed neighborhoods of high opportunity and low opportunity, creating an opportunity for city officials to respond to said changes.

"Cities will need to invest in anti-displacement strategies, transit and housing across all neighborhoods to ensure every neighborhood is a place of community and inclusive opportunity," the report said. "The era of villages in cities big and small has arrived."

NLC also recommends city officials to "build a presence in the community to enhance access, facilitate inclusive placemaking and offer ongoing capital and business support services for entrepreneurs and underrepresented community members by leveraging city hall's convening power."

The NLC interviewed a few local officials within the report to highlight ambitious steps some city officials have taken to respond to the changes

David Fine, economic development manager for Bozeman, Montana, cited the importance of human relationships and partnerships across the city as essential for creating high-quality jobs and a local pipeline of talent.

Since the pandemic began in 2020, Bozeman has experienced an influx of new residents but has struggled to keep up with designing the city for its new projected growth and meeting the needs of existing residents.

Population growth for Bozeman isn't new, but the level of wealth that comes with this swath of remote workers remains difficult to keep up with.

"What is new for us is the money, the wealth and the fast pace of development we're experiencing now," said Cyndy Andrus, the mayor of Bozeman. "We need to be honest about the housing crisis our cities face. Under these current economic conditions, the cost of land, labor and materials simply makes building affordable housing impossible without government or philanthropic support."

In 2021, the Bozeman City Commission approved a \$2.9 million sale of its former fire station to be redeveloped for middle-income housing, which included a \$1.6 million subsidy through tax increment financing. Still, the city has struggled to build more housing as the city is prevented from levying new taxes to offset new developments and in 2021, Bozeman voters rejected a ballot initiative that would establish a tax to raise money for affordable housing.

"Our lesson from the housing bond was that we were not specific enough about how we were going to spend the money," Andrus said. She added that they needed to stress the fact that "voting for affordable housing is voting for your neighbors, but it is also voting for yourself, for your kids' ability to afford a home in the place they grew up."

The case of Tulsa, Oklahoma's recent initiatives shows what local cities can achieve when they have a clear vision, which for mayor G.T. Bynum, was to "make Tulsa a globally competitive city," following his election in 2016.

Tulsa Remote was launched to attract 1,200 new workers by offering \$10,000 relocation payments, housing support and access to coworking spaces, which contributed \$62 million in new local earnings in 2021 and "one new job created for every two remote workers," the report said.

Starting in 2018, Tulsa officials worked with the Rockefeller Foundation to create a plan of action for building an inclusive, equitable city and informed community feedback, which coincided with the establishment of the Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity, a program that included 41 tangible actions including restructuring the Tulsa Authority for Economic Opportunity into the more streamlined Partner Tulsa.

"Mayor Bynum attributes success for Tulsa's ambitious goals to building community trust through specific action plans, extensive public engagement and demonstrating progress on core government functions," the report said.

"The next ten years will shape the next hundred," the report concluded. "Cities will face great challenges in the next decade, but through bold vision and effective execution, entrepreneurial city leaders can build America's cities, towns and villages into more sustainable and inclusive centers of community and opportunity."

"In the tumult of the forces shaping this decade, city leaders have an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine and shape the future of work and in doing so realize the promise not only of their communities but of the country."

