For more information:

Rob Henken
President, Public Policy Forum
414-276-8240 or 414-708-4392 (c)
rhenken@publicpolicyforum.org

Affordable housing hampered by fragmented approach
Report provides policy options to improve situation

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – *(Tuesday, May 5, 2009)* – A report by the Public Policy Forum

concludes that an integrated and coordinated strategy by government could enhance the region's

ability to overcome an affordable housing shortage for low-income households.

Commissioned by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, ***Give me Shelter – Responding to***

Milwaukee County's affordable housing challenges says affordable housing challenges cannot

be overcome by public funds alone and that Milwaukee County and the city of Milwaukee need

to work together to attract private investment.

"Public efforts to address the housing needs of low-income residents in Milwaukee County are

fragmented, and the multiplicity of public programs is confusing for both housing developers and

investors, as well as for low-income renters," the report says.

To help create a sound and sustainable infrastructure to support the development of affordable

housing in the region, the report recommends the following policy options:

- Convene a permanent intergovernmental planning committee made up of representatives from government, business, and non-profit sectors to identify the most immediate affordable housing needs, predict long-term needs, and establish and implement strategies for meeting those needs. This could build off a promising effort launched by the Milwaukee mayor and county executive to plan jointly on housing for special needs populations.

- Establish an infrastructure to coordinate private investment from lending agencies, foundations, and corporations.

- Encourage Milwaukee County to contract with the city of Milwaukee to administer the Section 8 housing program.

- Secure a stable public funding source for a consolidated city/county housing trust fund which would reduce redundancy among existing funds and ensure that the dedicated funding source would be used to further the goals of the planning committee.

- Consider creating a local rental subsidy program.

"Few issues better capture the nature of problems facing metro Milwaukee than the issue of affordable housing," says Forum President Rob Henken. "Encompassing matters of racial segregation, poverty, and failed public-private partnerships, the area's struggle to provide a safe, decent, and affordable supply of housing for low-income citizens has been a difficult one."

In its key findings, the Forum report highlights the ingredients that have contributed to Milwaukee County's current housing affordability crisis:

- Average household income ranked 103rd lowest among the country's 112 most populous counties, according to the last census.

- There are 47,200 extremely low-income (making less than 30% of the area median income) households, but only 30,700 units affordable to this group.

- The vast majority of low-income renters do not receive public rental subsidies.

- More than 40% of renters are living in housing that is inadequate because it's too expensive, too crowded, or has substandard plumbing and kitchen facilities.

In addition, the report assesses the public infrastructure currently in place in Milwaukee County to support the affordable housing effort, and reviews how other cities and counties around the country are dealing with affordable housing financing, capacity building, and trust funds.

The affordable housing report can be downloaded from the Forum's Web site at http://www.publicpolicyforum.org/pdfs/2009AffordableHousing.pdf.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

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