

■ 5 Priority Campaigns

Below is a one-page document explaining each of Strong Towns' five priority campaigns (Incremental Housing, Safe and Productive Streets, Transparent Local Accounting, End Parking Mandates and Subsidies, and End Highway Expansion). Whether you're helping members understand the priorities at an internal meeting or offering a quick introduction to people outside the organization, these sheets give a clear, straightforward overview of each campaign.

You can choose to print whichever campaign documents make the most sense for your Local Conversation. They can also be edited to reflect how your group is approaching the campaign locally, so the information stays relevant and connected to your community.

In a strong town, housing emerges rapidly in response to local needs. But across the continent, our neighbors can't find homes they can afford to live in, and local builders can't help.

To address the housing crisis from the bottom-up, we must understand:

We are in a Housing Trap.



Housing is treated both as an investment and as shelter. Investments prices must go up, but when the price of shelter goes up, people experience distress.

Cities must address regulations that block bottom-up responses to housing needs.



In most cities, zoning codes and building regulations stunt local housing markets. Building anything beyond a single-family home on a large lot usually requires a variance, rezoning, or long, costly approval processes — a major barrier for small developers, homeowners, and builders who could otherwise add housing that fits the neighborhood.

A healthy housing market is built by many hands — and it works.

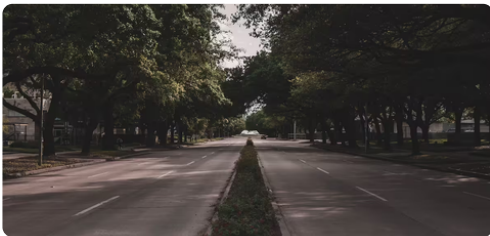


A healthy housing market isn't built by a few big developers but by homeowners, local builders, and neighborhood developers working together. Incremental growth is fast, adaptable, and rooted in the community. It helps neighborhoods mature, reduces risk, and builds local wealth. When we legalize and support it, we unlock the power of many hands to solve the housing crisis.

In a Strong Town, a street is a safe place for people to spend time and build relationships; and a perfect place to put a wealth-generating home or business. But many of us drive on dangerous roads that drain our town's economic vitality.

This is because we fundamentally misunderstand these things about streets:

Streets are a liability, not an asset.



Most cities treat streets as permanent assets that add value to the city. In reality, every street costs money to build, maintain, and police. Unless the adjacent properties generate enough wealth to cover those long-term costs, the city is actually losing money on that street.

Street design is the primary factor in crash prevention and safety.



The design of a street is the most important factor in whether people drive safely or not. It's not about how many signs you put up, how many tickets the police write, or how many public service announcements you run. If a street is designed to feel like a highway, people will drive it like a highway.

Streets should prioritize human movement, not automobile movement.



Most streets have been designed like roads, optimized to move cars quickly and efficiently. This often makes them dangerous and unpleasant for everyone else. When streets are designed for people first, they become safer, more inviting, and more economically productive.



Transparent Local Accounting

A Strong Town only builds what it can afford to maintain, and only makes promises it can afford to keep. But our streets are cracked and potholed, our water systems are aging, and the bill is coming due. And if you're not seeing it in your place... you're about to.

This is because municipal accounting is stuck in a system that hurts long-term prosperity.

Most North American cities are caught in a Growth Ponzi Scheme.



Cities build new infrastructure and see short-term revenue, but the long-term costs of maintaining that infrastructure are far greater. To cover the gap, they chase more growth on the edge of town. This cycle — what Strong Towns calls the “Growth Ponzi Scheme” — leaves cities with liabilities they can't sustain.

Cities must run a profit.



If a city consistently spends more than it brings in, it's on a path to insolvency.

That's just math.

Local accounting must serve the long-term financial needs of the community.



Local leaders should focus on investments that make their communities stronger and more livable for current residents. Outside institutions often incentivize growth and flashy projects that often don't serve people. Strong Towns argues that financial choices must reflect the values and priorities of the community, not outside incentives.

End Parking Mandates & Subsidies

A Strong Town builds wealth by creating places for people to live, do business, and congregate. But most cities have rules about parking that destroy opportunities to make these places.

Cities must end minimum parking requirements.

Parking mandates stifle the creation of homes and businesses.



It's about land and money. More land used for city-mandated parking means less land for much needed homes or wealth-generating businesses. And parking can be expensive to build, costing between \$5,000 and \$50,000 per space. When you force developers to include a minimum amount of parking, you're adding tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars to the cost of a project.

Parking mandates cost cities money.



Parking mandates don't just affect the private development side. They also cost cities a lot of money by making destinations farther and farther apart. You end up with more streets and roads per capita, more stormwater runoff to manage, and more liabilities on the city's books.

End Highway Expansion

We built highways to connect our towns. But then we never stopped building them.

This is because we fundamentally misunderstand these things about highways:

Highways don't address local transportation needs.



Highways are designed for long-distance, high-speed travel. They're great for moving freight across states or connecting cities hundreds of miles apart. But when we try to use highways to provide access to local homes and businesses, we end up driving up congestion and making travel unsafe—even deadly.

Highways are a liability.



Highways come with massive short term costs in planning and construction, and long-term financial commitments for cities that are left with the maintenance and replacement bill.

Highways destroy financial productivity.



Highways don't generate wealth for cities. In fact, they often destroy it. When a highway cuts through a city, it lowers the value of adjacent land, displaces residents and businesses, and fragments neighborhoods. That's not just a social cost, it's a financial one.

Highway development is driven by top-down priorities.



Cities often get help from state or federal sources to build highways, but once they're built, the maintenance, policing, and infrastructure around them become local responsibilities. That's a huge burden.