



Essential Reporting on Affordable Housing



DONATE

NEWSLETTER

CONTACT

EXPLORE SHELTERFORCE

FROM THE FIELD

ORGANIZING STRATEGY

# HOW A DALLAS HOUSING COALITION WON BONDS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Dallas's bonds aren't usually used for housing. A new coalition of advocates changed that.





**BRYAN TONY**

Founder and managing director of BGT Strategies



**KATE GUSTAFSON**

Policy intern with BGT Strategies

PUBLISHED: SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

SHARE



TOPICS **HOUSING, ORGANIZING STRATEGY, STATE & LOCAL POLICY**

 [Shelterforce](#) SOUNDCLOUD

How a Dallas Housing Coalition Won Bonds for Affordable Housing



11:50

225

[Privacy policy](#)

For years, Dallas has grappled with an escalating affordable housing crisis. Housing costs have soared while incomes have stagnated. From 2003 on, the city had never allocated more than a few million dollars of dedicated bond funding for affordable housing initiatives—until 2024, when a rapidly mobilized coalition secured \$82 million for affordable rental and homeownership programs as well as homelessness solutions.



In Dallas, bonds are used every 5 to 10 years to address long-term needs like streets, parks, libraries, and public safety facilities. As consultants for [Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity](#), we wanted to prepare for the [2024 capital bond program](#). In July 2022, we convened a meeting to determine what issues and priorities we could build the most consensus around to improve housing affordability. The attendees were the founding members of the [Dallas Housing Coalition](#) (DHC). In June 2023, the [DHC](#) formally announced its campaign for a groundbreaking bond investment.

According to a study by the [Child Poverty Action Lab](#), Dallas faces a shortage of 33,700 affordable rental units. Without action, this crisis is expected to grow as more people move to North Texas. Dallas homeownership rates also lie below the state average and, as of 2021, 48 percent of renters were considered housing-cost-burdened. By joining forces, DHC members aimed to raise awareness surrounding the upcoming bond and pressure policymakers to act.

The DHC could offer valuable insights into the housing challenges faced by the low-income Dallas residents that its members served. By being well-versed in their daily struggles, coalition members understand how stable housing can transform lives, not just providing shelter, but also supporting better health, education, and financial stability for individuals and families.

On this unprecedented journey, we learned to organize early, communicate often, and not to count our chickens before they hatched.



EXPLORE SHELTERFORCE



A rally at Dallas City Hall, September 2023. Photo courtesy of Dallas Housing Coalition

## ORGANIZE EARLY



The coalition members' common mission—solving Dallas's housing crisis—was bolstered by personal outreach, word of mouth, low barriers to joining (no membership dues or meeting requirements), and intentional building of an inviting environment for a diverse range of community leaders and practitioners. As a result, the coalition grew rapidly. From June 2023 to May 2024, membership increased from 65 organizations to over 200, including housing developers and builders, corporations, trade associations, institutions of higher learning, nonprofits, policy experts, and other community-based organizations.

This wide-ranging coalition highlights two important points: first, that Dallas had lacked a unified voice for housing advocacy, and second, that there is a strong desire for such advocacy across Dallas's various industries and neighborhoods.

Even so, the coalition recognized that securing bond dollars would require extensive public education and persuasion of elected officials. DHC launched its campaign with detailed messaging about its creation and purpose. The coalition focused on key messages, like "Dallas is big enough for everyone" and "Dallas is becoming unaffordable," hoping to resonate with the public.

DHC reached out to elected officials to meet individually with their constituents in the coalition. We contacted all 14 Dallas city councilmembers, the mayor, and the city manager. We attended multiple community bond task force meetings and in-district town halls of each councilmember and organized speakers to address the city council throughout the bond development process.

The coalition used social media, email outreach, events, and networking to highlight Dallas's housing needs. We included sobering statistics about housing unaffordability. Wages aren't meeting housing needs—according to 2022 census data, the [median household income in Dallas was \\$65,400](#). At the end of the same year, the [median home sale price](#) was \$340,000—which increased to \$430,000 by June 2024.



The coalition deployed a calculated, organic social media campaign that gave a human face to the housing crisis, such as videos featuring members [inviting others to join our cause](#) and explaining why funding affordable housing is so important. Content centered around themes like [“Housing 101,”](#) describing Dallas’s housing crisis and debunking [housing myths](#) (such as unfounded fears of affordable housing bringing crime to neighborhoods). We wanted to avoid relying on emotional appeals, instead incorporating statistics and data. In addition to social media, members used their personal networks to reach new audiences.

## COMMUNICATE OFTEN

As competition emerged for the limited bond resources, it became increasingly difficult to convince council members to consider significantly investing in housing through a bond that wasn’t usually dedicated to housing. [The city of Dallas calculated over \\$16.6 billion in unmet needs](#) among all the potential areas the bond could benefit, like housing and infrastructure. In addition to the DHC’s \$200 million ask, other groups, like [arts-](#) and [parks-centric](#) coalitions, had their own requests, totaling hundreds of millions. Meanwhile, the city had a bonding capacity of [\\$1.25 billion](#). The coalition vied for public support.

Some questioned our motives and worried that their allocations would be threatened. *The Dallas Morning News* editorial board commented that it was [“far from clear how building private housing for a few meets the public-good criterion that bond spending is intended for.”](#) Others made their cases in op-eds like [this one, which lauds the return on investment of parks](#), and by showing up at City Hall. To combat this early on, the DHC organized a [well-attended rally on the City Hall plaza in September 2023](#), which featured remarks by several city council members.

Dallas Parks Coalition's supporters argued that parks are critical to attracting people to move to Dallas, while the DHC argued for the importance of keeping Dallas affordable to retain existing residents. Both coalitions argued that their causes would boost Dallas's economy and grow the city's population. Community members and elected officials questioned whether using bond funds for housing was appropriate because bond money had typically been allocated for building, repairing, or maintaining infrastructure. They debated whether constructing new housing fell within the proper scope of bond funding.



EXPLORE SHELTERFORCE



**dallashousingcoalition**

2,109 followers

[View profile](#)

[View more on Instagram](#)

---

7 likes

**dallashousingcoalition**



Dallas has the potential to produce over 10,000 housing units annually in the next decade! This graphic details how \$150 million in bond funding in 2024 and 2029 can make this happen. This is achieved by leveraging flexible, municipal funds alongside private, state, and federal funds. See all Dallas' potential by clicking the link in our bio! [#DallasHousing](#) [#HousingForAll](#)

Add a comment...

EXPLORE SHELTERFORCE

The coalition navigated pushback by acknowledging the validity of all requests in making its own focused case for affordable housing. Building on the social media campaign, the coalition continued to use platforms like Instagram to educate the public and detail planned uses of the bond money to address concerns. A prime example of this strategy is an Instagram post titled "[Dallas Housing Bond Specified Uses](#)," shared in January. The graphics illustrated how Dallas could produce over 10,000 housing units annually in the next decade and leverage private, state, and federal funds providing up to \$12 for every \$1 in municipal bond funding. By presenting this information visually, the coalition not only continued its "Housing 101" theme but also directly addressed questions about how bond money would be used, demonstrating transparency and furthering its public education efforts.

## DON'T COUNT YOUR CHICKENS BEFORE THEY HATCH

After over a year of advocacy and organizing by the DHC, in January 2024, the big day finally arrived for the city council to vote to decide the allocation of the bond funding. The coalition had been working relentlessly, confident that at least eight council votes, or the majority, would approve at least \$100 million for Dallas's affordable housing and homeless initiatives.

DHC representatives sat cautiously optimistic in the council chambers gallery that morning. But as the proceedings began, the atmosphere quickly grew tense. The council member presiding as mayor pro tem, who had spoken in favor of the proposed \$200 million housing bond investment at



the [September city hall rally](#), unveiled a new bond proposal of his own. Suddenly, a couple of the council members who had previously expressed support started wavering. This ultimately changed the outcome of the vote.

The reality soon became clear—the mayor pro tem desired to whip up support for his own proposal, including diverting \$75 million of the \$1.25 billion bond capacity to provide each council member, and the mayor, with \$5 million in discretionary funding to use as desired. As members shuffled in and out of the private back room behind the council dais, the coalition’s two staunchest housing champions, Adam Bazaldua and Chad West, scrambled to lock in votes, but their best efforts fell short. When the final tally was counted, the housing allocation had been slashed to \$82 million—a historic achievement, but also a brutal compromise after over a year of tireless work by hundreds of advocates.

In the May elections, all three housing-related bond propositions passed with [at least 70 percent voter approval](#). The propositions dedicate \$36.6 million for mixed-income gap financing, \$26.4 million for affordable single-family homeownership development, and \$19 million for permanent supportive housing and homelessness solutions.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

As disheartening as the outcome was at the time, members of the DHC saw it as a proof of concept and vowed to redouble its efforts. The coalition is now well-positioned to make affordable housing a central issue in the spring 2025 municipal elections, holding those who wavered accountable and advocating for additional policy reforms and investments to meet the demands of Dallas’s escalating housing crisis.



The DHC will be monitoring the timing of when bond funds will become available in tranches over the next five years.

Now, the coalition is shifting its focus to support Dallas's comprehensive land-use plan update, [ForwardDallas](#). The proposed plan contains promising zoning recommendations that would allow for more housing choice and access throughout Dallas, which would in turn help alleviate the lack of housing supply. The DHC is using similar strategies as it did with the bond advocacy, focusing mainly on public education on social media and at community events to address [misconceptions of what ForwardDallas is](#) and what it can do.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### BRYAN TONY

Bryan Tony is the founder and managing director of BGT Strategies, a consulting and advocacy firm based in Dallas. He oversees a portfolio of clients including the Dallas Housing Coalition, Dallas Area Habitat for Humanity, and various local campaigns.



### KATE GUSTAFSON

Katherine Gustafson is a policy intern with BGT Strategies. She is a junior at the University of Puget Sound, majoring in English and minoring in politics and Spanish.

## TAGS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

TEXAS

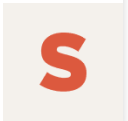
## COMMENTS

### Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment \*

Name \*



Email \*

Website

## RELATED ARTICLES

[ALL ORGANIZING STRATEGY](#)

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. [Learn how your comment data is processed.](#)

---

### How Rent Control Helped Create East Palo Alto

BY DAVID SKIDMORE  
MARCH 22, 2022

The story of East Palo Alto's incorporation is one marked by great contention among local stakeholders, but also provides valuable lessons for organizers in forging and mobilizing local coalitions.

---

### Philly's 1970s Fight to Revive Rent Control

BY MICHELLE CROUCH  
JANUARY 21, 2022

As rent control reemerges as a strategy to address an intense housing crisis, we go back 50 years to examine the lessons learned from past struggles in Philadelphia.

---

### Minneapolis, St. Paul Voters Say 'Yes' to Rent Stabilization

BY EDWARD G. GOETZ  
NOVEMBER 15, 2021

Despite an all-out effort by the housing industry to stop them, two rent stabilization initiatives were given the green light following this month's vote.



EXPLORE SHELTERFORCE

**Shelterforce** is an independent publication that serves (and sometimes challenges) affordable housing and community development practitioners across the United States.

FOLLOW



**QUICK LINKS**

- About Us
- Staff and Board
- Donate
- Supporters
- FAQ
- Strategic Plan 2023–2028

125 Glenridge Ave. #1547  
Montclair, NJ 07042

(973) 509-1600

info@shelterforce.org

Member of the Institute  
for Nonprofit News