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Three Paths to Affordability for Local Governments.

Public officials can make the greatest difference when they focus on their communities' housing, transportation and utility costs.

The concept of "affordability" keeps gaining ground as a mantra for public officials and political candidates across the political spectrum. New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani centered his campaign almost exclusively on the issue, which was also a centerpiece in the campaigns of the new Democratic governors of New Jersey and Virginia. In Georgia, Republican Secretary of State and gubernatorial candidate Brad Raffensperger has accused his legislative critics of "tomfoolery" for demanding that his office release sensitive voter data to the U.S. Department of Justice — arguing that lawmakers should instead focus on pressing issues like affordability.

The word is being swatted around like a pickleball, but too few public officials have stopped to seriously consider what "affordability" actually means for local governments and the people they serve, and what those governments can do to make a difference.

I served for nearly two decades as a public official in both the legislative and executive branches of local government, followed by six years as a state college president. Across every leadership role I held, my primary focus was creating affordability for individuals and communities. From that experience and the prevailing research, I have concluded that there are three areas where local officials can make the greatest difference.

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