

Regulatory Barriers Conference Roundtable Summary

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The summary session highlighted the political economy of regulatory barriers that face reform advocates. Local governments that promote regulatory barriers are, in fact, often responding to the perceived desires of their electorate. No level of government is in a position or willing to take on this powerful local dynamic. What state government wants to get involved in local land use disputes?

Federal influence is dilute, as authority for localities to regulate land use is mostly defined and controlled by states. To an extent, some argue that federal programs, such as the Community Development Block Grant program and HOME, can be used as leverage to coerce localities into reducing regulatory barriers. But, if the locality is using regulatory barriers already to discourage the development of affordable housing, federal programs that promote affordable housing might not be a high priority in the first place.

Another possible leverage point is the federal-state nexus, a juncture explored by the Kemp Commission. The federal government could incentivize states to be more proactive on regulatory barriers. This approach, however, foundered on economic and political reality. The federal government would never place enough funding at risk to effectively change states' incentive structures to tackle regulatory barriers.

Thus, the final panel generally supported making progress on developing more information on the affordability impact of specific regulatory barriers. While no particular regulation emerged as the highest priority, panelists expressed support for the idea of tackling one regulation at a time to examine the impact in depth and disseminate information on its affordability impact. They also recognized the need for research that challenges the predominant view that affordable housing hurts home prices.

Panelists also recognized that the lack of data hampers effective advocacy research designed to expose barriers. They generally supported efforts to more consistently gather data on a national basis. Finally, panelists recognized that the public often wants policies that may inadvertently increase housing prices and that highlighting this apparent contradiction may be useful.

Author

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