

**MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING OF
THE BOARD MEMBERS OF
THE HARRIS COUNTY HOUSING POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

THE STATE OF TEXAS

COUNTY OF HARRIS

The Board Members of the Harris County Housing Policy Advisory Committee (“the Committee”) convened in their first session of 2020 at 10:00 a.m. on the 26th day of February in the Auditorium Conference Room of the Harris County Community Services Department, 8410 Lantern Point Dr., Houston, Texas, and roll was called at 10:04 a.m. of the duly constituted acting members of the Committee, to-wit:

Daphne Lemelle	Harris County Community Services Department
Allison Hay	Houston Habitat for Humanity
Lance Gilliam	Precinct 1
Mike Moody	Greater Houston Builder’s Association
Mike Nichols	Coalition for the Homeless
Zoe Middleton	Texas Housers
Oudrey Hervey	United States Veterans Initiative
Erica Brown	County Judge
Starla Turnbo	Houston Apartment Association
Mary Green	Harris County Children and Adult Protective Services
Tom McCasland	City of Houston Housing and Community Development
Quentin Wright	Lone Star College
Eric Heppen	Precinct 3
Horace Allison	Harris County Housing Authority
Mercedes Sanchez	Precinct 2
Assata Richards	Sankofa Research Institute
Staci Lofton	Harris County Public Health
Lloyd Smith	County Engineering
Paul Shanklin	Precinct 4
Jennifer Herring	Harris County Sheriff’s Department

And all of said members were present at the convening of such meeting, thus constituting a quorum. The following persons also attended the meeting: Kyle Shelton, Deputy Director for Urban Research, Kinder Institute at Rice University, and Amy Schultze, on behalf of Staci Lofton, representing Harris County Public Health.

Affordable Housing Study Progress Update

Mr. Shelton announced the portion of the contract for conducting the Affordable Housing Study (“the Study”) was approved by Harris County (“the County”) on January 28, 2020. A contract with the City of Houston (“the City”) is still being negotiated with the Kinder Institute; however, efforts

are being made to finalize negotiations for a united effort on the Study between both the County and the City.

Public engagement for the Study is anticipated to last seven to 10 months, per Mr. Shelton. Engagement efforts should begin in April 2020. Once initiated, outreach will center on three strategies for community engagement: “speak-outs,” formal community meetings, and a series of stakeholder meetings. Speak-outs refer to a type of outreach where representatives will go to high-traffic areas – such as a grocery store – in selected neighborhoods to solicit input and participation in the Study’s community survey. Thirty speak-outs are planned inside the City and another 30 are planned for outside the City. Outreach materials should be expected at the Committee’s next meeting, as well as an overview of the engagement plan. Mr. Shelton likened the branding and marketing effort of the Study to that of the Census currently being pursued in the County. Marketing and branding materials are to be used for the next decade to establish a relationship between the County’s housing initiative and the community. Outreach should look to the methods executed by the different agencies involved in the North Houston Highway Improvement Project, Ms. Richards remarked.

Collection and analysis of data was Mr. Shelton’s next point of discussion. Large amounts of data will be distributed to stakeholders for review in the next few weeks. Stakeholders will ensure there are no major lapses in relevant information by providing feedback. Initial data will be focused on unincorporated Harris County and non-Houston cities, with all data for the County expected to be complete in the next three months. Topical briefs, the first one to be distributed in May 2020, will follow data collection and analysis. All topical briefs will be finished by July 2020. Several briefs will include information on what gaps exist in all aspects of housing, not just affordability; a focus on housing affordability; a summary of the engagement process; among other possible topics. Ms. Richards suggested some briefs align with the goals of the to-be-established working groups, although topics are still being decided upon. Ms. Richards also advised that a thorough explanation of the Study’s methodology be included in one of the topic briefs as to reinforce credibility. Public access to the collected data in an easily-decipherable format was a suggestion by a committee member. Though, such a decision will have to be made through the Commissioner’s Court. Kinder Institute’s data team will be available for questioning by the Committee at the subsequent meeting, said Mr. Shelton.

Generally, the Study will be answering what housing needs exist in Harris County. Affordability is not the sole focus of the Study but will be a component. The Study’s final report will include strategies to address housing issues for the City, unincorporated Harris County, smaller cities within the County, as well as what can be shared by each jurisdiction. Ways that the County can facilitate implementation of such strategies will also be included. Finally, Mr. Shelton asked the Committee to (1) review and report to the Kinder Institute all existing programs, products, and policies in their respective organizations so as to not duplicate these programs, products, and policies in the Study’s recommendations and (2) provide input on the data being collected and how the dataset can be improved.

Working Groups

Ms. Lemelle opened up discussion on the working groups related to findings from the Study. Mr. Smith pointed out that “land use,” rather than “zoning,” should be the language utilized throughout

the process. Ms. Richards expressed similar sentiments. Ms. Hay expressed concern that the initial working groups proposed did not represent the interests of top priority for her organization; others agreed. Mr. Gilliam warned that the creation of new working groups may cause a duplication of efforts. By the end of the conversation, members of the Committee agreed that the first topic brief could be used as a guide for establishing working groups. Mr. Smith added, in the meantime, possibly expanding the current Low-Income Housing Tax Credit working group to a broader “funding and financing” group that is more inclusive of Ms. Hay’s and others’ priorities.

Other Discussion and Concerns

One concern brought up was the possible rigidity in the Study process as data and topical briefs are introduced early on. Mr. Shelton assured the Committee that the process will remain fluid with constant input from stakeholders. A committee member pushed for working groups to be formed as soon as possible, as bimonthly meetings are insufficient for the amount of work to be completed. Ms. Lemelle agreed, reiterating that data and topical briefs should be provided to the Committee once available.

Regarding the content of the Study, Mr. Wright described housing insecurity among college students, imploring that the issue be considered in the Study. Other committee members emphasized criminal justice, public health, flood prevention and mitigation, and transportation as aspects needing attention. While the study will not go into extensive detail on these issues, they are certainly important to a holistic view of housing that will be discussed, said Mr. Shelton. On another note, Ms. Turnbo pushed for a clear definition of “affordable housing,” citing misconceptions from community members related to the term. Ms. Richards added that discrimination based on income is a major issue related to Ms. Turnbo’s concern. Mr. Shelton mentioned that a message of housing being “safe and affordable” will be employed when discussing the issue broadly while using the standard 30% of area median income metric for the term’s technical definition. Sanitary and safe conditions for housing – not just the number of units – should also be a priority of study and messaging, added Ms. Hay.

A final question asked regarded how communities would be empowered and mobilized around the findings from the Study. Mr. Shelton answered that such actions were not in the scope of the Study. However, the survey associated with the Study does have the opportunity for interested residents to provide contact information if they are interested. Kinder Institute will also conduct follow-up meetings with stakeholders, many of them advocacy organizations, to discuss the results of the Study. Such efforts will spur mobilization from communities outside of what is being done by the Study. The Commissioner’s Court may also call for advocacy efforts as a result of the findings.

Suggested Reading: *Color of Law*

Suggested Viewing: “Segregated by Design”

Adjournment and Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 11:27 a.m. The Committee’s next meeting will be held April 29, 2020.