

**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 at 10:00 a.m. on the 26th day of August through Microsoft Teams and roll was called at 10:02 a.m. of the duly constituted acting members of the Committee, to-wit:

Daphne Lemelle	Harris County Community Services Department
Lance Gilliam	Precinct 1
Mike Nichols	Coalition for the Homeless
Zoe Middleton	Texas Housers
Mary Green	Harris County Children and Adult Protective Services
Eric Heppen	Precinct 3
Mercedes Sanchez	Precinct 2
Assata Richards	Sankofa Research Institute
Lloyd Smith	County Engineering

And all of said members were present at the convening of such meeting, except Allison Hay, Mike Moody, Oudrey Hervey, Chan Chiu, Starla Turnbo, Tom McCasland, Quentin Wright, Horace Allison, Dr. Umari Shah, Paul Shanklin, Jennifer Herring, and Wayne Young, thus constituting a quorum. Staci Lofton and Aimee Schultze attended the meeting in place of Dr. Umair Shah. The following persons also attended the meeting: Roberta Burroughs, Miguel Garcia, Kyle Shelton, Alpa Patel, Richelle Henderson, Leah Chambers, Rene Martinez, Veronica Soto, Desi Canela, and Jon García.

Introduction

Ms. Lemelle asked for a motion to approve the last meeting’s minutes with an amendment. Ms. Richards moved to approve the last meeting’s minutes with an amendment; Mr. Gilliam seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved as amended.

Ms. Lemelle introduced the policy facilitators that were contracted to work with the different work groups and the full Committee. Ms. Burroughs and Mr. Miguel Garcia introduced themselves and their professional experience. Mr. Miguel Garcia then went through the method that the consulting team will be employing throughout the Committee facilitation process. This is the same process that has been presented in the previous work group meetings in June 2020.

Presentation from Verónica Soto

Ms. Soto, Director of Neighborhood and Housing Services Department, City of San Antonio, was invited to speak to the Committee regarding San Antonio’s process for developing their own

recommendations and 10-year plan for housing affordability and quality. The plan was adopted by the San Antonio City Council in August 2018. Preparing recommendations for the San Antonio City Council involved a five-person task force that was charged with creating a comprehensive, compassionate framework for housing which would allow residents to live with dignity. The task force took a “bottom-up” approach, according to Ms. Soto. The task force aimed to be grounded in the reality of housing as seen through San Antonio’s families, which resulted in a push for a massive amount of community engagement. Paired with this outreach strategy was a desire for data-driven conversations while looking at frameworks and similar initiatives nationally.

Technical groups were created to focus on certain aspects of the study. The topics of the five technical groups were housing for all, coordinated housing system, removing barriers to affordability, funding and financing, and neighborhood issues. The City of San Antonio acquired consultants to facilitate the conversations within the technical groups. Another consulting firm was selected to assist with data collection. A third consulting firm was hired to run the study’s community outreach program. Technical groups met frequently and public workshops were widely attended, per Ms. Soto.

In developing recommendations, Ms. Soto noted there were challenges. One challenge faced was the difference in expectations for what was desired from the study between the city department charged with coordinating efforts around the study and the mayor’s vision for the study. Furthermore, due to many of the recommended programs coming from the study requiring significant funding, there was the challenge of finding funding streams. Aligning all participants, including members of the City Council, with the same definitions and understanding of the data was another hurdle encountered during the study. Community buy-in and City Council buy-in to the project were other major issues that had to be resolved. Many of these challenges persist in the implementation phase of this study.

The study was able to develop a series of policies and strategies to achieve the original charge of the task force. Ms. Soto explained there was a dramatic increase in funding for housing projects as a result of the study. Now, the City of San Antonio has a minimum expectation specifically for affordable housing spending each year as opposed to solely devoting funding to the Neighborhood and Housing Services Department. Programs developed from the study have their results quantified in terms of funding, units of housing constructed, as well as other metrics, such as the amount of housing vouchers needed by San Antonio residents. A communication plan is also maintained between the partnership organizations involved with implementation of the recommendations adopted by the City Council. Currently, the City of San Antonio is working on an anti-displacement strategy, older housing stock study, and other plans in order to accomplish the goals set by the study and 10-year plan.

Ms. Lemelle asked whether anti-homelessness initiatives were included in the budget described by Ms. Soto for affordable housing. Ms. Soto said that San Antonio’s anti-homelessness programs are mainly ran from the city’s Department of Human Services. The affordable housing budget mentioned is not targeted toward these initiatives. Ms. Lofton commented on her experience in New York City where a study related to housing vacancies was pursued. Ms. Lofton asked what was used to inform San Antonio’s plan. Ms. Soto pointed to data such as that detailing the conditions of the older housing stock around the city and what type of residents tend to live in

those homes. This data exposed gaps in investment that later informed study recommendations. Ms. Lemelle asked Ms. Soto if there were legislative priorities that were developed for the state legislature. Ms. Soto said there are legislative priorities developed but that municipalities must also acknowledge many pieces of legislation that may inhibit the city's affordable housing goals. Aside from state-level policy, there is also constant communication with federal officials for legislation in Congress. Passage of the HEROES Act, for example, is a priority for the city currently.

Work Group Updates

Ms. Lemelle first mentioned that outputs from the work groups would be technical memos which would assist in developing recommendations from the Committee to the Harris County Commissioner's Court (Commissioner's Court).

Opportunity and Accessibility Work Group

Ms. Richards began the opportunity and accessibility work group update. Ms. Richards was unable to attend the last meeting but applauded the group's co-chair for attending and running the meeting. Ms. Richards mentioned that the group discussed the upcoming legislative agenda, with an emphasis on HB 1257 from the 86th Legislature. She mentioned that the group had desired another meeting to discuss the legislation even further. Ms. Burroughs mentioned that the land use and resiliency work group had a Doodle poll sent out to the membership of the work group but that not enough people were able to meet at the same time. Ms. Richards pointed out she did not receive the poll. However, if the poll was only sent to the land use and resiliency work group, the discussion on legislation should be expanded to include other work group members. Ms. Richards asked if all work group meetings were already scheduled. Mr. Jon García responded that all work group meetings were set for the rest of the year. A Doodle poll will have to be sent for the meeting on legislation, though.

Funding and Finance Work Group

Mr. Miguel Garcia presented what was discussed at the work group meeting, which included sources and constraints of financing. Many members of the group were interested in learning more about how philanthropic dollars could be used to assist in affordable housing development. Mr. Miguel Garcia mentioned he had invited a staffer from the Walton Family Foundation – who is currently participating in a similar housing initiative in Arkansas – to talk with the work group regarding the topic. Mr. Miguel Garcia answered a question from Ms. Lemelle regarding whether the Walton Family Foundation was interested in investing in programs in Harris County by saying their only involvement at the moment was educational and informative. Ms. Lemelle added that having a larger foundation invest in such initiatives first could then spur local donors to follow suit. Mr. Nichols highlighted that part of the philanthropic effort should be a discussion of how Houston and Harris County collaborate on affordable housing efforts. Ms. Lemelle responded that defining any collaboration between the two entities should be a task of the funding and financing work group.

Ms. Burroughs explained that this was the first work group where the facilitators used the questions developed by the Harris County Community Services Department (CSD) from April 2020 to guide conversation. This process will be replicated in the other work groups in the future. The Kinder

Institute was also asked to provide questions for the work groups in order to have outputs from the work groups be meaningful to the work being done by the Kinder Institute. Ms. Richards brought up a concern regarding the use of philanthropic dollars for affordable housing programs. She stressed that money from wealthy individuals cannot be seen as a sustainable funding source because of the discretionary nature these funds and the possibility of these funds being diverted from other initiatives needing funding in other areas. Mr. Nichols agreed with Ms. Richards, saying that philanthropy can never replace government but that philanthropy can be a catalyst for other investment. Ms. Burroughs suggested that all the Committee members receive the minutes from all work groups and noted that the funding and finance work group was not solely discussing philanthropy as a funding source. Ms. Lemelle echoed Mr. Nichols's comments.

Land Use and Resiliency Work Group

Ms. Burroughs gave the update on the land use and resiliency work group. She mentioned there was good, robust discussion during this work group, especially relating to the legislative agenda. The group desired to focus on legislation related to land banking and resiliency as a result of the conversation. Ms. Burroughs mentioned it would be wise to see what other work group members are interested in to have a combined session on legislative priorities. Ms. Lemelle offered to invite the Harris County Legislative and Global Affairs team to discuss legislative priorities. Ms. Lemelle admitted that the group was delayed in its focus on legislation; however, she will ask the Harris County Legislative and Global Affairs team if the work groups can still submit recommendations for the 87th Legislature.

Housing Study Update

Community Engagement

Mr. Shelton announced that nearly 3,000 surveys had been completed by Harris County residents. Activations are looking differently as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic from in-person activations to those that are virtual. A town hall was held by the engagement team earlier in the month. A Spanish-language and English-language town hall will be held in September 2020. The engagement team will also be present at the Harris County housing fair. Mr. Shelton encouraged those at the meeting to share the collateral distributed by Ms. Canela to encourage participation in the study survey. Once engagement for the Census begins to close, the engagement team will increase advertising and efforts around housing study participation. Hundreds of online activations are anticipated from now through December 2020 – the time the survey is intended to close.

Topic Brief #2

Mr. Shelton wanted to prime the Committee members for future conversations on topic brief #2 by introducing the brief quickly in today's meeting. The topic brief will focus on a high level suitability and risk analysis. Produced by the University of Texas School of Architecture and Planning, the brief will show a range of hazards, such as industrial-environmental issues, and attractors. This brief will be able to show how risks and attractors may be balanced to meet the needs of future housing projects and programs. To encourage discussion on these topics, the Kinder Institute delivered questions to the facilitation team, as discussed previously. The full topic brief should be sent to Committee members by early October for more robust discussion at the full Committee meeting that same month. Mr. Shelton highlighted that the Kinder Institute is soliciting

input from members on what hazards and attractors should be included in the brief. The housing survey also has questions related to hazards and attractors.

Ms. Lemelle asked what a “successful” survey response looks like. Mr. Shelton answered that the initial goal of 90,000 responses was decreased to 45,000 due to the City of Houston not participating in the study. Ms. Lemelle then asked whether geography will be considered when developing responses. Mr. Shelton said that geography is a central component to the analysis of survey responses with underrepresented and vulnerable populations being especially targeted for activations.

Affordability Definition

A document describing the Kinder Institute’s affordability definitions will be shared with Committee members. In order to define existing supply, a definition on affordability must be settled, said Mr. Shelton. While important to thinking of programs for addressing gaps in housing, the affordability definition should be seen as a baseline for understanding and not an end to a conversation. The Kinder Institute used area median income from Housing and Urban Development and Census data for Harris County. Regional metropolitan statistical area (MSA) median income was not used due to a drastic difference between county median income and that of the MSA. One interesting trend seen at the county level was that, after a certain size, families with more members in the household see decreases in income rather than the expected increase as seen at the MSA level.

The document provided by the Kinder Institute breaks down affordability into different thresholds of how much housing costs will take up a household’s income. There are three thresholds: 25% of a household’s income, 30%, and 36%. Mr. Shelton also described in detail the inputs for the calculated housing costs. Ms. Lemelle and Mr. Smith encouraged Mr. Shelton and the Kinder Institute to do their best in identifying overarching trends and using data visualization to make the data more digestible. Mr. Shelton agreed. Mr. Smith acknowledged that using current interest rates for housing costs could be misleading due to historically low rates. Mr. Shelton said the team desired to use information that was as up-to-date as possible. Mr. Smith encouraged Mr. Shelton to put some qualifier identifying that some assumptions do change with time. Ms. Henderson had questions as to how the team came up with loan amounts and the 25% cost burden scenario. Mr. Shelton said the loan amount was based on a 20% down payment assumption. For the 25% threshold, that number was based on historical thresholds as well as other similar studies on housing affordability. However, Mr. Shelton highlighted that Committee members should send suggestions for changes to assumptions related to the affordability definition. Once the definition is confirmed, the research team will work on a market analysis of the county.

Conclusion

Ms. Lemelle announced that the City of Houston will not be participating in the study as initially planned. Additionally, the study will begin taking into account the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing.

The next full Committee meeting will be held on October 28, 2020. The meeting adjourned at 12:03 PM.