

**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 30th day of December through Microsoft Teams and roll was called at 10:03 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
Mike Moody	Greater Houston Builder’s Association
Mike Nichols	Coalition for the Homeless
Oudrey Hervey	US Veterans Initiative
Starla Turnbo	Houston Apartment Association
Assata Richards	Sankofa Research Institute
Loyd Smith	County Engineering
Paul Shanklin	Precinct 4

And all of said members were present at the convening of such meeting, except Lance Gilliam, Zoe Middleton, Chang Chiu, Mary Green, Tom McCasland, Quentin Wright, Eric Heppen, Horace Allison, Mercedes Sanchez, Jennifer Herring, and Wayne Young. The members present did not constitute a quorum. Staci Lofton and Aimee Schultze attended the meeting for Harris County Public Health; Mary Itz attended the meeting for Tom McCasland. The following persons also attended the meeting: Adrienne Holloway, Roberta Burroughs, Miguel Garcia, Kyle Shelton, Rene Martinez, Elizabeth Mueller, Desi Canela, and Jon García.

Introduction

Daphne Lemelle began the meeting by expressing her appreciation for everyone’s attendance at today’s meeting. Lemelle followed by introducing Dr. Adrienne Holloway, who assumed the role of Executive Director of the Harris County Community Services Department (CSD) in November 2020. Dr. Holloway introduced herself, mentioning that the Committee was one of the exciting parts of her work and is looking forward to working with the Committee on the projects at hand regarding affordable housing.

Discussion of 2021 Legislative Priorities

Introduction

Lemelle began this portion of the meeting by pointing to a document distributed to the Committee at a previous date that listed CSD’s legislative priorities for 2021 relating to housing policy. Priorities were developed from previous surveys taken of the Committee, a special meeting of the

Committee held earlier in the year, and research from various CSD staff. Lemelle solicited comments on the list from the Committee.

Income Discrimination Ban Item

Starla Turnbo listed three items that warranted review or discussion: the repeal of the state's preemption against localities to implement income discrimination bans; reasonable landlord-tenant fee regulations; and a proposed statutory requirement to direct any payments made by a tenant to a landlord first be applied to any outstanding rent before other charges are fulfilled. Regarding the income discrimination ban, Turnbo stated that the possible increase in bureaucratic burdens on landlords due to implementation of such a ban would overwhelm the landlords. Alternatively, Turnbo suggested that the focus of housing advocates should be on addressing the issues with Section 8 vouchers on a federal level¹. The federal program disincentivizes landlords to participate in the program due to cumbersome bureaucratic hurdles. Furthermore, Turnbo pointed out that some developers are under loan provisions from lenders that specifically bar prospective tenants participating in a Section 8 voucher program from living in that development. Legislation, as supported by CSD's document, could jeopardize these loans. Regarding the other two issues, Turnbo stated that reasonable fees and application of payments to certain charges were matters left to those party to the contract. Any legislation touching these subjects, therefore, warrant further discussion.

In responding to Turnbo, Lemelle agreed that documentation requirements and other bureaucratic processes are burdensome for those participating in the program. Lemelle also explained that income discrimination is a real problem among renters. Lemelle asked Turnbo if she would bring suggested language changes forward for consideration. Turnbo accepted. In the meeting chat, Elizabeth Mueller stated that the loan provision language discussed previously is likely regarding project-based Section 8 vouchers rather than tenant-based Section 8 vouchers. Assata Richards asked Turnbo if clarifying language regarding the loan provisions would ease concerns about the income discrimination ban repeal bill. Turnbo believed the language would ease concerns. Richards followed up other concerns brought up by Turnbo by suggesting the legislative priorities list in question must include recommendations for federal policy change. Lemelle agreed. Richards added that such an effort provides an opportunity to coordinate Harris County and City of Houston policy agendas. Returning to the loan provisions conversation, Mike Nichols believed that lending requirements as discussed by Turnbo should be banned due to their oftentimes racist and classist effects. Lemelle recognized these comments. Lemelle noted that federal recommendations, where needed, would be added to the legislative priorities list and would also discuss the idea Nichols suggested.

Protections for Special Populations Item

Richards moved the conversation to the special populations item on the legislative priority list. Richards believed that a class of people that should be added to these special populations are those who are long-time residents of a neighborhood and are at risk of displacement due to gentrification. While Houston does not have zoning regulations, Richards noted that other efforts may be able to address protections for this group of people. Richards added that age is likely a factor that contributes to the risk seen by this population. Richards offered to provide language from other

¹ The income discrimination ban essentially bars landlords from denying a potential tenant based on their participation in the Section 8 voucher program.

states on what is being done to ensure protections for those at risk of displacement. Lemelle pointed out that homestead preservation districts are a method to provide the protections suggested by Richards but that other solutions are always welcome. Richards reiterated the need for this group to be protected, saying that Houston's Second Ward is often unnoted and undiscussed when it comes to displacement discussions.

On a similar topic, Nichols asked whether the Fair Housing portions of the legislative priorities includes formerly incarcerated persons, as that population is of special interest to Nichols' work. Lemelle answered that formerly incarcerated persons are not explicitly mentioned in the Fair Housing subject but that it could be added elsewhere. The Fair Housing legislation mentioned in the list relates to the alignment of state and federal law when it comes to Fair Housing regulation. Nichols also suggested a broader view be taken that includes racism and criminal justice reform as those are related closely with homelessness. Lemelle asked for any specific language to be sent to CSD. Oudrey Hervey suggested that specific language for protection of veterans and their housing needs be added to the priority list. Hervey justified this suggestion because this group is typically tracked in data as a measure of a program's success; therefore, the importance placed on this group should be reflected in the priority list. Lemelle stated that such language would be added.

Other Topics

Allison Hay asked if there are any bills highlighted by CSD for the group to advocate for. Lemelle explained that CSD is tracking legislation and that the Harris County Intergovernmental and Global Affairs Department (IGA) is doing its own tracking of bills. IGA sends updates to CSD; CSD will keep the Committee apprised of updates. So far, the only item that Harris County is highlighting in the legislative session relates to county land banking. However, the priority list developed by the Committee and CSD will be used to inform further county legislative action as well as inform local elected officials as they develop their legislative agendas. A general discussion on coordinating these efforts with City of Houston and other groups was held. Lemelle said updates on advocacy efforts and coordination would be brought to the Committee at the next meeting.

Richards introduced the issue of preservation of naturally-occurring affordable housing. Richards asked whether incentives for preservation of such housing is being considered. Lemelle said that more research can be done to determine what policies could incentivize such preservation. Lemelle added that, while naturally-occurring affordable housing is usually discussed in terms of small developments, medium- and large-scale complexes sometimes fall under the term. Finally, Richards suggested that a point on economic development be added to the list.

Discussion and Approval of 2021 Meeting Schedule

Lemelle moved the meeting to a discussion on next year's meeting schedule. Committee members were provided a schedule draft in their meeting packets. Prior to entertaining a motion to approve the meeting schedule, Richards asked why the dates differed on the work group meetings. Desi Canela said that CSD wanted to provide ample time between work group meetings and full committee meetings to follow-up on action items and other work. Lemelle noted that while work group meeting dates are set, the times of these meetings may vary depending on work group member availability. Nichols moved to approve the schedule. Hay seconded. All members present voted in favor of the schedule.

Housing Study Update

Public Survey

Kyle Shelton began his presentation on updates regarding the housing study being conducted by Harris County and Rice University's Kinder Institute. Shelton displayed a map of survey response rates across Harris County, reporting that the survey has received 6,300 responses. A response rate of at least 1% of the county's population was the initial goal. Members of the outreach team for the survey highlighted certain geographies within the county to target due to different factors that would lead to underengagement, such as high levels of non-English speakers. The effectiveness of these targeted efforts has so far been mixed, per Shelton. There are no survey results to distribute yet as the survey is not yet complete and different weights have not been applied to responses. The team would be more comfortable sharing results in March 2021 once all public engagement is complete. Shelton encouraged members to reach out to the engagement team to partner on activities aimed at increasing response rates. Lemelle said that CSD has recommendations for increasing response rates. Richards asked if the engagement team could attend an Opportunity and Accessibility Work Group meeting to discuss engagement strategy. Shelton said he could ask Maya Ford to join one of these meetings. Shelton highlighted that a myriad of issues have complicated engagement in the previous year, including the COVID-19 pandemic and several large-scale messaging operations (such as the presidential election and Census efforts). Engagement has been moving toward a more digital and social media operation due to limited in-person opportunities. Shelton noted that the engagement team is working with already-established community groups to educate and solicit survey responses, with the goal of making the My Home is Here campaign a long-lasting public engagement tool. Hay asked Shelton in the meeting chat if someone from the engagement team could reach out to her regarding Sheldon Independent School District and the 77044 ZIP code.

Focus Group Comments

Shelton discussed the different focus groups that were held over the past months as part of the study's engagement. In-depth summaries of the focus group discussions could be found in the Committee's meeting packets. Several constituencies were invited to provide their input on different housing questions to be used to guide the study. Other focus groups will be added to receive input on COVID-19 and its impacts on housing as well as how emergency housing response can be more resilient in cases of disasters or other emergencies. Big themes that emerged from the focus group meetings included the drivers for siting of housing (like access to amenities, schools, transportation options, and minimal flood risk), barriers to providing housing to those households at 30% to 60% of area median income, reinvestment in housing by Harris County as private providers are unlikely to do so, general mitigation efforts by the County, taking advantage of different financing options (such as tax exemptions and public facilities corporations), identifying land suitable for development, and others. Lemelle mentioned that the increased amount of focus groups comes from additional funding for the study to analyze the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on housing as well as to ensure data from within the boundaries of the City of Houston is collected.

Attractors and Hindrances Survey Results

Shelton did not have results on attractors and hindrances of housing development from the public's perspective ready for presentation at this meeting. However, these suitability topic results can be discussed at the Committee's next meeting, Shelton said. Roberta Burroughs presented results from an internal survey distributed to members of the Committee on attractors and hindrances of affordable housing development. Richards applauded Burroughs and her team for asking the questions in the survey in order to connect the Committee's ideas with the public's perceptions. Shelton, while qualifying this comment by saying the survey data is not with him, commented that the results from the Committee were generally in line with those of the public. As a result of meetings with governmental entities and advocacy groups regarding suitability, the Kinder Institute has been changing how it identifies certain buffers from hazards which will inform suitability maps developed by the organization for the housing study. Shelton hoped that layers for suitability mapping would be complete by January 2021 for presentation at the February 2021 Committee meeting. Once receiving feedback on these layers at the February meeting, the layers will be compiled into topic brief #3, along with other topics. Shelton added that the suitability work will be working in tandem with a cluster analysis as introduced at the last Committee meeting. Mueller will be working with the Committee on the cluster analysis portion. Lemelle believed cluster analysis was a better method of outlining the results of the suitability questions as rankings, which is the alternative, can create and solidify perceptions of certain communities. Shelton said that cluster analysis will not replace work on suitability but rather will identify parallels between neighborhoods across the County. Rene Martinez commented in the meeting chat that an asset-based development approach is a good framework to use for analysis.

Work Group Updates

In Burroughs' documents describing the actions taken at each work group meeting between the last Committee meeting and today's meeting, Burroughs highlighted the main points discussed at those work group meetings. Burroughs asked each chair person to read out those highlights and add on other comments, if desired.

Opportunity and Accessibility Work Group

Richards read the highlights for the Opportunity and Accessibility (OA) Work Group. Richards added that a discussion around demographic trends and the correlation between age and income must be had as it relates to its effects on affordable housing. Turnbo said the group did a great job at their meeting. Richards underscored that in this conversation there must be an aspect of student housing included. Students are an exploited population as they must reside near campus for their studies. Developers will then take advantage of this need by building high-rent developments. These developments lead to gentrification of the surrounding neighborhood, putting pressure on multiple populations at the same time.

Funding and Finance Work Group

Nichols read the highlights for the Funding and Finance (FF) Work Group. Nichols hoped that a more progressive U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development would make finding public funds for affordable housing easier. Nichols announced that different state agencies charged with distributing dollars for housing would be presenting at the next FF meeting. Nichols said the aim of the panel is to better understand how the available dollars are distributed and how local developers can more readily access these funds. Richards commented that this work would involve

a community land trust and that the County must learn from the City of Houston Land Trust's experience on how to most effectively run the program. Better collaboration between Harris County and the City of Houston is needed, said Richards. Nichols agreed and suggested Ray Miller be brought in to discuss this complex area. Lemelle added that CSD has talked with leaders of the City of Houston's Land Trust and welcomed the opportunity to discuss with Richards and her fellow land trust board members on their experience with developing the program. Lemelle said a follow-up meeting on this topic would be sought.

Land Use Design and Resiliency Work Group

Burroughs read the highlights for the Land Use Design and Resiliency (LUDR) Work Group. Burroughs mentioned that her and her team will be identifying patterns between the different work groups and update the Committee on themes developed from the different meetings. Richards pointed out that one partnership that is critical in a community land trust is that of the taxing authority over the property and the land trust itself. Property taxes contribute to unaffordable housing; so, ensuring that properties in a community land trust are appraised so that taxes do not undermine the affordability aspect of the program is crucial. This becomes especially problematic when property is passed from one generation to the next in a family. Lemelle agreed with Richards that heirship is a major concern, especially for Black homeowners. Nichols expanded on this conversation by stating how systemic racism has placed barriers on wealth accumulation for Black households, especially if viewing wealth using the formula of assets minus debts. Community land trusts can help with this issue, Nichols claims.

Conclusion

Ms. Lemelle thanked those in attendance and said she looked forward to a completed study and implementation phase of the study recommendations in the coming year. Nichols reiterated that a more progressive federal administration may mean more opportunities for housing and encouraged CSD to stay aware of updates. Lemelle agreed and asked Committee members to contribute their own observations with the changing administration.

The next full Committee meeting will be held on February 24, 2021. The meeting adjourned at 11:44 AM.