

# HALA Community Focus Groups

## Process Guidelines



### Purpose

The Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) community focus group process is part of our effort to engage the public in providing input into implementation of the HALA recommendations and the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) program, also known as the “Grand Bargain.” Focus groups will act as sounding boards that allow diverse voices the opportunity to give feedback on City proposals to implement the HALA recommendations. A particular focus is how implementation of the MHA program and corresponding land use and zoning changes could affect neighborhoods, their priorities, and, more broadly, the values of our city. The goal of the MHA program is to build 6,000 new affordable units over the next 10 years, contributing to an affordable and livable Seattle.

### Structure

The City has convened four focus groups comprising neighborhoods with similar characteristics or key issues. Each of the four focus groups consists of roughly 40 stakeholders who represent a diversity of interests, perspectives, and neighborhoods. Focus groups will inform, and be informed by, periodic *Citywide Conversations* and *Neighborhood Meetings* convened around HALA and MHA.

### Outcomes of Focus Group Input

Focus groups will serve as sounding boards during development of City policies and actions to successfully implement HALA recommendations, including the MHA program. The focus group process will influence and inform staff proposals and the community conversations held in neighborhoods. The process is an important part of the dialogue among City decision makers, staff, and the public.

### Schedule and Timeline

Focus groups will generally meet monthly for 90 minutes. Monthly meetings will begin in May, with regular placeholders established for each focus group (e.g., the first Monday of every month). The focus group process will conclude at the end of 2016.

Focus group meetings are open to the public, with time for public input at each meeting. Meetings may also be recorded or filmed so that a broader public audience can follow the process online and via social media.

### Roles and Responsibilities

#### Focus Group Members:

Focus group members represent the diversity of interests and perspectives in Seattle. Staff will incorporate input and feedback from the group into background materials shared with the broader public and in policy and planning materials presented to the Mayor and Council.

The role of the focus groups is to provide feedback on City proposals for implementing the HALA recommendations. Significant policy direction from Mayor Murray and the City Council over the last few years laid the groundwork to address housing affordability and livability. Therefore, focus group members are not

starting from scratch to address the housing affordability crisis. We ask that focus group members begin with the basic outlines of the HALA recommendations, review the proposed policies and programs, and provide feedback on their implementation. For example, focus group members will share input on how the MHA program might apply in specific neighborhood areas, but not whether to implement an MHA program as outlined in the “Grand Bargain.”

Specific responsibilities of focus group members include:

- Adhering to the ground rules;
- Reviewing pre-meeting materials as required to prepare for the meeting;
- Attending focus group meetings and, if possible, other HALA-related community conversations and neighborhood meetings;
- Providing informed and constructive input with a focus on how to improve the program; and
- Staying focused on the topics of the current meeting agenda.

#### City Staff:

City staff will provide the information and materials necessary for focus group members to be informed about the purpose of and need for City proposals. They will serve as an information resource at focus group meetings and clarify the City’s intent for HALA and MHA.

Specific responsibilities of City staff include:

- Keeping focus group members apprised of the planning process and outcomes from broader public involvement efforts;
- Coordinating with other City agencies around emerging issues, opportunities, and policy limitations and advising the focus groups accordingly; and
- Avoiding undue influence on focus group members’ input or feedback.

City staff will also engage with other stakeholders in the community through *Citywide Conversations* and *Neighborhood Meetings* for further feedback and ideas that will inform the planning process.

#### Facilitation Team

Diane Adams and Susan Hayman of EnviroIssues will serve as facilitators for the focus group process. They will remain neutral and impartial to the process and its participants.

Additional EnviroIssues staff will take notes and coordinate documentation of the focus group meetings.

#### **Documentation**

For each meeting, the Facilitation Team will document key discussion points, areas of agreement or disagreement, action items, and next steps. Every effort will be made to state items accurately, clearly, and fairly.

Draft meeting summaries will be circulated for one round of review and comment by focus group members, then finalized by EnviroIssues and distributed to focus group members and City staff. Final meeting summaries, including the list of meeting participants, will be posted on the City’s HALA Focus Group website.

## **Decision Making**

Focus groups are not decision-making bodies. There will be no attempt to reach consensus, except for decisions regarding meeting schedules and other operational issues. Areas of agreement and disagreement that emerge during discussion of input and feedback to City proposals will, however, be noted as the process continues.

## **Focus Group Ground Rules**

*We will...*

- Start and end meetings on time;
- Attend meetings regularly;
- Come prepared to discuss agenda topics;
- Actively and respectfully participate;
- Share speaking time – nobody dominates the conversation;
- Actively listen to one another;
- Speak from interests, not positions; and
- Silence electronic devices during the meeting.

*As we interact with others outside the focus group, we will...*

- Avoid characterizing the views or opinions of other focus group members outside of any focus group meeting or activity; and
- Accurately describe the level of agreement that has been reached for any input or feedback collectively provided to the City.