HALA Community Focus Groups
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Hub Urban Village Focus Group | Meeting #3
Tuesday, July 12, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Seattle City Hall, Bertha Knight Landes Room

Meeting Summary

Opening Remarks and Introductions

Diane Adams, facilitator, reviewed the ground rules, schedule, and goals for the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) Community Focus Group process and provided members with an overview of the agenda and the objectives for the Hub Urban Village Focus Group's third meeting.

Reflection on MHA Implementation Principles Feedback

Geoff Wentlandt, Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD), provided an overview of the draft summary of Focus Group feedback on the Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) implementation principles that had recently been shared with the City Council members and the Mayor. Geoff said that the draft summary document indicated areas of general agreement, areas where opinions diverged, and areas of special interest for particular Focus Groups.

Geoff encouraged members to review the draft summary document and submit questions, comments, or concerns to OPCD before the Focus Group's next meeting in August.

Open House

Geoff encouraged Focus Group members to browse two sets of informational boards set up throughout the meeting space. The boards provided:

1. Information on how MHA would create affordable housing

2. Example illustrations of development in various zones under MHA

As additional context for the boards, Geoff invited a representative from the Seattle Office of Housing (OH) and a representative from the Low Income Housing Institute (LIHI), a local non-profit affordable housing developer, to provide an overview of how the agency and the organization work together to develop and operate affordable housing in Seattle.

Miriam Roskin, OH, noted the following key information:

- OH has many responsibilities—chief among them is awarding funding for the production of affordable housing. The funding for affordable housing comes from the Seattle Housing Levy and the existing voluntary incentive zoning program. OH also monitors affordable housing development over a 50-year term to ensure that income and rent restrictions are enforced and that residents receive quality amenities.

- OH puts out Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for affordable housing development. Interest in these RFPs often substantially exceeds available annual funding. OH then evaluates proposals based on sustainability, cost effectiveness, proximity to amenities, location, and need.

- For every dollar that the City invests in affordable housing, developers are able to leverage approximately three additional dollars of private and public funding.

Robin Amadon, LIHI, added a non-profit affordable housing developer's perspective, highlighting the following points:

- LIHI considers the future needs of communities and focuses on constructing affordable housing in places where an influx of market rate development is likely. LIHI maintains affordability in its developments for at least 75 years.

- Many of LIHI's developments incorporate space for other needed community services, such as preschools and community food banks.

- LIHI leverages OH funding with federal funding sources and private sources (banks, insurance companies, etc.) that in turn get tax credits for investing in affordable housing.

Focus Group members reviewed the informational boards and engaged in discussion with City staff and the LIHI representative.

Large Group Discussion

The group reconvened after the open house, and Diane presented several discussion questions. Focus group members responded with their perspectives:

- One board highlighted criteria that the City uses when choosing where to locate affordable housing. Are there additional criteria that the City could add to this selection process?

  - It is important to locate affordable housing near school and daycare—these are needed resources for families

  - Healthcare and mental health resources

  - Strong requirements that ensure placement of affordable housing around the city

- Are the provided example renderings of what MHA development could look like in different zoning areas an appropriate tradeoff for increased affordable housing?

  - Raising the height of developments is a good way to increase density, and the tradeoff is minimal

  - Additional height allows for greater incorporation of open spaces, which increases neighborhood aesthetics and usability

- Are there any adjustments that could be made to proposed MHA developments that would allow them to better fit within existing neighborhoods?

  - Maintain (or create) cut-throughs mid-block, where needed, to provide accessibility

- o Incorporate space for retail and other services that communities need (e.g., daycare, community spaces, shared work spaces, etc.)

- o Make public areas outside of developments more than just sidewalks

- o Incorporate courtyards or other open spaces into design

- o Create and enforce policies that require landlords to ensure the safety of tenants and businesses

Focus Group members also highlighted the following comments:

- Development in single-family areas should also pay into MHA

- MHA should also provide pathways for homeownership, rather than solely producing affordable rental housing

- It is important for OH funding to be provided for rehabilitating and updating existing housing structures, in addition to new developments

- MHA should work to address existing apartments that transition to condos—there are currently no provisions that preserve affordable housing in these situations

- The definition of a family is changing (they may include several families living together)

Observer Comment

Diane invited the observers in attendance to share brief comments with the group:

- One observer expressed concerned about citywide zoning changes for all urban villages. This observer noted that the different areas of Seattle will have different challenges and needs as they continue to develop.

- One observer raised a question about using OH development funds to leverage private funds for the construction of affordable housing. The observer noted that these private funds are likely finite and that they could go to other uses if not invested in affordable housing. The observer also noted concerns about whether MHA was the best strategy for increasing affordable housing in Seattle.

- One observer noted that one of the informational boards showed 10,000-square-foot lot with 60 homes. The observer noted that the addition of new housing units could stress existing infrastructure and parking. The observer also noted that placement and development of affordable housing in many areas of the city may be dictated by the availability of property.

Next Steps

Diane thanked the group for their participation and discussion. She reminded participants that the next Hub Community Focus Group meeting would be held on August 23 at City Hall. Diane reminded Focus Group members to submit any additional comments on the draft summary of Focus Group input on the MHA implementation principle before this next meeting.

Diane closed by encouraging Focus Group members to continue using the online HALA Consider.It tool (http://hala.consider.it) to provide additional thoughts on planning for housing affordability in Seattle.

Attendees

Focus Group members:

- Alex Brennan
- Allem Grissom
- Beatrice Peaslee
- Chris Maite
- David Evans
- Eli Edwards
- Hannah Tang

- Jane Taylor
- Jennifer Cells Russell
- Jennifer Price
- Karthik Jaganathan
- Katharine Kurfurst
- Laura Bernstein
- Luis Ortega

- Mary Monroe
- Natalie Curtis
- Patrick Burns
- Shay Huff
- Shelly Cohen
- Sue Shaw

Observers

- Walt Mason
- Susanna Lin

- B. Williams
- Steve Nielsen

Project team and other City staff:

- Geoffrey Wentlandt, Office of Planning and Community Development
- Miriam Roskin, Office of Housing
- Robin Amadon, Low Income Housing Institute
- Diane Adams, EnviroIssues
- Brett Watson, EnviroIssues