

HALA Community Focus Groups

Medium Density Urban Village Focus Group (Focus Group 3)

Summary of Meeting #1 (May)



Thursday, May 26, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Seattle City Hall, Bertha Knight Landes Room

Opening Remarks and Introductions

Susan Hayman, facilitator, led a round of introductions and reviewed the ground rules, schedule, and goals for the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) Focus Group process. Susan also provided Focus Group members with an overview of the agenda and the objectives for the Medium Density Urban Village Focus Group's first meeting.

Susan reminded Focus Group members that they are welcome, but not obligated, to participate in further HALA conversations with members of their community to the extent that they feel comfortable.

Race and Social Justice Initiative

Elliott Bronstein, Office for Civil Rights, provided Focus Group members with a presentation detailing the history and mission of the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI). Elliott encouraged members to consider the RSJI as a lens through which to view HALA and provide input to the City.

Elliott recognized that the overall mission of the City's RSJI was to eliminate racial disparities and achieve racial equity by ending institutional racism in City government, promoting the inclusion and participation of all residents, and partnering with the community and other groups to achieve racial equity. Key discussion points from Elliott's presentation included:

- Considering the differences between equality and equity
- Framing race as the focus for the City's equity initiative
- Recognizing the legacy and impact of redlining and other discriminatory policies
- Highlighting strategies that the City is using to achieve racial equity goals and end structural racism, including internal toolkits and coordination with external, community-based organizations
- Encouraging Focus Group members to "lead with race" and use the lens of RSJI to ensure that HALA and Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) principles meet the City's overall goal of racial equity

Focus Group members provided the following questions and comments during the interactive presentation included:

- Can you give a specific example of something that emerged from RSJI?
- Could you translate what RSJI means for housing?
- Equity isn't always fair. Isn't the equality vs. equity comparison too black and white?

- In Seattle, we like to pretend we are far more progressive and integrative than we really are. As long as we continue to pretend that we do not have a racial issue, the worse it gets.

Elliott thanked participants for their engagement and discussion. He encouraged Focus Group members to contact him with any additional follow-up questions.

Principles for Implementing Mandatory Housing Affordability

Geoff Wentlandt, Office of Planning and Community Development, provided Focus Group members with an overview of MHA and MHA implementation principles. Key ideas from Geoff's presentation included:

- MHA will seek to provide 6,000 affordable units over 10 years. These units will remain affordable for 50 years.
- Affordable housing will serve individuals and families who make no more than 60% of the area median income (AMI). (In 2016, the AMI for the Seattle-Bellevue HUD Metro Fair Market Rate Area is \$63,300 for an individual or \$90,300 for a family of four.) To be considered affordable, housing costs cannot exceed 30% of an individual's or a family's income.
- MHA will require affordable housing as commercial and multifamily development occurs. Key strategies include:
 - Developers "performing" by constructing affordable housing units or "paying" into a fund to create affordable housing throughout the city.
 - The City making zoning changes in Urban Villages, adding development capacity in commercial and multi-family zones, and expanding some Urban Village boundaries.
- The City engaged members of the public to gather an initial set of MHA implementation principles. These principles highlight the core tenets of MHA as well as community-generated principles that will shape MHA implementation.

Focus Group members provided the following questions and comments during the interactive presentation.

Note: Answers to many of the questions that couldn't be fully answered during the meeting are being provided to focus group members in a follow document.

- What is the base line of total number of affordable units?
- Do we have the inverse statistic of how many people are spending more than 30% of their income on housing?
- What efforts are being made to help marginalized people that have a fixed income?
- Why do you consider AMI rather than federal poverty levels?
- I know there is an option for developers to opt to pay for vs. build affordable housing. How often can they do that, and what sort of restrictions are in place about where they can build affordable housing?

- Why don't you only consider the perform option vs. the payment option? That way we wouldn't have as many issues of segregation and pushing people out of a neighborhood.
- How is the public learning about this process?

Geoff requested that Focus Group members review the MHA principles and provide feedback on posters hung throughout the meeting space. He also noted that Focus Group member comments on Group B principles, community-generated principles that would help to guide MHA implementation, would be most helpful to the City at this time. Geoff stated that future Focus Group discussion on the MHA principles would incorporate additional focus and detail on those areas where members highlighted questions, thoughts, or concerns.

Observer Comment

Susan invited the observers to share brief comments with the group:

- Is HALA going to move us towards RSJL goals or move us away from them, especially if there is an option for developers to pay to build something elsewhere? Please continue asking questions about data and upzoning.
- The net 6,000 units doesn't account for the current affordable housing that will be lost. And originally there was a measure for inclusionary housing. My big concern is that this is not being forced to occur where development is happening. This is going to increase the economic segregation of the city. I think that the upzoning percentage needs to be higher to be more inclusionary.
- I think this is a very important process that needs to occur. Obviously the amount of land is a finite thing, but we can make more units on each piece of land. To me, the only way to make housing more affordable is to make more housing. You're going to have the laws of gravity fighting against you if you don't push the supply. I encourage people to be ambitious to increase the supply. One other component that hasn't been as emphasized tonight is the transportation perspective – high density pockets that connect to mass transit will make things better for everyone.
- I think it's very important for people to understand how this will impact their individual houses. There needs to be mailers to people's homes so that they understand what is going on. We need transparency about who is making the decision and how it is made.
- I would like to challenge people to look at synergistic opportunities with ADUs (accessory dwelling units) with MHA goals. I personally don't agree with the way ADUs currently are managed, but I think they can be combined with MHA goals.
- What will build out look like? We were promised years ago that the City Council would watch affordable housing units. We should be looking at build out so that what we build is what we want – would you want to live in this city after everything is done?

Next Steps

Susan thanked the group for the discussion and explained that the principles are the central topic of the next meeting. She also shared that the “Consider.it” online tool will be used throughout the process to promote an ongoing dialogue with the public. She explained that focus group members are welcome to participate when they can, but it is also meant for people who are otherwise not part of the HALA process.

Attendees

Focus Group members:

- Amalia Walton
- Bárbara Guzmán
- Brie Gyncild
- Chase Craig
- ChrisTiana ObeySumner
- David Osaki
- Denechia Powell
- Diane Rose Vincent
- Hendrik de Kock
- Jessica Jones
- Jin Lee
- Josh Castle
- Kara Luckey
- Kathleen Lange
- Laurie Torres
- Lisa McElroy Sweeten
- Lynn Sereda
- Matt Hutchins
- Maureen Cartano
- Michael Lanthier
- Peter Amos
- Peter Hornyack
- Peter Wehrli
- Rick Hooper
- Rokea Jones
- Ryan DiRaimo
- Sarah Armstrong
- Shanna Alvarez
- Tiffany Chan
- Toby Thaler
- Wendy Cho Ripp

Observers:

- Joan Weiser
- Frank Shields
- Walt Mason
- Craig Brooke-Weiss
- Miranda Berner

Project team and other City staff:

- Geoff Wentlandt, Office of Planning and Community Development
- Elliot Bronstein, Office for Civil Rights
- Susan Hayman, EnviroIssues
- Jentien Pan, EnviroIssues