Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda Advisory Committee Meeting

December 11, 2014, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM Seattle City Hall, Boards and Commissions Room

Advisory Committee members present: Cindi Barker, Maria Barrrientos, Catherine Benotto, Betsy Braun, Mitch Brown, Sylvester Cann IV, Alan Durning, Merf Ehman, Hal Ferris, Sean Flynn, Ubax Gardheere, Gabe Grant, Jonathan Grant, Marty Kooistra, Paul Lambros, M. A. Leonard, Don Mar, David Moseley, David Neiman, Co-Chair Faith Li Pettis, Lisa Picard, Bill Rumpf, Kristin Ryan, Jon Scholes, Co-Chair David Werthheimer, Maiko Winkler-Chin; Committee Staff: Leslie Brinson Price; Facilitator: John Howell

Not Present: Estela Ortega, Jermaine Smiley

Welcome and Agenda Review

Co-Chairs Faith Pettis and David Wertheimer welcomed members to the meeting. John Howell reviewed the agenda topics.

Charge and Scope for the Committee

Co-Chair Pettis reminded committee members to review the committee's scope and charge from the City Council (under Tab 2 in the committee notebooks). The outcomes in the Statement of Purpose include that the committee is to identify the *priority* of strategies it recommends and that the actions be for implementation within three years; that the strategies advance race and social justice goals; that the strategies be data driven; and that they be informed by public input.

Co-Chair Wertheimer outlined four topics that will *not* be part of the committee's scope and the rationale for not including them:

- 1. Shelter for homeless people There is a separate work group that is charged with developing recommendations for this population within 60 days.
- 2. Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) rent policies SHA has a separate process that includes citizen comment.
- 3. Planning for the next housing levy The Office of Housing will convene a technical advisory committee in mid-2015. In addition, there will be other opportunities for engagement around planning of the next housing levy.
- 4. Specific zoning by neighborhood or parcel The committee will talk about zoning on the macro level, but the neighborhood/parcel level would be too detailed to undertake.

Discussion

Committee members asked several questions and offered comments about the scope. The following is a summary of the comments and the agreements on changes in the scope or other actions:

• Housing levy: There was a suggestion that advisory committee members may have recommendations on the upcoming housing levy and would like to know that their input will be considered in the planning for the new levy.

- Agreement/Action: The committee may provide input for the levy planning process and/or guidance for future levies.
- Data driven: There was a concern that the process seemed to be starting with targets for housing needs by income levels but that other data should be considered.
- Public input: Several members expressed concern that the three initial public meetings did not
 provide sufficient public input. There was a suggestion to get a random sample of public opinion
 on any options the committee develops. Leslie Brinson Price explained that the online survey
 will continue to be open on the committee's webpage until mid-January, and that there will be
 opportunities for public comment on the committee recommendations.
 - Agreement/Action: This issue will be referred to City staff to look at possible public opinion tools, such as a random sample survey. The staff will report back to the committee in January.
- Definition of need: There were questions about the breadth of need the committee will consider, whether there is agreement on the problem the committee aims to solve, and whether the committee should set a unit goal to accompany the recommendations. One suggestion was to describe the need for affordable housing more broadly by estimating ranges of need for various income groups rather than pinpointing precise numbers for each income bracket. There was another suggestion that the need for affordable housing is so overwhelming and urgent that, given the limited time, the focus and attention of the committee should be to identify and prioritize solutions rather than focusing on a precise estimate of need. Committee staff and Co-Chairs said that describing the need is part of the conversation the committee needs to have, and that committee members should suggest any alternate sources of data or approaches they think are useful. The Comprehensive Plan update will provide a full assessment of the housing needs in the city, but it will not be finalized until later in the spring.
 - Agreement/Action: This issue will likely be part of the discussion in the committee's January meetings.

Committee Ground Rules

Mr. Howell reminded the committee of key points in the draft HALA Advisory Committee Ground Rules. The goal for this meeting was to get agreement on a set of ground rules.

In discussion, committee members raised the following questions and concerns:

- #1 on meetings not open but the materials to be available: A committee member noted that he understood the rationale, but this approach would not be his first choice.
- #5 on consensus: There were questions about the definition and method for identifying consensus and, if consensus is not achieved, how the report will be developed. The Co-Chairs, committee staff and facilitator explained that the goal is to get unanimous consensus on the full set of recommendations the committee will make. Consensus will be defined as everyone agrees or can live with the recommendations, as indicated by showing a thumbs-up or sideways, and no one showing thumbs-down. This is an intentionally high bar because the committee's recommendations will have more clout if there is unanimous consensus. However, if full agreement cannot be achieved on some point, differences of opinion will be noted in the

- committee's final recommendations. The staff and consulting team will draft the recommendations, which the committee will review and comment on.
- #7 on public meetings and comment opportunities: There was a suggestion to delete the
 language about hosting "at least three" public community meetings, since three meetings have
 now taken place. Instead, the item should mention that there will be one or more public
 meetings or comment opportunities about proposed recommendations.
- #12 on speaking to the media or other audiences about the committee's work: There was a
 question about what information the committee members may provide to their constituencies.
 Ms. Price said that the intent is to make all meeting materials public by posting them on the
 committee webpage before each meeting. For this meeting, unfortunately, the materials were
 not posted on time because of a staff illness.

Decision: Committee members approved the Advisory Committee Ground Rules with a modification of #7 to refer to ongoing public input opportunities.

Reflections on the Community Meetings

Summary

The HALA community open houses took place in south Seattle (Ethiopian Community Center) on November 19, in central Seattle (Garfield Community Center) on November 20, and in north Seattle (Olympic View Elementary School) on December 4. Ms. Price reported that the electronic-enabled survey taken at each meeting showed characteristics of the people attending. The majority of attendees had lived in Seattle for 10 or more years. Many of those attending the North meeting had been residents for 20 or more years; those attending the Central meeting were the newest to the area. Most attendees lived in the area surrounding the meeting site. The North meeting attendees were older, the Central meeting younger, and the South meeting attendees were mostly in their middle years. The South meeting attendees were largely East African immigrants; the North meeting attendees were predominantly white; and the Central meeting attendees were diverse.

The South meeting attendees were mostly renters. Most said they were not having trouble affording their rents, but further anecdotal evidence showed that many attendees were public housing residents. The Central meeting attendees were mostly renters, many of whom said they were struggling to meet their rent. The North meeting attendees were mostly homeowners. Across all meetings, attendees said that walkability, the neighborhood, nearby amenities and safety were important to them in choosing their home. Most were concerned with rising prices and affordability.

Meeting attendees wrote many comments on the poster boards. Some also submitted written comments at the meeting or sent them afterward. The staff and consulting team are compiling these results. Before the next committee meeting, the committee will receive a summary of the themes from meeting comments and a full set of the comments as written.

Follow-up

Asian/Pacific Islander (API) community members were notably missing from the meetings. City staff will do follow-up outreach with the API community and with the East African community. The staff will also

do ongoing outreach with neighborhood coordinators with an emphasis on Southwest Seattle, since there was no meeting in that area.

Ms. Price encouraged committee members to send the link to the comment webpage to their constituencies and ask them to participate in the survey or to provide comments. The survey will be open through mid-January. In response to a question about outreach to displaced residents, Ms. Price said the staff does not have a way to identify people who have been priced out of the city. However, several committee members said they could do this kind of outreach.

In January, the staff will provide information on the plans for further community outreach and for getting input on the strategies the committee will be developing.

Committee Reflections

Mr. Howell thanked committee members for attending the open houses and asked for their impressions. The following themes emerged from committee members' reflections:

- *Populations reached:* The North meeting was an interested and active group but a narrow cross-section, since it was mainly owners.
- Community bonds: It was clear that the people who attended the meetings love their community and city, and want to see them grow and flourish. The committee might set strong community bonds as a goal.
- *Complexity:* The comments made clear that housing is a complex issue, involving many elements, such as employment, transportation, personal growth, and commitment to a neighborhood.
- Support of density and improved affordability: Attendees mostly seemed to feel that density is acceptable as long as it translates to affordability. There did not seem to be much push-back from people who did not want to see things change.
- Barriers list: It was disturbing that a large number of people placed a dot on the barriers about being discriminated against. A large number of the barriers also relate to displacement, which was an issue many people at the meetings said was a problem.
- Framing of questions: A committee member was concerned that the questions asked at the open houses were specific and targeted. Ms. Price noted that the meetings' and committee's focus includes livability and growth, so the topics at the meetings included these issues. Another committee member found the framework beneficial, since attendees started seeing issues in a larger and more complex context than their own needs.
- Outreach outside Seattle: Several committee members said they would like to get input from people who have been priced out of Seattle. One suggestion was to send a survey through Seattle employers.

In response to a question about how the committee will use the public input, Mr. Howell said that the committee will receive a written summary of the open house comments, along with the verbatim comments, to consider as they start developing strategies.

Creation of HALA Work Groups

Ms. Price noted that the committee has much to accomplish in five months to meet its May 2015 deadline. Assigning discussions about strategies to work groups is a way to increase capacity. The work groups will develop strategies to propose to the whole committee. The staff identified nine topic areas, while recognizing that there is some overlap:

- 1. Financing
- 2. Zoning and Housing Types
- 3. Construction Costs and Timelines
- 4. Tenant Access/Protections
- 5. Preservation of Existing Subsidized Housing
- 6. Affordability in Existing Market-Rate Housing
- 7. New Affordable Housing Resources
- 8. Place Based Strategies
- 9. Sustainable Homeownership

The work groups will consist of HALA Advisory Committee members, other individuals who have expertise in the area, and City staff, who will facilitate and provide support (do research, take notes, etc.). Ultimately, the Mayor's Office will identify the participants. The work groups will not all be the same size nor need the same number of meetings. Committee members were asked at this meeting to sign up for groups on which they would be interested/willing to serve, to suggest experts to invite, and to suggest other potential strategies that should be considered.

Co-Chair Wertheimer said that the work groups are being asked to develop/identify specific strategies in three categories:

- **Do**: High-priority strategies that are ready for immediate action. "Immediate action" might include strategies that require a code change or legislation before they can be implemented.
- **Develop**: Strategies that have potential but might need additional research or information.
- Explore: Ideas that have potential but need significant work and/or are long-range in nature.

In response to questions about the timeline, the Co-Chairs said that the Advisory Committee's flow chart shows the work groups starting in January and continuing into the spring. But some groups might need only two or three meetings. For example, the Financing group might complete their work faster because a significant amount has already been done. The Co-Chairs would like to bring strategies the work groups propose to the full Advisory Committee on an ongoing basis as the work groups develop them. The staff will review the committee members' suggestions of people and potential strategies on the work group sheets at this meeting, and develop proposed groups to bring to the January 7 committee meeting, with the idea that the work groups begin meeting in January.

Some committee members voiced concerns about whether some of the work groups could be combined for efficiency and to avoid developing competing strategies. The Co-Chairs and staff were open to other configurations of the work groups. Ms. Price noted also that the staff will support multiple work groups, so will be able to identify overlaps and fruitful combinations.

One committee member wondered if having nine work groups each generating three to five recommendations would result in a nine-chapter report and up to 45 recommendations, obscuring the priorities. He also suggested that the report tell a clear story, rather than be in "policy-speak." He suggested the following topics and regrouping:

- 1. Remove Legal Barriers to Housing work groups #2 and #3
- 2. Stop Discrimination and Protect Consumer Rights work groups #4 and #9
- 3. Improve Effectiveness of Existing Housing work groups #5, #8 and #9
- 4. Increase Investment in Public Housing work groups #1, #6 and #7

Other comments about the work groups included:

- #1 and #4 (Resources) predetermines a lot of the rest of the strategies.
- It would make sense to combine #5 and #6.
- #9 and #4 need an integrated solution at the end.
- There needs to be time for integration of the ideas.
- The committee's recommendations need to tell the story of housing affordability and livability in a compelling way.
- We should get started, have the groups meet, then re-evaluate what the most effective structure is.
- It would be good for each group to get the wider input more members would bring.
- Equity must be at the heart of all groups; much of the present situation stems from lack of equity.
- The report will need to be politically saleable so that elected officials will champion it.

Rather than try to reach consensus on the number of work groups at this meeting, the Co-Chairs asked committee members to provide their ideas on the work group sheets, knowing that the nine lists may not be the final form of the groups. He asked committee members who list their name in more than one group to indicate their priorities for which group/area to serve in. Staff will review this input and look for opportunities to combine groups and define their tasks.

The staff also will be working with the Office of Civil Rights to evaluate all strategies based on a race and social justice lens. The City has a Racial Equity Toolkit

(http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/RSJI/RacialEquityToolkit_FINAL_August2012.pdf) which provides a set of questions addressing impacts on racial equity to guide the evaluation of policies and programs. The staff will describe how to use this tool kit at one of the January meetings.

Committee members spent the next 20 minutes adding to the work group sheets.

Next Steps

The next Advisory Committee meeting will be on Wednesday, January 7, 2015. The agenda will be a full one, likely including:

- Follow up on the structure and content of the work groups so they can begin their work
- Discussion about the basic assumptions regarding the scope of the affordable housing needs

- Information responding to the committee's data requests
- If ready, a report on the community input (might need to be for the January 29 meeting).
- Discussions about the Racial Equity Toolkit, at one of the January meetings.