



LOW-INCOME AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS MEETING # 1

July 6, 2015
10:00 am to 12:00 pm
City of Grand Rapids Parking Services
50 Ottawa NW, 49503

WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT: Trenessa Allen, Lauren Baker, Chris Bennett, Kimberly Brown, Lisa Cruden, Sue DeVries, Jeff Fortuna, Stephanie Gingerich, Adrienne Goodstal, Karen Leppke, Lynn Locke (Co-Chair), Frank Lynn, Kwan McEwen, Andrew Sisson, Kathy Strah, Ann Thomas, Hattie Tinney, Marolyn Villalobos, and Betty Zylstra (Co-Chair)

STAFF PRESENT: Erin Banchoff, Connie Bohatch, and Johanna Schulte

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS: Lynn Locke and Betty Zylstra (Co-Chairs)

- 1) Rosters will be available after this meeting. Binders were distributed.
- 2) Ms. Zylstra revisited the ground rules that were introduced at the June 12, 2015 Workgroup Kickoff meeting.
- 3) Meeting notes from the June 12, 2015 Workgroup Kickoff were distributed.

PLANNING AND ANALYSIS:

Ms. Locke led a SWOT analysis. Workgroup members divided into four tables. Each table had an opportunity to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in terms of public policy, accessibility, and affordability.

- 1) The following success factors (i.e. what has to happen) were identified:
 - Funding – money
 - Expertise (having the right people at the table)
 - Must be legal, consider compliance
 - Coordinated, streamlined, and knowledgeable users
 - Friendly regulations and incentives
 - Decision makers need to be educated
 - Public buy-in and awareness
 - Economic development
- 2) The following value propositions were identified:
 - Legislators – public appeal and perception
 - School districts – more funding and increased enrollment
 - Law enforcement – reduction in crime
 - Transportation – increased demand
 - Neighborhoods – stabilization of low-income neighborhoods, property values increase
 - Consumers and vulnerable populations – dignity
 - Employers – greater applicant pool

EVALUATION OF IDENTIFIED STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS:

- The process and incentives for development in Grand Rapids were discussed. The group considered incentives for market rate developers to develop mixed-income affordable housing.
- The group recorded and voted on the most important SWOT analysis comments with each member selecting three priorities. Comments with the most votes are in bold.
 - i. Strengths:
 - Public Policy – People are working on it, local ordinances trump state, strong non-profit involvement, City has good process in place to support LIHTC applications, strong housing code, **commitment to a diversity of housing options (zoning)**, precedent to development agreement requiring mixed-income as a condition of tax credits/ renaissance zone, fair housing commitment/ can't refuse Section 8/ housing choice voucher, community support neighborhood groups and organizations.
 - Accessibility – strong disability advocates organizations, **commitment to accessibility by the City**, advocates for senior issues, Corporation for Supportive Housing, models that are successful – Reflections, Herkimer, Verne Berry.
 - Affordability – Single family market still has affordable options for low-income, Grand Rapids Housing Commission/public housing is good quality, developers are trying to do affordable projects, **foundation support and donations for affordable housing development**, more affordable than other U.S. cities, home-ownership opportunity.
 - ii. Weaknesses:
 - Public Policy – **No incentives for landlords to rent homes affordable compared to market rate incentives**, extra inspections for Section 8, tax incentives, budget cuts in mental health support, lack of advocacy for low-income individuals, lack of understanding from legislatures (local level), tenant education when they receive vouchers, gerrymandered districts, no cap on how many times people can receive services, not acting as a long term solution, policy on number of persons allowed per bedroom, AMI limits leave out working poor, need more units for people between 60 and 80% AMI.
 - Affordability – housing infrastructure is failing/aging, not enough to meet demand, **not enough vouchers to assist low-income**, landlords reluctant to rent to low-income, fair market rent restrictions for vouchers and assistance.
 - Accessibility – vacancy rate (low rate of 1% or less), **limited affordable housing**, accessibility for individuals with blemished credit, criminal backgrounds, and financial concerns, long waiting list for public housing and Section 8, confusion about percent requirements, the 5% acts as a limit, limited funding available.
 - iii. Opportunities:
 - Public Policy – Incentives for developers, streamline inspections down to one, inclusionary zoning, “Ban the Box” legislation, tax abatements – expand availability and access, public entities support plan to end homelessness, desirability of community, federal and state funding for

housing – HOME, ESG, CDBG, CoC, VA funding, etc., continue to support all sizes of housing units – not just micro-units, support mixed-income in publically supported developments, **implement a rent control policy.**

- Accessibility – Public access to legislators, City Commissioners, etc., **space available to develop new units**, strong advocates and knowledge base – DAKC, require more than 5% ADA units in new construction, housing stock.
- Affordability – LIHTC promotes affordability as a part of funding vouchers, dedicated developers serving low-income populations, several housing commissioners working in our community, **rent control.**

iv. Threats:

- Public Policy – QAP (Low-Income Housing Tax Credit) scoring criteria, NIMBY – people who don't want mixed-income, **federal cuts to HOME funds, LIHTC, etc.**, public sentiment against “living-wage” policy, use of AMI makes it hard, too many City regulations to deal with for developers.
- Accessibility – Transportation, **not enough ADA units – 5% of units must be accessible with federal funds**, community accessibility – curb cuts, traffic lights with sound, etc., college students demand more rent and are vacant in summer months, location of schools and school districts and their proximity to affordable housing.
- Affordability – Fair market rent restrictions – no units available at this price, people with no income or fixed income, developers not interested, developers choose to max out rents regardless, **the vacancy rate is so low it drives up rents**, increased cost of repairs makes unit turnover slow, public perception of low-income housing.

IDENTIFY GOALS:

The group discussed the importance of thinking about what topics are specific to this workgroup and maintaining a framework that prioritizes low-income and vulnerable populations.

NEXT STEPS:

- The SharePoint Collaboration Site is set up and ready for use. Contact Johanna Schulte at jschulte@grcity.us if you have questions or need help with the use of the site.
- Obtain information about rent control especially as used in smaller cities comparable to Grand Rapids.
- Use results of SWOT analysis to assist in formulation of goals at the next meeting.

Next meeting: July 20, 2015 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm