



**Low-Income and Vulnerable Populations
Meeting #4 Notes**

August 17, 2015
10:00 am to 12:00 pm
City of Grand Rapids Parking Services
50 Ottawa Avenue NW

WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT: Trenessa Allen, Lauren Baker, Katie Carroll, Marie Cimochoicz, Chuck Clemence, Lisa Cruden, Sue DeVries, Sue Ellis, Stephanie Gingerich, Ruth Kelly, Julie Kendrick, Karen Leppek, Latesha Lipscomb, Frank Lynn, Beanka Mushenkye, Joy Pryor, Ann Thomas, Hattie Tinney, John Wynbeek, Jesica Vail, and Betty Zylstra (Co-Chair).

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

Betty Zylstra led introductions.

Ms. Zylstra reviewed the goals of the workgroup. The group reviewed its task to address the most vulnerable households which include those with disabilities, mental illness, and low-income households.

August 3, 2015 meeting notes were reviewed. Frank Lynn commented displacement is an important issue and there has been significant displacement in the West Side and Belknap neighborhoods. Mr. Lynn said these people need to be considered in the conversation. Marie Cimochoicz agreed it is a huge problem. Erin Banchoff explained the comment was added to the meeting notes.

Ms. Zylstra summarized a document that identifies potential recommendations. The document lists several topics the group has focused on during its meetings. She explained it is meant to kickoff conversation. Ms. Banchoff introduced the non-homeless special needs section of the City's current Consolidated Housing and Community Development Plan. She explained it may be desirable to obtain similar updated data (which is currently being prepared) and use it to estimate housing needs for vulnerable populations.

Mr. Lynn commented the group had not yet adequately defined vulnerable populations. Joy Pryor commented there are advocates and vulnerable populations who live in poor housing conditions but are afraid to say anything because they are concerned they will lose their housing.

Julie Kendrick said right now if someone is facing an eviction, there are not adequate resources to turn to. Families have to wait until they are homeless to receive services. Jessica Vail commented Salvation Army has some prevention services, but they are limited in funding. Ms. Zylstra commented prevention could be a piece of the recommendation. The group discussed individuals who have evictions have a harder time getting housing later. Sue Devries explained

this problem could also be addressed through the education programs the group discussed at the last meeting.

Ms. Gingerich asked how to create an environment that encourages mixed-income development. Lauren Baker explained Salvation Army and the Department of Health and Human Services has piloted a program through the Kentwood courts that seeks to prevent evictions. It is modeled after a Kalamazoo program and could be a potential best practice for Grand Rapids.

The group discussed whether households below 30 percent of AMI are adequately being served through housing programs. Hattie Tinney explained one of the issues for Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) nationally is cuts to funding. Recently, HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program was created to allow PHAs to convert public housing locations to tenant-based vouchers. In order to maintain properties they have to use HUD money in addition to LIHTC and other funding sources, which are competitive. The Grand Rapids Housing Commission would like to do more but need more money.

John Wynbeek noted that the low priority needs in the five-year plan may no longer be low priorities and need to be reassessed.

Mr. Lynn commented the population that is rent burdened is important to be included in the list of vulnerable populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The group discussed tracking and maintaining up to date data on affordable and market-rate units and housing for vulnerable populations. Ms. Cimochowicz mentioned zoning requirements which restrict small units could provide affordable housing options. Connie Bohatch said the Land Use and Zoning workgroup is working on this issue. She explained workgroup co-chairs will convene in a few weeks and discuss the recommendations from all perspectives.

Lauren Baker asked whether the workgroup could define some additional vulnerable populations to add to the list included in the five-year plan document.

Sue Devries said it is important to define what the group means by low-income. Commissioner Ruth Kelly said it is important to talk about addressing perceptions of affordable housing. Mr. Wynbeek mentioned that "workforce housing" refers to the same group but is less divisive.

The group discussed using examples of low-income people and families which makes the topic more relatable. Frank Lynn discussed landlords sometimes requiring three times the rent in income which excludes many disabled and vulnerable populations. The group discussed the requirement and its relationship to HUD's rules.

Recommendation: Ensure affordable housing costs for vulnerable households.

The group discussed a few strategies to attain this goal. The group recommended clarifying vulnerable populations including those discussed at this meeting, obtaining data on populations, and providing target number to determine which housing types and costs are needed.

Recommendation: Expand development of accessible housing through new construction and remodel.

Data collection on the needs for accessible housing was identified as an important step.

Recommendation: Explore the formation of Community Land Trusts.

Recommendation: Enforce the local ordinance that provides source of income protection.

Recommendation: Advocate for changes to state laws that impede housing affordability such as rent control and inclusionary zoning.

The group discussed inclusionary zoning and whether to advocate for changes to state law. Frank Lynn clarified the legislation that prohibits inclusionary zoning also covers rent control. The group considered advocating for rent control as well.

Recommendation: Partner with local agencies to promote aging-in-place.

The group decided to add language that would promote housing for other vulnerable populations as well but to highlight aging-in-place specifically.

Recommendation: Support Housing First philosophy for vulnerable populations.

Recommendation: Provide incentives for housing low-income and vulnerable populations.

The group discussed continuing to support existing incentives and developing new incentives.

Recommendation: Explore property tax exemption or income tax credits, to create and preserve affordable housing units.

Recommendation: Expand a court pilot program to prevent evictions.

Recommendation: We are a mixed-income community and housing should reflect that. Educate the community about the benefits of balanced mixed-income communities with a variety of housing choices. Build an acceptance for diverse housing with a mixture of housing choices for a mixed-income community.”

The group discussed encouraging the creation of a housing consumer’s alliance, education strategies for consumers, landlords, and the general population.

The group added race, age, and sexual orientation as factors of vulnerability.

Lauren Baker asked if there is a PILOT community review board. Connie Bohatch explained if a project meets the criteria, it goes to the City Commission. The process is not competitive like tax credits.

Commissioner Ruth Kelly suggested an advisory board could be created which would review ongoing data and provide information to the City Commission on programs they have discretion on (like Neighborhood Enterprise Zones, Brownfields, etc.).

The group discussed advisory committees can be costly and considered whether it would be valuable.

The group decided staff and co-chairs will compile the recommendations and decide later whether to add a recommendation to explore the potential benefits of an advisory committee or taskforce which would advise the Commission on housing development projects.

Joy Pryor commented supporting neighbor to neighbor initiatives. Ms. Zylstra said the idea will be reviewed to see where it can fit in the recommendations.

Ms. Zylstra concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for their time and input.