



WORKGROUP KICKOFF MEETING NOTES

June 12, 2015
10:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.
Heart of West Michigan United Way
118 Commerce Avenue, SW

GENERAL SESSION

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION – Commissioner Ruth Kelly welcomed attendees and thanked them for volunteering to “roll up their sleeves” to do this important work in developing strategies to address concerns about housing in our city and to help ensure quality housing that is safe, affordable, and accessible. She emphasized focusing on the needs of our customers in the housing market, rather than obstacles in current models to enable innovative solutions that provide opportunity and growth benefiting the entire community and the region.

APRIL 22, 2015 GREAT HOUSING STRATEGIES EVENT DEBRIEFING – Connie Bohatch indicated that more than 200 people attended the event on April 22, 2015, with nearly 100 people expressing interest in participating in the workgroup process. She informed the group that the following information was available on the Community Development Department website at www.grcd.info: Target Market Analysis (TMA), TMA Executive Summary, and slides from event presenters Gustavo Rotondaro and Laurie Volk.

The group reviewed the Table Conversations Summary and provided the following general comments:

- Focus on current Grand Rapids residents, not just the potential housing market
- Include in the discussion those who are directly affected
- Address issues of college students who cannot afford to live downtown or nearby
- Get corporate involvement in the process
- Positive factors identified for the city can be negative factors –especially for neighborhoods

WORKGROUP PROCESS OVERVIEW – The workgroup process was highlighted, including guiding principles, decision making, ground rules, documentation, and anticipated timeline. The group was asked to provide comments, make suggested changes, and affirm the information.

The text for the Guiding Principles was agreed upon with an amendment to move the information about race and culture from the ‘affordable housing’ principle to ‘equitable growth.’

It was discussed that decisions and recommendations will be based on group consensus. Co-chairs will assist in synthesizing final draft recommendations to avoid inconsistencies and duplication among workgroups. An additional meeting of the full group may be necessary, but is not included on the timeline. More discussion is anticipated as to how the full group desires to confirm the final, full recommendations.

A collaboration site is being established for communication and sharing of documents within workgroups. The group requested the ability to access information across all workgroups. Names and contact information for additional workgroup members can be forwarded to Erin Banchoff (ebanchoff@grcity.us).

WORKGROUP INFORMATION/BREAKOUT – Workgroup information and meeting schedules was reviewed. Attendees identified a workgroups on which to participate and had an opportunity to meet one another and begin organizing.



WORKGROUP BREAKOUT SESSION

HOUSING FINANCE

WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT: Marian Barrera-Young, Jen Boezwinkle, Jeremy DeRoo (Co-Chair), Sue DeVries, Bob Gilewski, Ruth Kelly, Tom Kent, Ryan Kilpatrick, Clay Powell, Jesse Rodriguez, Carlos Sanchez, Chuck Skala, Monica Steimle (Co-Chair), Denny Sturtevant, Dennis VanKampen, Ryan Wheeler, and Brian Wolters

STAFF PRESENT: Kara Wood and Kim Dixon

INTRODUCTIONS: Co-Chairs Monica Steimle and Jeremy DeRoo

DISCUSSION:

Strengths

- Intelligent people who know how to put application packages together.
- Developers know how to address market needs.
- City that helps promote things faster than other locations.
- Plenty of financial institutions that have the tools.
- Charitable organizations for housing placement (supportive housing for challenging populations)
- People interested in moving into City and revitalizing spaces.
- Tools: Neighborhood Enterprise Zones, Tax Increment Finance, DDA incentive program, historic tax credits, PILOTs, new market tax credits, land bank, philanthropic support, HUD, Federal Home Loan Bank, project-based Section 8, bonds, FHA insurance, Section 8 for elderly/disabled, City HOME Program, homeownership programs, straight home ownership program

Weaknesses/Barriers

- Can't do land contract with people who can't afford conventional financing.
- Federal government regulations
- State policies overly focused on Detroit and Flint.
- Less money from federal affordable housing programs.
- Rental history

Opportunities

- Public transportation is evolving.
- Growing senior population that has more money than millennials.
- Customize our own financing for Grand Rapids.
- Land Trust
- Opportunity to better coordinate these tools so they work better together.
- Work with State of Michigan to design for Grand Rapids conditions/opportunities.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Where is our affordable housing inventory now?
Resources: Michiganhousinglocator.com, DGRI Downtown inventory
- What do programs like Challenge Scholars do to neighborhoods?
- What can be done with empty spaces in business districts that would create a different impression for the rest of the neighborhood?
- How can developers be incentivized to set aside low/mod income housing?
- What mechanisms are in place to support existing homeowners who can't afford rising taxes?
- "Grand Commitment" – one message coming from the region is powerful. What research/tools/information is needed to support that strategy? How do we communicate that unified message?
- What are other cities doing? What works; what doesn't work?

OTHER REPRESENTATION NEEDED ON THE WORKGROUP:

- Low-income
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Grand Rapids Community Foundation

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT MEETING:

- Monica will provide a list of tools currently in place with simple summaries so we can see what we're missing.
- Information will be obtained from CRA boards; a list of banking institution programs, products, and/or Grand Rapids initiatives. What are the CRA targets?

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT: Ann Armstrong Cusack, Tracie Coffman (Co-Chair), Jarrett DeWyse, Tansy Harris, Ben Johnson, Kwan McEwen, Kurt Reppart, Cheryl Schuch, Kevin Stotts (Co-Chair), and Marolyn Villalobos

STAFF: Kara Wood, Connie Bohatch, and Donna Shade

INTRODUCTIONS: Co-Chair Tracie Coffman

DISCUSSION:

- Housing for students
- Community Benefit Agreements
- Policy – Economic analysis of policy actions and their impact on housing
- Financing incentives, tax abatements
- Business Leaders for Michigan – Talent 2025 connection
- Job training efforts
- Look at data from presentation by Gustavo Rotondaro – shifting levels of poverty in suburban areas
- “Cliff effect” – Is there a gap in our community?
- Educational attainment
- Michigan Street planning process has information about employer/housing for that area
- More data may be necessary – Community Research Institute
- Students – rising rent, tracking where students live
- Some universities have strict rules about off-campus living
- Retain a variety of housing types and curb increasing housing costs

OTHER REPRESENTATION NEEDED ON THE WORKGROUP:

- DGRI, The Source, LINC
- Employers (GRCC, Spectrum, Mercy Health)
- Colleges (GVSU, Kendall, GRCC, Calvin, Aquinas, etc.)

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT MEETING:

- Data on housing costs, the skills gap, educational attainment
- Cliff Effect data from Talent 2025 if available
- Determine if employers are having conversations about housing, and if local data is available (Chamber of Commerce, Talent 2025)

LAND USE AND ZONING

WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT: Sara Abel, Pamela Benjamin, Janay Brower, Lamont Cole (Co-Chair), Dave deVelder, Nancy Haynes, Margo Johnson, Jim Jones, Tom Koetsier, Lee Nelson Weber (Co-Chair), Kristin Rahn-Tiemeyer, Brad Rosely, Kym Spring, Jim Talen, Victor Vasquez, and Stephen Wooden

STAFF: Suzanne Schulz and Landon Bartley

INTRODUCTIONS: Co-Chair Lee Nelson Weber

DISCUSSION:

Process

- Identify 3-5 priorities at meeting #1
- Definitions of terms like “affordable” and “mixed-income”
- How do we discuss incentives?
- Data driven approach
- How to communicate more broadly and address those affected
- Recommendations – feasible, enforceable, state law compliant
- What we need to know:
 - Best practices on housing strategies
 - Current Master Plan and ordinances
 - Current practices, what has worked or not worked
 - Michigan statutory limitations
 - MAPPING – SWOT current and opportunities
- What is the product of overall effort?
 - Designed ideals
 - measurable outcomes
 - Applied strategies
 - Other
- Think BIG strategy

Opportunities and Issues

- Consider unique downtown mix – what about neighborhoods?
- Density
- Are neighborhoods “closed?”
 - Current and future residents, money and other interests
- What are opinions on mixed housing?
 - Facts vs. feelings
 - NIMBY
 - Change averse
- Live in vs. profit from housing
- Zoning code – character
- Role and value of stability
- Impact and limits of MI laws and regulations (workforce, LIHTC housing)
- Vacancies, gaps, inventories
- Ways to control the market (i.e. prevent public money for low-income housing in low-income neighborhoods)
- Income vs. behavior

- Transitory vs. stable
- Market rate and affordable housing

Overall Strategy and Ideas

- Addressing foreclosures, affordability, and homelessness
- Community land trusts
- Inclusionary zoning

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT MEETING:

- Review Gustavo's presentation highlights perception vs. reality
- Review Grand Rapids Master Plan (GR Planning Dept. website)

LOW-INCOME AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

WORKGROUP MEMBERS PRESENT: Trenessa Allen, Lauren Baker, Chris Bennett, Abram Bos, Kimberly Brown, Marie Cimochoicz, Lisa Cruden, Jeff Fortuna, Stephanie Gingerich, Adrienne Goodstal, Latesha Lipscomb, Lynn Locke (Co-Chair), Frank Lynn, Kwan McEwen, Maria Moreno-Reyes, Emma Persons, John Peterson, Lindsey Ruffin, Ryan Schmidt, Andrew Sisson, Ciera Smith, Ann Thomas, Hattie Tinney, Marolyn Villalobos, John Wynbeek, and Betty Zylstra (Co-Chair)

STAFF: Erin Banchoff and Johanna Schulte

INTRODUCTIONS:

DISCUSSION:

- Who are vulnerable populations?
 - Displaced families
 - Gentrification
 - Fixed and limited incomes
 - Mental health
 - Veterans
 - Ex-offenders
 - Bad credit
 - Disabled
 - Homeless
 - Seniors
 - 60% and below AMI
 - Youth aging out of foster care
 - Domestic violence
- Note that Laurie Volk's presentation did not address below 30% AMI. Data is needed on this population to address barriers and opportunities. The workgroup is not limited to focus on 30% AMI and below.
- Develop common definitions (e.g. low-income, affordable)
- Public awareness of resources
- Housing Commission wait list may provide demographics
- Terms are important (e.g. workforce vs. affordable)
- The low vacancy rate means landlords can be selective, especially in terms of credit history
- Incentivize landlords while maintaining safety and security for residents
- State legislation and the Earned Income Tax Credit

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT MEETING:

- Determine Housing Commission wait list numbers and information, how long it takes to get housed once a voucher is received, and how many lose a voucher because they cannot find a housing
- Data outside of Grand Rapids' city limits
- Data on the homeless population (number of children, length, disabilities, veterans)
- Vacant housing date – blight list, land bank inventory, bank owned property
- Number of affordable units, new construction
- Income requirements for new mixed-income development
 - The gap between income three times the rent but less than four is too narrow
- Get the Lead Out! program data
- Consider models used outside of Grand Rapids