

2017-12-06

Housing Working Group #4

Committee Attendees

Leonardi Aray, Mark Boyes-Watson, Kelley Brown, Kathryn Carlson, Lauren Curry, Lee Farris, Cheryl-Ann Pizza-Zeoli, Susan Schlesinger, Ellen Shachter, Robert Winters

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Melissa Peters, Chris Cotter, Cassie Arnaud, Cliff Cook, Anna Dolmatch

Utile: Nupoor Monani

HR&A: Kyle Vangel

Committee Members Absent

Steve Cohen, Anthony Galluccio, Bob Flack, Esther Hanig, Sean Hope, Jesse Kanson-Benanav, Monique King, Tom Lorello, Eva Martin Blythe, Margaret Moran, Deborah Morse, Zuleka Queen Postel

Two members of the public present.

Meeting overview

Kyle Vangel led a facilitated discussion to review and prioritize actions. Actions were sorted into four categories based on difficulty and estimated impact. The Working Group discussed the language of each action and confirmed where they should be placed on the prioritization matrix. The presentation is available [here](#).

Committee Discussion

Actions discussion:

- Overall, members commented that the actions read as a long laundry list and it was hard to identify the big ideas. They agreed on the need to prioritize and clearly point to the 4-5 big themes that cover the group's recommendations.

Easy Wins

- Action N: Members suggested using clearer language to specify what action the City would take to implement this action, suggested rephrasing it as "Develop a strategy for zoning reform..." They discussed moving it to the Major Projects category to ensure it emerges as a priority recommendation.
 - City staff clarified that both Easy Wins and Major Projects will be translated as priority actions. Members agreed to leave it in Easy Wins.
- Action S: Members suggested changing the language to "Expand financial support..." to explicate the type of assistance the City would provide. They also noted that this action was procedurally easy to implement by allocating a greater share in the City's fiscal budget but is a big project that would have a high impact.
- Action I: Members suggested adding "...City funds through higher dedicated revenue from the general revenue fund..." to clarify this action.
- Action B: Members asked for a clarification on what constitutes "significant" new housing.
 - City staff noted that the working group would determine that by setting targets at the next meeting.

- Action M: Members recommended drafting this action from the point of view of what the City could do. If it pertains to having discussions with the universities, then they agreed it was an Easy Win. If it meant undertaking rezoning or mandating housing in another way it would be a Major Project.
- Members raised a question about how their recommendations would be carried through in future phases of the plan. They noted that despite housing being an overall plan priority, it was not prioritized over other uses in the Alewife Plan. Another member asked how their recommendations from all the different working groups would be reconciled.
 - City staff clarified that the plan is a synthesis of many competing recommendations. Discussions in the housing working group have informed the development of the preferred scenario through discussions at the Alewife Working Group. They explained that the recommendations of topic-specific working groups would be tested through citywide scenarios. For instance, they would inform the different use mixes for “Potential Areas of Change.”
 - City staff also said that they would provide a clearer measure of action priority before the next round of meetings.
- Members asked if the City should conduct a separate study to evaluate the impact of their recommendations on the jobs-housing balance citywide, or if this should be studied statewide to understand the effects regionally.
 - City staff responded that this analysis was done at a high-level for the Alewife plan (based on the City’s Incentive Zoning Nexus Study.) Moving forward, data generated through citywide scenario analysis would help determine this.

Lower Impact / High Difficulty actions

- Action R: Members debated the impact of setting up alternative models like Community Land Trusts. Some supported the idea noting benefits such as the CLT’s ability to think through different land use priorities holistically and encourage diverse board representation. Others questioned the limited benefits relative to the structural challenges of setting up a new model. They saw the Affordable Housing Trust with its already diverse membership, and an active and deliberative City Council as entities that already addresses many of those concerns. Ultimately, members agreed that this was a Low Impact / High Difficulty action.
- Action U: Some members supported this action noting that it was one of the few focused on the beneficiaries of affordable housing rather than production of new units. Others saw this as overlapping with the scope of the Multi-Service Center and objectives of the Rich Rossi Housing Assistance Fund, and recommended allocating additional funds for gap financing through these channel. Ultimately, members decided that the objective of Envision Cambridge should be to set long-term priorities and so program-specific recommendations should be evaluated by City staff separately and pursued on an ongoing basis.

Major Projects

- Action K (naturally occurring affordable housing): Members commented that the definition of “naturally occurring affordable housing” was not specific enough to identify who would benefit from this action, and that the action would be administratively complex and could have low subscription from property owners. They decided it would not be an effective use of City resources and suggested moving it to Low Impact / High Difficulty actions.
- Action G: A member mentioned a past land banking project pursued by the City that resulted in Corporal Burns Playground becoming smaller which was not favorably received by the community. Other members suggested focusing on resources other than land, such as available

buildings, to develop new affordable housing. They recommended changing the language to be more precise: “Prioritize available City and other public property that is available for disposition to develop affordable housing.”

- Action I and L: Members suggested adding “City funding sources” to clarify this action.
- Actions C and A: Members identified both as very high priority recommendations of the working group.
- Action T: Members discussed the scope of the proposed Office of Housing Stability relative to that of the CDD staff and multi services center. They agreed on the intent of the action as evaluating gaps in supportive services provided by the City, increasing capacity and funds to address those, and making the list of available services known to all. They ultimately decided that this could be achieved without the need for new tools, resources, or legislative reform that would go into the creation of a new office/department. They recommended removing mention of an “Office of Housing Stability” from this action.

Fill Ins

- Members agreed that the actions listed here are low priority.