

Housing Working Group Meeting #7

September 13, 2018

Committee Attendees

Leonardi Aray, Mark Boyes-Watson, Kathryn Carlson, Lauren Curry, Lee Farris, Anthony Galluccio, Esther Hanig, Margaret Moran, Cheryl-Ann Pizza Zeoli, Susan Schlesinger, Ellen Shacter, Robert Winters

Other Attendees

City Staff: Cassie Arnaud, Chris Cotter, Melissa Peters

Consultant team: John McCartin, Jessica Robertson

City Councilors: Sumbul Siddiqui, Quinton Zondervan

Three members of the public were present.

Meeting Overview

Melissa Peters reviewed the agenda and presented material on the Housing Working Group's recommended idea for a citywide zoning overlay for 100% affordable housing development. John McCartin then presented development projections based on current zoning and two policy ideas emerging from the working group process: a super-inclusionary housing incentive and an environmental performance incentive. The working group discussed the ideas. The meeting ended with public comment.

The meeting's presentation is online [here](#).

Discussion

- There was a discussion of the diversity (or lack thereof) of different neighborhoods. Many members were focused on this and think we should be talking about the all-affordable overlay in this context to ensure equity and access to housing in all areas for all residents.
- Several members said the overlay should not be presented absent of other strategies related to increasing city funding to build more fully-affordable housing and wanted to discuss how funding would be increased.
- Some members thought the overlay will help in producing more units though lowering soft costs. Staff responded that it's hard to predict; most of the cost in creating new housing is in land acquisition and construction.
- There was a discussion on why no changes to base zoning were analyzed.
 - City staff said it was not analyzed for these purposes, but it could be discussed as it relates to target setting.
 - There was confusion about whether base rezoning was a recommendation of the working group. Several members of the working group said it would be a misunderstanding to say that base rezoning is not a recommendation. Staff pulled up the recommendation language. As written the language does not specify the mechanism for changing zoning, only that zoning should be changed. One member described this language as "formless."
 - One member said that in a ten-year vision plan, base zoning should be on the table, especially given that zoning allows significantly more development in certain areas and very little in others. If not during a visioning process, then when?
 - One member stressed a need for a strategic political approach. Since any rezoning will be politically contentious, they said we should ensure it's worthwhile.
 - One member said they felt there should be base upzoning in some areas of the city like the corridors). Another member said that would increase land values further. The first member said the values don't go up forever, and if demand for one-bedrooms is met by more one-bedrooms built on Massachusetts Ave, it will free up triple-deckers for families in the neighborhoods.

- The need for and interest in base zoning changes was reiterated by several members over the course of the meeting.
- There was a discussion about making a super-inclusionary incentive citywide. The consultant staff said it is only modeled in the study areas because that is where the bulk of development is likely. A working group member also said that development in areas not shown are more likely to be small, so they wouldn't even trigger inclusionary.
- One member asked for clarity on Alewife's inclusion in the charts. Consultant staff said Alewife is included in the numeric outputs (using estimates from the Envision Cambridge Alewife planning process as starting point). The consultants said the tested incentives were applied in all areas for these projections, including Alewife, but excluded projects that were already permitted (such as North Point or other pipeline projects). The areas with existing plans and proposals did not go through the same parcel-by-parcel analysis of impacts, so they are not included on FAR impact maps.
- Several members noted that if super-inclusionary is not an option in all areas, historic patterns of density and thus historic patterns of segregation are reinforced.
 - Some members said that is why they like the affordable overlay, since it impacts other areas of the city, as well.
 - One member agreed but noted that more density near transit is also a good thing. They said the green line extension means Cambridge Street should be thought of as transit-oriented, too.
- There was disagreement within the working group about which policy would be most accepted by the wider public.
- There was a discussion about impacts on commercial development:
 - One member noted the shift toward residential development under super-inclusionary.
 - Another member said there are still more jobs than residents and the need to focus on that balance.
- There was a discussion about net zero emissions.
 - Members noted that lab is the most energy intensive, and that at higher densities it is harder to produce green energy on site, so developers must buy credits. Several members did not like that the policy created a mandate to buy credits rather than develop buildings that produced no emissions themselves.
- One member asked how much housing was produced in the last 10 years. City staff said about 7,000 units over 7-8 years.
- One member said they think it's worth spending more money per unit of affordable housing if that housing was developed in lower density neighborhoods and worked toward racial equity.
- One member said they were concerned the affordable overlay would lead to tearing down older/historic buildings or cutting down trees. The working group and staff agreed more analysis is needed to understand impact on other dimensional standards such as setbacks.
- One member said it is important to produce some affordable housing in residential A & B zoning districts, and that it's important for the City to make that statement even if it isn't many units. They asked for more testing on whether the voluntary programs (like super-inclusionary) would be adopted. They also stressed the need for more funding.
- One member asked for clarity on the timing. Staff said any of these policies would need to be refined, vetted more with the public, and submitted as a zoning petition to the City Council. Between the preparation and the Council process they said there would be a minimum of six months of further review.
- One member said we need to ensure there are deeply affordable units. They also said the environmental performance incentive should also look at indoor air quality.
- There was a discussion on strategy:
 - One member said they liked all the ideas: the overlay, super-inclusionary, and increasing the base. However, they said these would be politically explosive, so the focus should be

on creating the units we want. They suggested doing a few very big projects that produced many affordable units and working with the private sector. They noted that would be a big battle, too, but if there is going to be a battle, we should make sure it is worth it. They noted racial and economic diversity in all areas is critical, so we have to look at what kinds of units: lower income bracket, more bedrooms. Don't want to go through all this for studios for part-time grad students.

- One member said the working group should focus on getting something passed this term, and that the overlay seemed like it could be that policy.
- Another member said this is a vision plan, and that while the short-term opportunities are important, some of the ideas might take some time to implement, and that even if everything cannot be done immediately, the ideas and strategies in the plan will continue to be relevant during the plan period.

Public Comment

- One member of the public said they were troubled by the targeting of residential A & B zoning districts with out-of-scale buildings to achieve racial equity. They said density should be targeted toward transit corridors, but also that doubling density would totally change the character. They said the city must demonstrate that it would enhance the character because there's more services, etc. They also noted the history of upzoning in the city and the subsequent downzonings that occurred.
- One member of the public said the presentation doesn't speak to issues of noise and light pollution. They said there is a need to preserve and enhance the green around buildings.
- One member of the public they did not like the level of abstraction in the presentation. They said people in affordable housing need access to trees.