

Envision Cambridge Housing Working Group Meeting #8

October 11, 2018

Committee Attendees

Susan Schlesinger, Robert Winters, Cheryl-Ann Pizza-Zeoli, Esther Hanig, Lee Farris, Sean Hope, Ellen Schacter, Lauren Curry, Leonardi Aray, Margaret Moran

Other Attendees

City Staff: Chris Cotter, Melissa Peters, Cliff Cook, Cassie Arnaud
15 members of the public were present.

Meeting Overview

The objective of the meeting was to finalize housing targets. The Envision Cambridge Housing Working Group discussed targets for the following six indicators:

1. Total new housing units produced
2. Share of dedicated affordable units as part of housing supply
3. Total investment in affordable housing
4. Share of household with children
5. Share of low-income and moderate-middle income households
6. Number of evictions.

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

Discussion

To frame the discussion on affordable housing production, total housing supply, and affordable housing investments, the group looked at build-out projections, as well as historical trends.

Total new housing units produced:

There was some discussion about whether Inclusionary Zoning requirements would be increased before 2030. There was discussion of population projections and how public may be more supportive if policy was to maintain income diversity and moderate-income families who may be more likely to remain in the community, rather than a more transient market-rate population.

Group asked about projections, the recent Metro Mayors group's targets, and what Boston and Somerville were now proposing as production goals. Both Boston and Somerville had recently announced an increase in production goals. Boston is targeting 69,000 new housing units and Somerville 9,000. Staff also confirmed that projections (range of 10,600 to 12,500 new housing units) shown for Cambridge reflect anticipated production at Volpe, North Point, Kendall as well as the Alewife planning work done through Envision Cambridge. Staff agreed that additional upzoning could occur (as recommended by the Housing Working Group), so it is possible that production will be higher than projected.

In response to a question from a committee member, staff confirmed that the working group has a recommendation that multi-family housing be allowed in all areas of the city (whether for all housing developments or just affordable), and that there are recommendations to look at changes such as increased FAR.

One member raised the idea of doing a survey of existing FAR throughout the city and then make that a starting point for base FAR going forward. Several members said this could be a good idea, but also noted that as some areas of the city are already highly built-out while others are less so, that could perpetuate existing density patterns.

The group discussed upzoning. One member noted that without limiting the benefits of upzoning to affordable developers, as proposed in the overlay, the resulting land value increases would make affordable housing less feasible. Others said that they did not believe the two ideas were mutually exclusive and that there could be both.

One member expressed his frustration that the group was focusing as much as it was on policies and targets related to regulated affordable housing, rather than addressing general housing affordability. He said that he hoped the Envision process would help address housing affordability. He said that while he would support increasing density throughout the city, he expressed concerns about the affordable housing overlay which he thought would unfairly advantage one type of developer over another. He suggested that it might not be legal to provide zoning benefits to developers of affordable housing over any other type of developer. He said that he believes that if the community wants more regulated affordable housing, the City should use tax dollars to pay for that rather than through zoning. Several members pointed out that there were several other actions in the group's recommendations designed to address general affordability issues and that the overlay is just one approach to help solve the affordability problem in Cambridge. It was also noted that there are other ways to expand the existing stock such as additions, basement units, accessory units, and the like.

One member asked why we should assume that developers would be willing to provide more than 20% affordable when 20% had been said to be maximum during the recent Inclusionary Zoning rezoning process. Staff said that the consultant team hired to assist the City with the Envision process had interviewed developer and done economic modeling to come up with the amount of relief which would be needed to incentive at least some developers to increase their affordable contribution.

The working group agreed to a total new housing target of 12,500. This represents 23.5% of the existing housing stock. In comparison, Boston and Somerville's targets are 23% and 24% respectively.

Share of dedicated affordable units as part of housing supply:

Several members felt that the proposed target of "more than 15.5%" affordable was not high enough. One member suggested that 25% of new units should be affordable, which would result in 3,125 new affordable units and bring the overall stock to 16.8%.

Total investment in affordable housing

With a target of 3,175 new affordable units by 2030, that would mean increasing production of locally subsidized units from the 600 units anticipated to 1000, resulting in the need for approximately \$7 million more annually, or a total of \$20 million annually. Committee members discussed ways in which this funding could potentially be raised, such as transfer fees, increased property taxes, bonding. One member noted that the Council had already proposed increased local support for affordable housing by as much as \$20 million annually.

Share of household with children:

Staff provided some background to the data on the current and historical percentages of households with children. The group agreed that it was important to make sure that the city retains family

households and felt that the target should be increased from the 18% proposed to 20%. It was noted that to accomplish this, zoning would need to require a greater number of family-sized units in new development.

Number of evictions:

Staff shared current data on eviction activity, noting that staff continue to refine and analyze the data to understand how many households were evicted, and for what reasons. There was a discussion about the availability of data, how Boston was collecting and analyzing data, and the limitation of available data. One member suggested a goal of 35% reductions in evictions, though difficult to test without more information. It was agreed that staff would continue to work to refine the data and that the target could be revisited.

The group ran out of time to finalize a target for evictions nor discuss the remaining indicators. Another meeting was scheduled for Monday, October 29th to continue the conversation.

Public comments:

- Concern about parking needs if housing production increases.
- Concern about displacement, cited example of properties being sold and tenants being displaced. What are their options? Would they would be at the bottom of the affordable housing application pool?
- Lives in large building which feels like community to him. He supports increased density and suggests building on parking lots. Also supports idea of streamlined permitting for all-affordable housing.
- Attended one of past community meeting and shared that most at that meeting were opposed to the overlay due to fear of developers building without oversight. Said that there was support for other ideas such as allowing accessory or additional units to be added to existing 1F, 2F or 3F buildings if they are affordable. He felt that could result in many new affordable units which would be financed by the homeowners.
- Felt that the group was not adequately considering parking impacts and was assuming too little parking
- Suggests that staff could use sampling to estimate the proposition of eviction cases which result in actual eviction, it would be imperfect but a way to take rough measure; also noted in response to earlier comment by member questioning the legality of the overlay idea that the existing 40B comprehensive permit statute currently advantages developers of affordable housing
- Supports the overlay; feels we need much more housing and affordable housing in particular. Lives in Central Square in 4BR with roommates, rent goes up 10% per year. She would love to be able to move to a smaller unit and free up her family sized unit.
- Had only just learned of Envision Cambridge and would have liked to have been able to participate earlier. Concern that a tax increase would meet resistance and is not a practical idea, believes the group should look at other ideas.