

Envision Cambridge Housing Working Group Meeting #9

October 29, 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, Deb Morse, Mark Boyes-Watson, Anthony Galluccio, Kathryn Carlson

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 eight 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.
7. Median length of tenure of non-student head of household for owners and renters
8. Change of racial/ethnic composition over time

Discussion

There was a quick discussion recapping the decision from the last meeting around targets for total new housing units produced, share of dedicated affordable units, investment in affordable housing, and share of households with children.

1. Total new housing units produced

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.

2. Share of dedicated affordable units as part of housing supply:

The group decided on a target of 25% of new units as affordable, which would result in 3,125 new affordable units and bring the overall stock to 16.8%. Some members thought the target was too high and should be 20% to mirror the Inclusionary Zoning. Others felt the subsidized 100% affordable housing would increase the share and it should be consistent with the affordable housing target produced under the proposed target for city investment in affordable housing (see target below).

3. 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 at least \$20 million annually.

4. Share of households with children under 18

Group set a target of 20% of households with children. There was a discussion around what actions could be implemented to increase the number of families. One member told story of neighbors being opposed to development with 3 bedrooms because they felt it would result in non-family roommates (students). Group agreed that even if that is the case short-term, over the long-term it is important to have stock. Group suggested that universities house more students. As comparisons, Boston has 20.7% of households with children; Arlington is 29.2%, Somerville is 16.5%, and Watertown is 22.5%.

5. Share of low-income and moderate-middle income households

Group discussed how this goal interacts with unit production goals. Group suggested expanding Inclusionary Zoning to reach lower and higher income tiers. Group agreed to the following indicators:

- 30% of households earning less than 50% AMI
- 20% of households earning between 50-100% AMI
- 50% of households earning over 100% AMI

6. Number of evictions

Staff walked through summary of available data on eviction activity. Available data does not reveal outcomes and/or reasons for eviction actions (non payment, lease violation, no fault etc.). Data is not easy to obtain. Staff will continue to do deeper analysis. Group discussed what other measures could be used to track displacement. Several members said that they wanted the word “displacement” in the goal itself. The group was not able to agree to a target and discussed how a desired target of fewer evictions may, in reality, be caused by factors that run counter to other housing goals on affordability. For instance, as market rate tenant incomes increase, there will likely be fewer evictions. There was a discussion on setting a target of reducing certain number of levies, but data is hard to obtain. Several members suggested evictions is not what we need to track. Other ideas suggested for tracking displacement included: vacancy rates, condo conversions, sales prices, rent increase-related displacement, city survey, voter registration lists, those becoming over-income in existing affordable stock. Group did not reach resolution and asked city research other indicators that better track displacement. Another idea suggested tracking programmatic data from service providers, such as the Multi-Service Center, including the number and type of households served. However, it was felt that tracking programmatic data would not cast a wide enough net to be a good indicator. For instance, it would miss people who are unaware of available services).

7. Median length of tenure of non-student head of household for owners and renters

Group liked this indicator but admitted that it does not tell full story. For instance, longer tenure could indicate over-housing. Also, data does not distinguish whether household moved from one Cambridge residence to another, so short tenure might reflect existing long-time resident moving to another Cambridge home, rather than new resident moving into city. Group asked City to research other indicators that better track displacement.

8. Racial/ethnic composition over time

Group wants to track overall diversity but does not agree on approach. Some suggested tracking minority homeownership; race and ethnicity of families; or developing a diversity index. After discussion, the group suggested that staff review and recommend an indicator for diversity.

Public comment

- Students sharing 3-bedrooms can pay more than families. Seniors are being displaced as foreign developers buy buildings. Is there a way to regulate developers who buy buildings and increase rents? How can we protect naturally affordable stock?
- Question about the actions needed to reach these targets. Staff explained the previous working group meetings resulted in 40+ new action steps; the focus of this meeting was on indicators and targets.
- 2 members of public stated they were impressed by group and their commitment to housing affordability.
- Important to get eviction data if possible.
- People who are underhoused are also in need and at risk of displacement.