

# Appendix B: What We Heard Report

## INTRODUCTION

Renton’s Housing Action Plan planning process included a program of community outreach and engagement to gather input on housing needs and opportunities in Renton. The planning process took place between March 2020 and March 2021, during Washington’s Stay Home, Stay Healthy order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Outreach and engagement activities were conducted in accordance with the State’s public health guidelines.

The outreach and engagement activities were designed to satisfy both the **information needs** of the project as well as **process needs**. These include:

### Information Needs

The planning process sought community member input on:

1. The nature and extent of barriers and challenges Renton residents currently face in meeting their housing needs.
2. How housing needs will change over the next 20 years.
3. Current constraints to increasing housing supply across housing types (single-family, multifamily, infill development, etc.)
4. Community preferences for meeting current and future housing needs.
5. Necessary conditions to ensure actions and strategies are feasible.

### Process Needs

The planning process also aimed to achieve the following outcomes:

6. Raise awareness of the Housing Action Plan process, preliminary findings, and potential strategies.
7. Include ways to reach community members who speak a language other than English, or who have limited English-language skills.
8. Participation in defining the problem and building strategies by those most closely affected by the City’s current housing policies and processes (residents, housing providers/navigators, developers).
9. Increase understanding of the barriers and challenges Renton residents currently face in meeting their housing needs among City leaders and city residents not experiencing barriers.

10. Provide simple, plain-speak information on complex housing data to facilitate meaningful engagement by non-experts.

## Summary of Community Engagement Activities

This document describes the outreach and engagement activities conducted as part of the project and summarizes community input by theme. The document does not review the communications activities of the project including media and web materials. Summaries of the Housing Action Plan Advisory Committee meetings are presented on their own.

Activity	With whom/ by whom?	When?
<p><b>Housing Action Plan Advisory Committee</b>            The Advisory Committee provided guidance on the project process and analysis, as well as the contents of the final Housing Action Plan.</p>	<p>Residents and organization representatives in Renton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Angela San Filippo, South King County Housing and Homelessness Partners</li> <li>▪ Benita R. Horn, Renton Community</li> <li>▪ James Alberson, Renton Planning Commission</li> <li>▪ Kathleen Hosfeld, Homestead Community Land Trust</li> <li>▪ Linda Smith, SKY Urban Empowerment Center</li> <li>▪ Melissa Glenn, King County Library System</li> <li>▪ Millie Phung, Renton Housing Authority</li> <li>▪ Nancy G. Osborn, Elder of United Christian Church of Renton</li> <li>▪ Roberto Perez, Centro Rendu of St. Vincent de Paul Society</li> <li>▪ Rocale Timmons, SECO Development</li> <li>▪ Rich Wagner, Community Member</li> </ul>	<p>June 2020 – February 2021</p>

Activity	With whom/ by whom?	When?
<p><b>Property Manager Interviews</b></p> <p>Brief phone interviews with property managers focused on rapidly changing conditions in Renton’s apartment communities.</p>	<p><b>Property managers</b> of apartment housing in Renton.</p> <p>Conducted by Berk Consulting. Five property managers, 1,652 households.</p>	<p>April 2020</p> <p>Right after Stay home, Stay Healthy order</p>
<p><b>Expert Interviews</b></p> <p>Interviews focused on housing issues and opportunities in Renton and best strategies for engaging community members.</p>	<p><b>Housing and Community Need Experts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Matt Feldmeyer, Renton School District</li> <li>▪ Benita Horn, Renton Mayor’s Inclusionary Task Force</li> <li>▪ Kathleen Hosfeld, Homestead Community Land Trust</li> <li>▪ Millie Phung, Renton Housing Authority</li> <li>▪ Rocale Timmons, SECO Development</li> <li>▪ Guy Williams, Human Services Manager</li> <li>▪ Mayor’s Inclusion Task Force</li> <li>▪ Debbie Little, Renton Senior Services</li> </ul> <p>Conducted by BERK Consulting</p>	<p>May – June 2020</p>
<p><b>Mover Interviews</b></p> <p>Interviews focused on what recent movers were looking for in new housing and what was available to them in Renton.</p>	<p><b>Residents</b> who have moved in the last two years (either to Renton, from Renton, or within Renton).</p> <p>Conducted by Advisory Committee members. 17 households.<sup>31</sup></p>	<p>June – July 2020</p>

<sup>31</sup> Summary of Mover Interviews is presented in the Advisory Committee Meeting #2 Summary.

Activity	With whom/ by whom?	When?
<p><b>Community Conversations</b></p> <p>Community Conversations is a community engagement approach to enable community representatives to gather useful information for the Housing Action Plan through semi-structured conversations with community members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Renton Mayor’s Inclusion Task Force, conducted by BERK consulting</li> <li>■ Renton African American Pastoral Group (RAAP), conducted by Hannah Bahnmilller</li> <li>■ Latino High School Students, conducted by a Renton High School student</li> <li>■ Senior Advisory Committee, conducted by BERK Consulting</li> <li>■ Latino Community Members, conducted by Julio Amador</li> <li>■ Renton Sunset Area Transformation Resource Council, conducted by BERK consulting</li> <li>■ Renton Downtown Association, conducted by BERK consulting</li> <li>■ Renton Vietnamese Residents, conducted by Brian Do</li> <li>■ Residents, conducted by Monique Taylor-Swan</li> </ul>	<p>September – November 2020</p>

## SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY INPUT

The following summarizes community input gathered through the Property Manager Interviews, Expert Interviews, and Community Conversations. Findings are organized by theme with selected quotes illustrating the theme. All quotes are paraphrased comments from the interviews with each quote representing the thoughts of one individual.

### Renton's Strengths and Assets

We did not explicitly solicit resident input on Renton's strengths and assets for housing. Nevertheless, some residents and service providers highlighted some of the community's strengths.

#### *Satisfaction with Current Housing*

- Some residents, particularly older adults, expressed satisfaction with the housing they have.

*"We used to have a lot of nice activities in our community room, but now because of COVID it's all shut down. I really value those activities."*

*"The 55+ communities in the south have really taken off because people like to be with people that like to do the same things as they do. Golf, games, bunko, poker-- people like to be where other people enjoy their hobbies."*

*"For homeowners it is a joy because they find Renton to be a good place to live in, low crime, and close to everything that one desires to do. But also know the value of their home is going up."*

- Residents who live in income-restricted housing expressed gratitude for their housing. Residents report high levels of satisfaction with safety, maintenance, and the walkability of their communities.

#### *Strong Community*

- Early in the pandemic property managers observed mutual support in terms of childcare.

*"The community has come together a lot, watching each other's kids playing outside. The school district comes by and provides meals. A lot of more outside time, a lot of people at home."*

#### *Renton Pride*

- Many expressed a sense of pride about living in Renton and being from Renton.

## Partnerships

The City has had effective partnerships with other agencies that create new opportunities for housing.

- Cross-sector partnerships are critical to securing funding for community development and housing projects.

*“The City works with their partners. They are planning a bus rapid transit line through the area. It is things like that that make the area competitive when looking for tax credits or funding and grants...There are aspects of the neighborhood and services that allow Renton to be more competitive in getting those funds.”*

## City Initiative and Leadership

- Housing providers speak highly of the City’s initiative in housing programs:

*“Renton is light years ahead of the other SKC cities in thinking about incentives.”*

*“Renton is at least approachable - A lot of other cities are really insulated; things happen behind closed doors and you don't really know the network that is behind the scenes.”*

- Others see an opportunity for Renton to adapt its leadership to the changing circumstances.

*“Renton has not accepted that it has transitioned from a small town into a city. Because of that it doesn't have the resources and the thought leadership and policy leadership on what it means to grow and scale to create the housing necessary to meet Renton's needs and population growth. It is behind the curve. [Do you have an example of a jurisdiction that is not behind the curve?] Bellevue is an example of a place that has accepted the need for growth. Housing, transportation, schools, etc. They took a holistic approach and understood that their proximity to Seattle meant they needed to account for growth to do the best by their community to provide housing. They didn't do a good job providing affordable housing, but Renton can do it better.”*

- Renton is seen as having a functional approach to design review.

*“What the city has done right is not to have design review by committee. That is where a lot of judgements fall off the cliff. ... I would hate to have that change because I think that is something Renton has done well. If you look at any jurisdiction, Seattle being the poster child for what goes wrong with design review. It is a costly process that does not add value to the project. You want community input but not in a way that derails the whole thing...The whole design review process creates a lot of cost, you can't design by committee, it becomes a process for the sake of process, it can delay your project by six months or a year, I can put a monetary value on that process. Then in the end, all it does is change the window colors. It can be very, very expensive for the soft costs like keeping the architects engaged and managing the design iterations.”*

*“Renton has done this well as part of the pre-application process and having the developer engage the community on the front end.”*

### ***Strong Community and Neighborhood Quality***

- Residents appreciate the quality of Renton’s neighborhoods.

*“Renton has a lot personality in its single-family neighborhoods. The City has done a good job preserving neighborhood character. But the single-family neighborhoods are not accessible to a lot of people who have historically lived in Renton.”*

*“Renton has done a great job with parks. The city’s parks are really great, and there is a good overlay between the school playgrounds and city parks.”*

## **Renton’s Housing Challenges**

### ***High Housing Costs***

- While Renton used to be known as an “affordable area,” many feel that it is no longer the case.

*“Cost is a barrier; Renton is becoming Seattle.”*

- While people’s incomes have increased, housing costs have increased even faster.

*“In the past five years her parents had to pay more rent every year because the owners keep raising the prices. She feels like it was normal especially since Renton is going up in price for house-owners and renters. She is one of three kids and feels like money is tight since rent gets higher every year.”*

- Rents are higher in Renton than other parts of the county, making federal subsidies less effective. Housing programs may need to use additional funds to cover the discrepancy between the federal programs and the market.

- Housing insecurity impacts a lot of people, even people with steady, professional employment.

*“What’s interesting is that our model serves people who you don’t think as needing subsidized housing: teachers, nurses, technicians, bus drivers, taxi drivers, firefighters-folks that you think of as having a good job.”*

- Housing cost increases may be accelerating.

*“See people who have lived in the same place for 10-15 years and now are seeing rent increases all the time. Every year there is a rent increase, but seniors can’t afford it because there is no increase in their income.”*

## *Barriers to Housing Outside of Cost*

Cost is not the only obstacle to finding adequate housing. Residents report other barriers that restrict a household's ability to access housing.

- Access to financing.

*"One issue is that lots of people do not qualify for financing. Even with interest rates so low, many people cannot get a mortgage. The low interest rates mean a down payment requirements are strict."*

*"When it comes to Renton - a lot of people are working in cash, which prevents them from getting a loan. For a lot of people, the lending requirements are difficult. They need more assistance with the down payment, they have difficulty because they are paid in cash, they do not speak English, so it is difficult to work with the lenders. Difficult to meet the lending requirements."*

- Lack of living wage jobs. Some suggest the need to focus on improving incomes and addressing income inequality.
- Past evictions
- Lots of tenant stipulations and requirements that are difficult to meet, such as prohibiting family members as live-in caregivers in senior housing.

*"One specific challenge is the restrictions on the number of people in a home"*

- Lack of wrap around services to help people maintain their housing, especially affordable housing.

*"Not having wrap around services for folks to be able to maintain the affordable unit they are in and remain housed. Especially true of Section 8 housing and needing support of wrap around services."*

*"Agencies that manage housing have to understand the barrier and need for flexibility for residents; for affordable housing, there is a need for staff to resolve conflict and work with residents to promote stability."*

*"We face a lot of challenges - mostly around our tenants. Most of our tenants have issues finding and retaining a home. Because they have issues with their personal lives, they've also had challenges with deposits and keeping up with the higher cost with utilities, they don't receive as much support through living on their own as they would in project-based subsidies...they pay about 30% of their income towards rent, but there are other costs that come up in life. They also have really complex personal problems. Psychological health issues, some have had past gang affiliations, PTSD."*



*“We get the vouchers and are supposed to find the services and intensive case management that are necessary to keep them housed. We don't have the capacity for that, and the Veteran's Administration has limited capacity as well. We struggle to keep them in housing. A lot of our veterans will break the lease policies, many have a lot of behavioral health issues and need intensive support services.”*

- Fair housing concerns exist, particularly for rental housing. Some note that with more Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and other privately-owned homes available for rent, there may need to be some landlord education around fair housing.

*“There is a lot of racism when it comes down to lending. There are a lot of gaps in who has access to income. There are so many barriers we'll have to break down.”*

- Some participants feel there is still too much of a disconnect between the city, the school district, and the housing authority.

### ***Challenges with Cost Burden***

- People can typically find a house that meets their needs, but often must pay more than 40% of their income in rent. This was common among Latinx households.

*“The rent was 40% of their net income. It is difficult for these people to survive. If you take into consideration all the other bills. It became obvious to me that it was an impossibility. It was painful for people to explain the difficulties they were going through at this moment.”*

- High cost burdens have led to stretched budgets and perilously low savings.

*“A lot of us are a couple of a paychecks away from homelessness.”*

### ***Crowded Housing***

- Residents spoke to the challenge of shifting to online school given the lack of space in their homes.

*“When people are living in one or two bedrooms with a four-person family, it makes it hard for students to focus on their work.”*

### ***Displacement Pressure***

- Families are being displaced, their income has increased, but not enough to match the rise in housing costs.

*"I am hearing about families that moved out of the Renton School District ... their salaries have not gone up but their housing costs have so families are moving to more affordable areas."*

- Residents report accepting a higher commute burden to take advantage of lower housing costs in Renton compared to other cities such as Kirkland.

*"The closer you get to Seattle or Bellevue the worse it is. People are moving further away to be able to afford something, but that increases commuting costs which is a financial strain, not to mention costs to the region and environment."*

*"I have overheard staff say that they have been trying to find a rental in Renton but can't. Staff have to live out in Maple Valley. It creates a dissatisfaction with trying to find an apartment they can afford. Teachers with kids, they are probably struggling, they get paid more than other staff, but even then, I am sure it is a struggle."*

- Displacement negatively impacts the education system.

*"Relocations also create challenges, people having to move multiple times. Student retention becomes a challenge and teacher retention rates are lower. Retention has a correlation to student success. When students have been at a school longer, they are more comfortable and able to do better. They don't have to play catch up and get up to speed all the time. It is similar for teachers."*

*"When the school environment ends up with a lot of housing insecure students, it creates higher discipline issues, which creates a feeling of discomfort or dissatisfaction on the part of teachers."*

- The changing economy and income equality leave some people out.

*"We know it is easy for Renton to serve and please people who work for Boeing, Microsoft, Amazon, and Google because their income is greater than any other job in the Pacific Northwest. People who are white or Southeast Asian had the highest probability of being represented and served within Renton because they have the money available to be house owners."*

- Senior residents are particularly vulnerable to rising rents which can lead to displacement pressure. While they may have started within the mid-range of incomes in their community, as prices rise but their income stays the same, their relative position decreases.

*"You find yourself moving toward the lower brackets of the income range. The house next to mine just sold for \$800,000. My neighborhood has been changing. Last night I found people left clothes in my yard that are not mine, so these are things that are changing around me."*

*“We know seniors have fixed incomes that do not keep pace with rent ... Some folks think it’s better to move out to assisted living because everything is taken care of. Homes are hard to maintain and have other costs than rent – e.g. yard, HOA dues, utilities, etc. These extra costs didn’t used to increase at the rate they do now. With all the other challenges and costs to staying, a rent increase is always on top of it all.”*

*“For a senior, a family of just me living by myself, it was hard finding something that I can afford. My small income is just social security plus a little bit of retirement. It is not easy. I am lucky that the park I live in is for lower income people, but these parks are slowly moving out. Everything is going up and our income is not going up.”*

*“Regardless of where you are, as you get older you don’t have an increase in income, but the value of your housing is increasing. Other costs are also increasing—food, transportation, etc.”*

- Rising taxes is also a challenge for seniors. There are programs to help seniors with property taxes, but they are only for very low-income households. Residents recommend adjusting the eligibility threshold to account for local conditions.

### **Limited New Housing**

- The housing supply is too limited.

*“It seems like Renton is running out of land and there are supply issues. The inventory is really short.”*

- People who want newly built housing have a hard time finding what they need.
- Need more housing and new types of housing with lower prices.

*“Any housing we build is going to be helpful. More housing means more options for people. Having more supply is going to mean more options.”*

*“I love Renton. I brag about Renton-- people come here and want to live here and they can’t. We have all these draws, but people can’t come in. If we had the housing more people would want to come.”*

### **Lack of Housing Options for Some**

- Housing that is **right sized** to a household’s needs:

*“More mansion-sized houses are being built. For the whole family that is more than what we would need. We are looking for regular single-family homes.”*

- **Larger families** are unable to find suitable housing.

*“Larger family units are also a challenge to find because developers are trying to maximize the number of units. [What size is missing?] Family size = three+ bedrooms, units to fit five to six people including kids and/or blended families”*

*“We need housing of different sizes, more medium and larger size housing. People are looking for housing that is suitable for their family size.”*

- **Lower income households** struggle to find adequate housing. Income requirements of 2.5 times the rent can present a barrier to housing in the form of higher deposit requirements or the need for a cosigner.
- Subsidy programs have **minimum income requirements** that continue to rise due to housing costs. Households that earn less than \$25,000 are not eligible for rental assistance unless they have another qualifying factor.
- **Younger** people are not able to afford the rent.

*“I spoke with some younger kids, they are adults but still young, and they are unable to live here due to their income. They cannot afford the rent if they are by themselves. This is a challenge for a lot of the younger generation. Housing is just overwhelming for their income.”*

- **People living with disabilities** have a difficult time finding appropriate housing.

*“In new development, they don’t have homes for handicapped. There isn’t a home for people that use wheelchairs.”*

### ***Lack of Services Near Housing***

- Some areas in and close to Renton lack access to needed services.

*“I live in the Skyway area, but I have a Seattle address. I am on a youth leadership group and a lot of what we focused on is affordable housing. We talked about the fact that there are no dentists, no doctors, or main grocery stores in Skyway. There isn't anywhere for children to go to afterschool. There isn't anything in the Skyway area also in West Hill area. There aren't any medical services there.”*

### ***Older Housing Stock***

- Renton has a lot of housing stock that is more than 50 years old. Some of this housing stock is past its useful life and needs replacing. Renton’s Home Repair program encounters challenges in addressing repair requests in old housing.

*“Cascade Vista, Highline manufactured home parks, those communities are impacted because they are occupied by seniors living in poorly-maintained manufactured homes.*

*We go in and do a lot, when we [assess the situation], we're finding a lot of deferred problems. The needs are past preservation by that point. The housing stock is from the World War II era if not older...they are mostly single, aging white women. We do the assessment first, then we try to lead the customer to a path to make them the most whole. Our goal is to make the home safe and healthy...dry and warm."*

### ***Economic Segregation***

- With respect to education, low-income students in the Renton School District are concentrated in some areas of the city, typically where housing is denser.
- There is greater need in the unincorporated areas outside of the city limits.

*"There are more pockets of need in the unincorporated areas than in the City of Renton. I remember when Renton tried to annex the West Hill area it didn't pass with voters and that was when there was potentially federal money to address the infrastructure needs. That federal money is long gone, so I think there is even less of a chance for annexation."*

## **Housing Needs**

### ***Appealing Downsizing Options for Seniors***

- Renton needs **more housing** appropriate for seniors.

*"There are also retirees that are living in larger homes but can't afford the property taxes and other costs. When they are looking at a one-bedroom apartment rent, it looks too expensive for them to downsize. So there could be more housing if these seniors could find an affordable apartment. If there was a program where they could pay their rent at a discount, that would give someone else the chance to buy their house."*

- Housing **designed** for older adults.

*"They need more affordable homes. Single story homes with no stairs. For a senior that would be great. For younger people, they could probably handle two stories."*

*"The lots are getting smaller, so they are building up, which makes for a lot of stairs."*

### ***More Participation by Property Owners in the Housing Choice Voucher Program***

- Greater participation by landlords in the Housing Choice Voucher program

*"On the landlord side, we struggle to get landlords to participate in the program. There is a bias against voucher users."*

### *Improvements to Existing Housing Stock*

- There is a concentration of WWII era housing stock. Emphasis on renovation and replacement are needed.

### *Better Management of Rental Housing*

- Enforcing basic standards for rental housing quality can be a challenge, especially for immigrant or refugee households who are reticent to report housing problems to the City.

### *Housing That Aligns to Income*

*“If you work in Renton, you should be able to choose to live here if you want to.”*

*“Low-income housing is needed especially near schools, because a family with kids is more likely to be of low income than an individual.”*

### *Homeownership*

A common theme throughout the community conversations was the need for homeownership opportunities for a greater range of economic segments of the community. This is considered an important aspect of creating a more equitable community.

- Many are locked out of homeownership opportunities: *“The possibility to buy a house is nonexistent.”*
- There is a strong desire for homeownership opportunities for a broader spectrum of incomes. *“There is a thirst for low-income housing that can be owned rather than rented.”*
- Residents value homeownership for the stability it can bring households. This would support stronger communities.

*“Also homeownership as a way to pass on wealth. There’s a real cost, both monetary and emotional, to moving from place to place. Homeownership emphasizes stability, including for families and kids. It allows for folks to build community relationships and invest money back into their community.”*

- Quickly rising home prices continue to push homeownership out of reach. Even if people can find a home to buy, other expenses make it unaffordable.

*“In the time it takes to save for a home, prices increase.”*

## Service Needs

- Programs that provide financial assistance to **help households stay in Renton**, particularly for low-income and disadvantaged households.
- **Programs for financial assistance for homeownership**. There is a need to have programs targeted to moderate income households in addition to programs for lower income households. Otherwise, given current market conditions, you end up with heavily subsidized housing for low-income people and market-rate housing for upper income people and thus hollow out your city.
- Need **homeownership affordability tools** for ownership beyond down-payment assistance.

*“The County does not currently have resources for home ownership...we need to work with the County to structure a form a financing that will work for homeownership. When they think of homeownership assistance, they only think about down payment assistant... they will not give enough to make that work. The cities will need access to other resources, if we rely only on the County it won't be enough.”*

- Renton's **Home Repair Program** is very popular, but there are constraints in how federal funds are used.
- There is a **gap in services** between housing and mental health. A provider may be able to address the housing issue, but without the mental health support the resident is not likely to stay in healthy, safe housing.
- Some felt that **rent control** was necessary to ebb quickly rising rents, others were concerned that rent control would be a disincentive to further development.

*“We want to start putting caps on the rent. Some of the people who are owning the complexes are raising the rents every six months or every year and that is pushing people out.”*

*“If the City was able to put that restriction [rent control] in it would be less competitive. We may chase the investments away.”*

*“When I think about living here, even though you may get a 3% increase in your social security, it doesn't cover the \$30 -\$50 dollar increase in your lot rent. It is hard to manage that, it is hard to keep living here.”*

*“The only thing the City can do is rent control. That is the only weapon that a city or state can have to slow down the throttle of capitalism. The rent can't go higher than the persons income increase. That's all the City can do because the City doesn't build housing.”*

*“Avoid price increases at all costs. The City of Renton could put a ban for a limited time, a policy that denies the landlords the right to increase the price of their home/apartment if they already know the area is low income.”*

## Housing Desires

- Housing at prices people can afford, including apartments in areas of the community with more amenities.

*“We need to come up with an apartment style where the housing prices can be lower. Housing in more areas and more apartment type of housing.”*

- Residents want access to transit and other quality of life amenities, both for themselves and for the disadvantaged parts of the community. Areas that currently connect transit, services, and housing tend to be available more to higher-income households, and some would like to see expanded affordable options in these areas as well.

*“A community that is active and has events in order to form bonds. They find it difficult to go outside when there are not that many parks available or in walking distance. But they did point out their desire for trails and hiking places to be in Renton.”*

*“A place that has amenities and public transportation close – it can’t be affordable but with no quality of life”*

*“Community amenities, housing where there are green spaces and playgrounds things for children. Families can get out together and do some activities.”*

*“For me, to have a successful community we’re going to have to have amenities. The Doug Baldwin Community Center, the partnership with the schools, are all really good. I would like to make some strategic mapping to ensure we are providing attractive features for student-age kids. Are we doing it in a smart way to make a community a community and not just a block of housing?”*

*“We need to be focusing on multifamily housing in those areas that are affordable to families with average incomes. Something that offers a sense of identity for the homeowner. A lot of the new developments are 3,000 to 4,000 square feet and close to \$800,000. We need more affordable, attached housing for families. For example, townhomes. I’m not typically a fan of townhomes because they are often built for the lowest cost possible and lack any individual identity. They are good if they can be built in a more affordable way than large, single-family homes. I’m not a big fan of condos, since I don’t want to own an apartment. We need something that offers a sense of pride for the homeowner that is built in an efficient manner. I don’t want to see Renton turned into tower after tower.”*



- Some frame their desire in terms of **density**. They want to see density around retail, grocery stores, and mixed-used developments, particularly in the downtown area and the Landing.
- Housing connections to **transit** is a priority.

*“Renton does not have rail and it is something that we have worked hard to try to get. We know that as there is more density and development there is a need for strong transportation infrastructure. The region must remember that should go hand in hand for there to be the connectivity. Keep in mind these things work together and regional and legislative investment need to work together.”*

- For multifamily housing, desired unit amenities include basic amenities such as microwaves, in-home laundry appliances. Development amenities include a gym and facilities for pets.
- Including affordable housing in the redeveloped downtown.

*“There should be new housing plans for low income in downtown Renton. This is because they think many of the people there will be removed for new house plans.”*

- Property managers report a strong preference for nature views.

## Development

### *Challenges to New Development*

- **Construction and development cost are quickly rising** due to labor shortages and tariffs, particularly for larger projects.
- **Family housing** is currently disincentivized in the market.

*“Right now, because construction costs are so high, building codes are stricter, land costs are going up, multifamily in general is having a hard time penciling. Specifically, family units. You can make micro-units pencil, but larger units that can accommodate families are becoming harder to make work. You are seeing that challenge already, there has already been a slowdown in Renton.”*

- **Subsidies and incentives** have become highly competitive and more difficult to access.

*“Looking at the development potential of those parcels, the ability to underwrite property with respect to the subsidies. There are conversations related to building supportive housing and assisted living. We’ve had conversations about the feasibility of developing on these lands, but it is a challenge. The competitive nature of the tax credit programs... they used to be more accessible, but now they are highly competitive and at capacity. Now we’re seeing the bond abilities at capacity as well.”*

*“HUDs funding has declined for decades. I don't see a huge change in that. It's where the politics will take us... having talked to a number of public housing authorities, these entities have had to be so creative to figure out to use their funds.”*

### **Current Development Trends**

- Future development is likely to be more diverse than just single-family homes.

*“I see a host of products coming into the market: micro-units, denser single-family homes, smaller lots, new way to densify our neighborhoods. We could hopefully see some new condominium development if the state can get their laws right. It has been a really long time since new condos have been built in the region and in Renton. Given COVID-19, there might be more live-work units needed, where people are working from home a lot more. Given that a lot of our region is based around the tech industry, and a lot of their workforce is comfortable working for home. That will have an impact on the product being developed, it has an impact on developments and the bottom line.”*

- There may be more resources to fund senior housing, housing in response to homelessness, and veterans' housing.

*“Senior housing is an area of growth because the available subsidies can make those developments pencil, affordable housing is feasible because when you see those subsidies roll out.”*

*“I see a political leaning shift when it comes to HUD; the homeless crisis is very prominent, and a lot of its programs are tailored to those populations.”*

### **Negative Impacts of New Development**

- Residents expressed concern about development impacts to **parking**.

*“With respect to development we have a lot more traffic and not enough parking. Traffic and parking is a problem. Usually families have more than one vehicle.”*

*“Downtown parking is terrible, it is almost impossible to go to restaurants, the post office, or to go into the state offices. That is terrible. You need to find some way for businesses to get more parking.”*

- When new development happens quickly it can overwhelm the **schools**.

*“I live in the Renton Highland area and there are a lot of new houses that have been constructed recently. That has led to building the new school, creating a huge influx of students and causing the school to put mobile classrooms around the school buildings.”*

- Residents also expressed concerns over **loss of green spaces** and forests.

- Seniors expressed concern that new development may stimulate displacement due to **gentrification**, causing rising property values.

*“One concern is gentrification; I would like to see more development in the Highlands area, but this increases property taxes and can cause rent increases”*

## Housing Equity

### *Need More Equitable Outcomes in Housing*

- Addressing equity in housing is critical, as housing can perpetuate the inequities in other parts of life.

*“The same standards of excluding people of color have led to the wealth gap today.”*

*“I hope it makes more options for the African American community. I hope we can shorten the gap between the black and the white in the community. There is a very thin line... I hope we do something that we can model for other communities.”*

- Equity means having true choice in housing.

*“Affordable is also the option to choose something else, having only one affordable option isn’t sufficient because it likely doesn’t fit the need.”*

*“The figures are disturbing, especially since the assumption is that the crisis is only going to get worse. See equity as having a diversity of costs that align with the incomes we have.”*

### *Strategies Must Be Race-Informed*

- Some expressed concern that the way the Housing Needs Assessment defined housing needs did not put enough attention to race.

*“\$108,000 is the median for whom? But what about by race? This isn’t the median for black folks, so looking at the median is going to leave some folks behind. If we build for a median, we’re going to leave POC folks to fall through the cracks.”*

*“Equity is looking at the specific needs of each population group by race. And integrate that perspective into building housing.”*

### *Need for More Diversity in City Staff*

- Diversity in staff is a need.

*“Given the environment that we’re in, the built environment is the largest manifestation of the social constructs we have. There is a lot to be done in terms of equity. One thing I will say, whoever is in the position in creating policy needs to be literate in race relations in the United States and how it manifests in development. Figuring out how to break down those barriers... white people, excuse me for peeling off the veneer, are not as literate. As a black woman, this is an issue close to my heart. I was seeped in some of the issues, there isn't an awareness of the invisible hand that creates the segregation, but we feel it, it's a cage. Housing policy can be developed to break down some of those boundaries if there was a will and if it was meaningful.”*

*“Equity is also in hiring of staff at the City – you have to see it reflected in the leadership.”*