

# Advisory Committee Meeting #1 Summary

June 22, 2020, 4:00 – 5:30 PM

## Meeting Objectives

1. Establish the Renton Housing Action Plan Advisory Committee
2. Review and advance project approach
3. Review *Mover Interview* protocol

## Attendees

- Angela San Filippo
- Benita R. Horn
- James Alberson
- Kathleen Hosfeld
- Linda Smith
- Melissa Glenn
- Millie Phung
- Nancy G. Osborn
- Rocale Timmons

### PROJECT STAFF

- Hannah Bahnmilller
- Mark Santos-Johnson
- Andrew Bjorn
- Dawn Couch

## Meeting Summary

The Renton Housing Action Plan Advisory Committee will guide the development of the planning process to ensure the results best fit the needs of Renton’s community today and in the future. The Committee is comprised of a cross section of community members, social service providers, community advocates, and other housing stakeholders. This is a summary of the first meeting of the Committee.

### Agenda Item ① Welcome and Introductions

Dawn Couch, BERK Consulting, welcomed the committee members and reviewed basics for having discussions over Zoom.

Each committee member introduced themselves and shared their connections to Renton. Many committee members have a long history of working, living, and/or volunteering in the City of Renton.

## Agenda Item ② Project Background & Approach

Hannah Bahn Miller, Renton Housing Programs Manager, thanked the committee members for their participation and noted that this is Renton's first Housing Action Plan.

Hannah briefly reviewed some of the City's efforts at addressing housing affordability challenges and introduced the Housing Action Plan. Hannah notes that housing affordability challenges extend outside of Renton's borders and the city participates in regional forums to address housing needs. Renton is active in the South King County Housing and Homelessness Partners and participates King County's Affordable Housing Committee.

Within its borders, over the last couple of decades, the City has taken several approaches including increasing incentives for development by working with its development partners and putting in place tenant protections. As part of this process, the City is working with six other jurisdictions in South King County (Auburn, Burien, Kent, Federal Way, and Tukwila) to build a subregional housing framework to help align policies and strategies to address housing need.

## Agenda Item ③ Project Approach

Dawn Couch reviewed the project approach for the Renton Housing Action Plan. The planning process is supported by a grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce and the approach is guided by requirements of the grant. The approach includes four phases of work (see [Figure 1](#)):

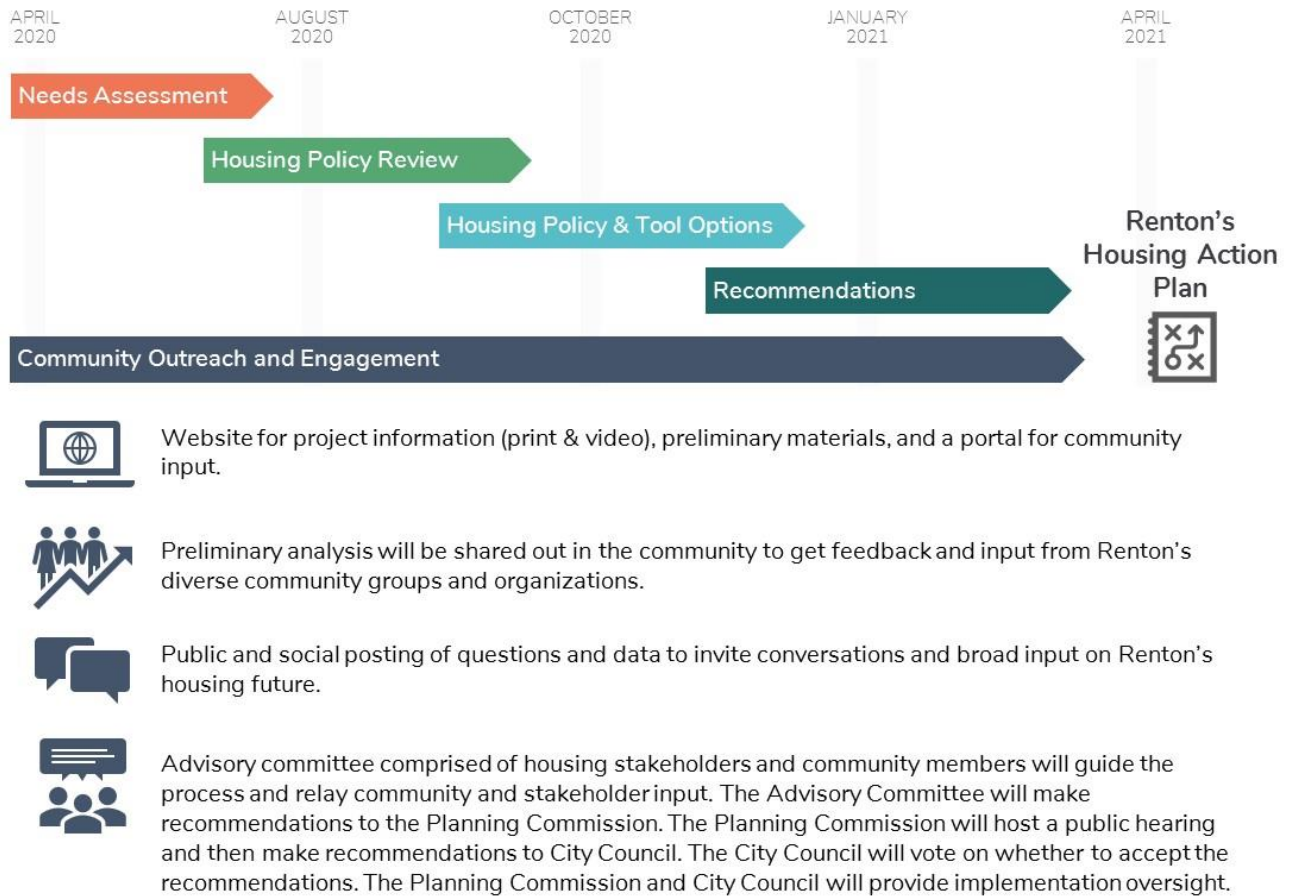
**Phase 1 - Needs Assessment.** The needs assessment will examine the relationship between who lives in Renton, who we expect to live in Renton in the future, and what the available housing is. The assessment will provide planning targets for the amount and types of new housing that Renton will need.

**Phase 2 - Housing Policy Review.** The Policy Review is an assessment of Renton's existing regulations, policies, and land-use codes to determine how likely it is that land use regulations, coupled with current market conditions, will deliver the needed housing in the right forms and at the right price points to meet the needs of the entire community.

**Phase 3 - Housing Policy & Tool Options.** In Phase 3 we will review the City's policy options to increase the variety and price-points of housing in Renton.

**Phase 4 - Recommendations.** The grant calls for a set of recommendations to be made based on the analyses described above. The grant is designed to work within the local government decision-making. As a part of this process, we'll be asking for the committee's feedback and input on recommendations that will be submitted to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission will make recommendations to City Council, and the Council will formally vote to accept the recommendations.

**Figure 1 Renton Housing Action Plan Approach**



The Advisory Committee will meet in each of the project phases to review preliminary analysis and advise the project team on recommendations. There will potentially be a fifth meeting in the Recommendations Phase, either as a standalone committee meeting or with some members of the Advisory Committee participating in the Planning Commission meeting and/or City Council meeting.

Community engagement will happen throughout the project phases, with the driving questions changing as new analysis becomes available and additional insight is provided by the community. The community engagement approach is adapted to the need for social distancing and will be dispersed and webbed, relying on web-based tools and small group conversations.

### **Agenda Item ④ Renton's Strengths & Challenges**

In advance of the meeting, committee members responded to a brief questionnaire about the strengths of Renton as a community and the housing challenges Renton faces. Dawn reviewed the committee responses.

Figure 2 Summary of Advisory Committee Responses on the Greatest Advantages of Renton as a Community



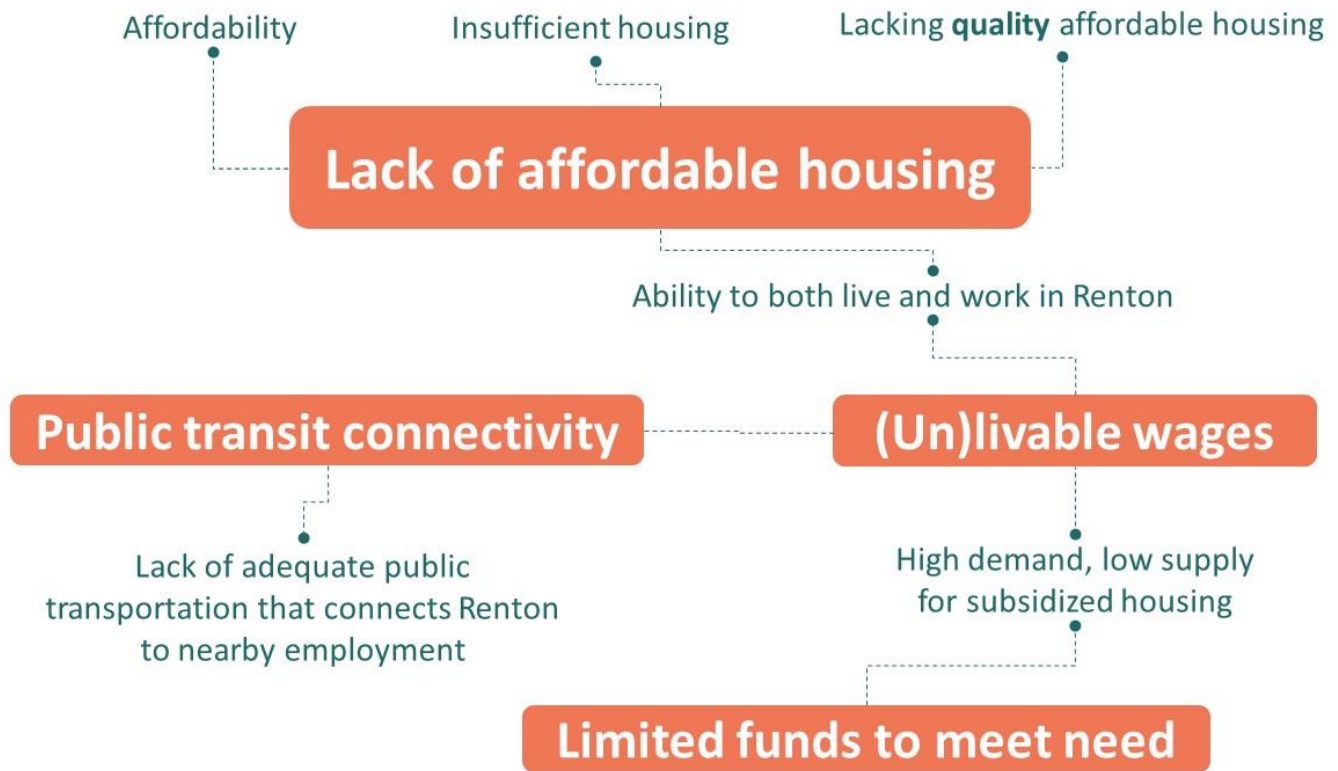
Dawn asked the committee members if there is anything missing or anything about the summary that surprised them.

- Nancy felt the grouping was helpful.
- Benita mentioned that something is not captured in the summary, which can be considered an advantage or a disadvantage, is that the social and economic conditions vary widely among geographic areas. She sees this as an opportunity. She noted that Renton is a very, very different city if you go from neighborhood to neighborhood. They say that your life expectancy can be predicted by your zip code, we may not be there in Renton, but that is a hover over concern she has as our work goes forward.
- Rocale offered the idea of “housing options” as a need that Benita is highlighting.
- Rocale felt that under “Livability Amenities” the waterfront should be mentioned, it is a unique asset of Renton.
- Rich (not present) suggested the Renton Technical College is an asset. Education can increase people’s incomes which increases people’s ability to pay and makes housing more affordable. Looking at other types of funds and the impacts they have on education and transportation will be necessary to address affordable housing challenges.

Dawn presented the summary of the Committee’s feedback to the question “What is the biggest

challenge we face with housing in our community?”. She noted that in contrast to the feedback on advantages, there was a lot more overlap in committee member responses about challenges.

**Figure 3 Summary of Advisory Committee Responses on the Biggest Challenge Renton Faces with Housing**



Some omissions the committee identified include:

- Nancy called out affordable senior housing as a need.
- Rocale suggested adding infrastructure beyond just transit, there is something that should be done in terms of water and sewer and other infrastructure to support additional density. She also noted that density is something else that is missing, that is a challenge to accommodate housing.
- Benita shared that she would like to see in her lifetime an approach to housing, or subsidized housing, that is about helping families build net worth. She notes that the current systems were put in place a long time ago in ways that prevented homeownership by people of color. The approaches have not changed, and we need to do things differently.
- Kathleen added that we need a new mental model about housing. We tend to think of housing according to different economic segments based on income ratios to median income. Instead, she would like to look at housing as an integrated system of moving people towards economic mobility. Housing can be a path out of poverty, a path out of rent dependence, and path towards intergenerational wealth building. We won't get there if we limit our thinking to certain types of housing for certain income groups where people stay put.

- Rocale noted that she would like the policy solutions that comes out of this process to have more flexibility and less rigidity to meet changing needs.
- Angela added that it is important that we focus on a full range of housing options and the land use policies that enable that full range of housing options. Historically, planning has limited choices into single type housing products such as single-family housing.
- Rich (not present) shared that the housing market in Renton has changed. In the 1990s it used to be that if you wanted something bigger and nicer, you moved out of Renton. People couldn't find what they wanted locally. Renton was the affordable option.
- Rich (not present) commented that the size of house people now feel they need has increase significantly. How is housing consumption at the higher end of the spectrum impacting affordability at the lower end of the income spectrum.
- Rich (not present) noted that it is increasingly difficult to both live and work in Renton.
- Rich (not present) noted that a barrier is that Renton is not committed to density out side of downtown. There is little walkability in many areas. People are afraid of density, but more for urban design concerns than a actual fear of density.

Dawn asked the committee members, given everything that has been said about Renton's advantages and challenges, what are the committee member's thoughts on the following questions:

**Question #1. What do we need to learn through the Housing Action Plan process?**

- Committee members noted that it is hard for us to know what we don't know, so it is critical to get new and diverse voices to the table, especially typically less represented or seldom heard voices. Not the "usual suspects" that already provide feedback in City Council meetings or similar forums.
- To engage a broader set of viewpoints, we'll have to consider our language. We need to reframe the language to engage the community, such as using terms like "low-income." No one wants to be marginalized and we shouldn't use "low" because it divides people. How can we talk about people as a whole?
  - How to address a range of income needs? Perhaps by providing examples or situations matched to types of housing?
  - Perhaps "Housing to support diverse members of the community"
  - Need a broad range of housing types to meet how the City will change. Will housing for education be needed? What will family living look like? Homeownership, etc.
- What services and opportunities currently exists? How are they working? No re-invention of the wheel!



- What has been successful with models in use?
- Specific information about other cities working on the same issues
- Range of housing options? Cities are scaling in different ways, housing needs to reflect that
- We need to have a clear statement about the vision for housing policy. This will be necessary for both developer-shaped and resident-shaped approaches.
  - Housing can't be done in a vacuum without developers and financing/underwriting by the private sector
  - Keeping in mind the market and whether or not it will provide the housing options that are needed based on the policy choices.
  - What does it take to bring policies to fruition?
  - Can we have stretch goals?
- What is needed to create a housing environment/system that supports the economic mobility of Renton residents? What supports do neighborhoods need to help imagine and prioritize the types of housing they want, and how can they be supported in working with developers?
- What tools / support do communities need to be effective in expressing their needs, not adversarial? Folks may know what they need, but don't know how to talk to developers or speak that language.
- Othello Graham Street neighborhood – planning, what do they need?
- What systems/processes/entities already exist? How are those processes working/not working effectively and can improvements be made? Can we explore a housing pipeline that includes resources for community members experiencing homelessness so they can remain in Renton long-term if they choose?

Committee members not present offered the following contributions:

- We need to learn more about Renton jobs:
  - How many workers do we export every day? How many do we import?
  - What income levels might each group of workers be achieving?
  - How many jobs is Southport Offices likely to have at full occupancy? How might those jobs match-up with the skills of Renton citizens? Thus, might Southport Offices add to our imported worker counts or capture current residents that we now export?
  - What are the income levels likely to be at Southport Offices?
- Related to affordability, I read in the HAP that the definition is cast at 30% of income levels. I think this is unreasonable low and should be at least 35% and likely higher. The 30% is an old

number from HUD that I think was set in the '50's(?). I realize that HUD still uses 1/3rd of income to calculate affordable subsidies, but 30% does not reflect the lifestyles of today and is particularly not realistic in our region. [Do we] have current data on the actual percentages in today's life?

## **Question #2 What are the barriers to community participation and how can they be overcome?**

- A main barrier is people not knowing if what they say is going to matter or make a difference. This can't be lip service. We need to craft a message, be aware of the mindset, and support feelings of inclusion/legitimacy.
  - Who extends the invitation to participate matters? Especially to groups that have not had a voice. Can this be trusted as an offer to participate?
  - Message carrier to the community is a barrier – should be someone that people can trust.
- We need to provide basic information to support informed input into the process. A basic road map for people that haven't felt heard in the past, who have been overlooked, including seniors who grew up in a time when other people told them what to do.
- We need a clear question. What are we really asking for input on? This is a place to start. This step is often overlooked and needs to be addressed first. Then you can address the literacy component.
- There is the expectation that community will come to policy makers – we need to go to the people. It is challenging in the current era but a great way to meet with people in their own spaces.
  - Holding engagement processes that allow for people who work full-time, who need childcare, etc.
  - Equitable development – opportunities to different groups, voice in development.
- Rich (not present) Wagner asked whether the advisory committee has enough representation around single family homeowners and the real estate community. We should consider adding this additional perspective to the committee.
- Rich (not present) suggested that we should start with building the case, then test it with the community. There will need to be some form of education about density. If you come to the community with a tabula rasa you won't get their attention until the end when you are making decisions.

## **Agenda Item 5 Next Steps**

Dawn confirmed that the next Advisory Meeting will be on July 29<sup>th</sup> from 1 to 3 pm. That meeting will focus on the draft Needs Assessment. In advance of that meeting, the Advisory Committee is asked to



conduct two brief interviews with people who have moved in Renton. Dawn reviewed the interview protocol and answered questions.

Hannah thanked the committee members for the contributions.

The meeting closed at 5:32 pm.