

Notes from Housing Group Meeting
(ANC 3/4 Dismantling Racism Task Force)
August 11, 2020, 4PM

10 group members attended (Randy Speck, Ron Eichner, Connie Chang, Andrew Auerbach, Cal Simons, Judith Mays, Chris Fromboluti, Sarah Remes, Cate Atkinson, Libby Martin)

Randy reiterated the four questions (see prior notes) we are trying to address.

Cal describes the listservs he has created for the whole Task Force and each working group. They are on the same platform as the Chevy Chase listserv, but they are not moderated. Cal has emailed us all invitations to which we should simply “reply” in order to join. We will be able to add files, links, photos, etc. Cal will explain further in our next meetings. We will try for one month after which we will need to consider how to pay for it.

Randy will still email out a meeting reminder every week.

Andrew Auerbach, from the neighborhood, introduces himself.

Ron shows a cartoon about zoning and single family homes. “If you can’t buy in, you’re walled out.” sightline.org

Randy mentions a duplex on Livingston that is a good example of adding units. He refers to our neighborhood as having the largest “SF2 at 78%.” Excludes people, it’s racist.

Ron proposes replacing SF2 with something more inclusive: the “Middle”. This could be house-scale buildings that include 2-6 units of housing. For now, it’s illegal to build this type in our neighborhood. But this could create different types of housing and price points. It is not our role to deal with the minutiae of regulations. But if we were to push to change this law, it could be seen as a huge gesture given our exclusionary past.

Randy mentions the prospect of two homes built on a single lot. There is some flexibility there.

Ron adds that one of the principles of the “Missing Middle” is you set standards for how the building will look (prescribed structure, how it fits into the neighborhood, etc).

Judith cites examples of townhouses that already exist near Regency House on Conn Ave. They have been there for 50 years and have not affected housing values negatively.

Sarah asks if middle constructions change the percentage of the lot the building can occupy. Also, how is the Episcopal Children's Center Zoned?

Ron says the school's plan is to continue as a school. It is in zoning R1 - single family residential.

Cate asks if there are other areas in DC where middle constructions have been done. Ron says that it depends a lot on inventory.

Libby read that MD and VA are doing things with the missing middle. Ron says progressive groups are moving forward on this in most cities. There is not a huge incentive but it could be considered.

Libby notes that this type of building can be more environmentally friendly. Ron says concentrating housing is always more green, especially near transit. Developers could get more support for this reason.

Connie worries about getting support from the neighborhood. Doing an analysis and showing images can make a difference. She says it would be good for us all to watch the talk Randy emailed about: a webinar by Daniel Parolek "Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis".

Cal mentions Transit Villages in Berkeley, and building up at transit points like Tenleytown and Friendship Heights metro.

Ron sees the benefit in making a statement that the old exclusive way of zoning is wrong.

Randy says it is understandable that people are nervous about having four units go up next to their home. Agrees people are more comfortable if they can see examples of what things would look like.

Re property values, Ron says the more walkable and dense an area is, the more valuable the property is.

Judith points out that not everyone needs or can do public transportation.

Cate refers to Bowser Task Force meetings in which developers were going to build higher vs. two stories which is more in keeping with the neighborhood. She points out aiming for attainable housing vs. affordable.

Libby asks how the two are different.

Ron: Maybe affordable housing targets is one thing and increasing affordability for equity is another conversation. Affordability by design can come from lower construction costs, lower land costs, and smaller units. Example of community land trust in CA.

Cal: Making a neighborhood more dense is racist as it is overcrowding. What are the consequences if we don't cough up 1,990 units in 5 years?

Randy: nothing.

He points out a viable example: the townhouses built 40 years ago on Unicorn Lane. Cate mentions Legation and 39th St.

Libby wishes everyone in our neighborhood could see/hear Richard Rothstein speak about the historical redlining in our country. Or see the video sent within our group. It would open people's eyes. Ron agrees but recalls situations where this video angered a lot of people.

Randy says this is the very thing we are trying to address.

Connie describes the "Underline the Red Line" exhibit. It is interactive and wonderful and could come here. She will send further details.

Randy: We must establish that this is a problem and we need to fix it. How?

Cal could get someone he knows to come talk...

He asks if we have anything we want to relay to the Data Group?

Thursday at 1PM, there will be a Q&A with Daniel Parolek.

Randy will send us the registration info.

Cal suggests our meetings go longer, from 4-5:30PM. The group agrees that our regular meetings could go 15-30 min. longer if needed.

The meeting adjourns at approximately 5:20PM.