

Notes from Housing Group Meeting
(ANC 3/4 Task Force on Racism)
Sept. 15, 2020, 4PM

10 people attended: Randy Speck, Janeese Lewis, Matt Landrieu of Team Janeese, Sarah Remes, Cal Simons, Connie Chang, Ron Eichner, Andrew Auerbach, Judith Mays, Libby Martin

Before Janeese joins our meeting, we discuss candidates running for various wards (including our Randy and Connie! GO YEAH GO!).

A finder on the ANC website can show which district we each live in.

Randy opens meeting by urging everyone to focus on writing the report (We have basically about three weeks left).

Cal describes Wiki technology we could use to group our documents. Sarah suggests another option using Google Docs.

Janeese Lewis joins our meeting. (I missed the introduction.)

Randy updates her on the concrete things the ANC and our Housing Group have been doing: Focusing on Affordable Housing and greater density by promoting Missing Middle, ADUs, building on Community Center/Library “campus”, and maintaining current stock of affordable housing. We are writing recommendations for Office of Planning. We have a Small Area Plan.

We introduce ourselves; we straddle Wards 3 and 4.

Randy asks Janeese: What do you think we should be asking for?

Janeese first thanks us for having these at times difficult conversations which can make some people apprehensive.

Janeese is trying to identify public property first as well as private (from Georgia Ave, transit areas, Fort Totten where there is a massive parking lot, the top of CVS near Petworth, etc.)

Inclusionary zoning needs to improve. Enforcement of the current laws is not great. How much are we going to actually enforce them?

She says repair and renovation need to be prioritized in public housing developments. Also the Housing First Program that gives options to the homeless.

The public arena will have the most deeply affordable options. She says adding residential properties starting on the end of the block are perceived better than pop-ups in the middle.

There will be a huge eviction crisis and more homeless due to Covid if we don't act.

Brianne Nadeau is one of her allies. They are discussing income distribution and how to create more affordable housing units across the city.

Ron: How are your and Briana's views different from Mayor's? And what are your thoughts on the Comprehensive Plan?

Janeese says Chairman Mendelson seems to be dragging his feet. The Mayor's planning differs from the Council's; they have different proposals.

Janeese and Brianne whose ward 4 borders on Petworth, Takoma, Fort Totten are working together.

Re Comp Plan: Janeese does not think things will happen in time. Most people are not paying attention or the Plan is too complex. She will be at the hearings, but it has been such a slow process. There is much arguing about zoning in certain areas, especially Crestwood, and no consensus among wards. There are two battles: Getting Mendelson to pass the Comp Plan and getting people to agree.

Ron: Some people have been working on it for years. Things are fully baked and it is time to do something.

Hearings are scheduled for November, but if they are not held, they are not obligatory in 2021. Things could slip into a new version of the Comp Plan.

Janeese thought the plan for Safeway had been scrapped.

Randy says it's complicated due to three owners but not impossible. Also the Well Fargo bank and WUMATA historic building bus depot are potential sites for development.

The Office of Planning is gung-ho about this Small Area Plan and we are going to work very closely with them to increase density and build where possible.

We are determined to make the development attractive from an economic and equity standpoint.

Janeese: Have you started to see ADUs in the community? Randy says not many, but we are looking for ways to encourage it. Also looking for ways to fund Library and Community Center. Connie mentions donations from the neighborhood and a possible Gala.

Janeese is looking at having teach-ins and workshops on affordable housing. Similar to discussions they are doing now on solar panels. The recipients then teach others.

Connie: Are you thinking about inviting people from other cities like Chicago to present? (sorry, I missed Janeese's answer...)

Cal: What resistance have you encountered and how can you get people on board?

Janeese: There is resistance from residential housing. People imagine buildings that will look like New York, that they will take away from the current character, and that there will be more crime, and of course more cars and problems with parking. People want the Georgia Ave corridor for businesses, restaurants, retail, etc but they push back against greater density. Families want their kids to return to live in their neighborhoods but they can't without affordability. She suggests the approach, "Let's talk about what you want for your community" and for example tie it in with environmental reasons such as transit.

Ron: Do you get a different response from black people vs white people or is it class?

Janeese: It's a very deep class issue. Ward 4 has had a black middle class for some time. They view housing along class lines. But environmental and transit issues are viewed along race lines. Example: Bus and bike lanes indicate encroaching white population and gentrification.

Cal: Has the outcry about schools been an issue in her area?

Janeese: Absolutely. On her Listening Tour, Crestwood wanted to be put back into a different boundary. People get upset and don't like change. We need buy in...and are working really hard to get Coolidge the same programming as Wilson.

Janeese asks about the Episcopal School. Randy says their Board is considering an after-school program and have no real incentive to act. Also, there is a lot of concern from neighbors about a change.

Janeese and Randy agree to talk offline about possibilities for the school and Janeese's ideas for birth to 3rd grade /childcare/6th grade, etc.

Janeese says we must create examples of success for people to see.. a model...

She and Matthew leave the meeting and reiterate they are happy to stay in touch, answer questions, etc.

Ron: Re the nature of our report, we need to talk about racism and how to combat it. Do we want to be in the weeds or aspirational?

Connie agrees aspirational is our goal. We know critics will counter.

Libby suggests we list potential objections and how to address.

Judith says don't go too specific.

Ron says we are the Anti-Racism group and we need to be ready to face the dog whistles.

Libby says we need to call people out on racism, in the right way.

Re fear of more crime, we need to show the data which doesn't prove that.

Cal says he can facilitate by assembling the report so different parts are not in conflict with one another.

Libby: Wants to bring up the non-housing aspect of development along Conn Ave. When people hear “along Conn Ave”, they can be worried about a Target popping up like in Tenleytown.

Randy: It’s not possible because it will only be small and medium size mixed use.

Ron: But our Task Force has worried about the loss of the mom and pop businesses.

Judith: We can acknowledge that Tenley has a metro and can therefore support more retail. But here, greater density can support more restaurants.

Cal: Adams Morgan managed to keep out chains.

Randy: The Small Area Plan can do that.

Connie says she will do the first part of the draft and then give it to Cal and Libby. Sarah will do the important section 2A about historical impediments to racial and economic diversity.

She will also put all docs together in one Google doc folder.

Don’t add to the outline anymore. Each section should be done separately as its own doc. We can combine them later.

Ron: We could come up with a section a bit like the “Five Myths” in the Post and demonstrate the urban myths.

Sarah: But restating the myths can reinforce the problem in people’s minds.

Doing an FAQ could be better.

Randy: Let’s have that in some way.

We agree it is good to have Janeese’s support. Let’s work hard to write the report.

Meeting adjourned at 5:35