

Notes from Housing Group Meeting  
(ANC 3/4 Task Force on Racism)  
Sept. 1, 2020, 4PM

Eight group members attended (Randy Speck, Ron Eichner, Sarah Remes, Connie Chang, Cal Simons, Judith Mays, Andrew Aurbach, Libby Martin)

In opening the meeting, Randy stated his concern that Chris Fromboluti does not want to be in the group anymore. Chris is worried that the group's focus on single family homes will detract from our objective. Randy agrees the initial reactions in Chevy Chase can be negative.

But our past and racist policies are also a big problem. If we explain the history and what it means, things could go better.

We are talking about ways to make housing more affordable. We need to be ready to call out racist laws. (Sarah)

Randy will share an article with us about a charge led by the Chevy Chase Community (culpable and continuing to benefit) against the Reno Park Community.

Cal remarks that the spacing near Conn. Ave. is already dense. Randy points out the matter of permitting the growth, not outlawing it. A triplex could be built in the place of certain huge houses and integrated into the neighborhood.

Libby says that although people tend to worry about property value and crime when more affordable housing is built near them, the literature does not really support that. We need to find studies to share with Chevy Chase residents.

Ron says that generally, when walkability and density increase, property values increase. He also refers to a "form-based code" that shows what buildings need to look like.

Judith says that adding the missing middle to the neighborhood would be a token gesture, but still a statement. Also, if a triplex were to be added to her block, you could have three residents there and people wouldn't even know.

Re inclusionary zoning, landlords are not achieving the objectives that were set out. They do not want to fill the units, and things are not managed well.

Connie points out that high income black people could afford to live here. So why aren't there more? Is it due to predatory loan practices? She will send an article about this. Sarah says she saw an article about the under appraising of black-owned houses.

Connie asks if other things are also out of control such as mortgage issues and our neighborhood's reputation. We need to understand the other reasons why black people are not coming here.

Connie and Sarah mention the covenants against Jewish people that existed in our neighborhood.

Judith does not think the black people she knows in our neighborhood feel uncomfortable.

Libby feels we could benefit if our Housing Group were more diverse. It would be good to hear from African Americans themselves. She will speak to her friend who ran her own construction and real estate company.

Cal says it is incumbent on white people to do this work.

Ron says that in the planning process, usually you should gather many people - the stakeholders - who would be affected by our efforts.

This leads us to discuss the pros and cons of investing a big sum of money here vs Ward 7/8, where the social wealth could be improved.

Randy points out that the Mayor has already made that decision, hence the planning for Rock Creek West/Ward 4.

Cal says it feels like our area is carrying the bulk; he asks what the Palisades and Spring Valley are doing in this regard.

Sarah says we can only focus on what we can control (ourselves.)

Libby feels that black people should be included in our discussion.

Sarah and Libby concur it's a fine line between asking them to do the work and asking their opinion.

Libby notes that Janeese Lewis of Ward 4 is knowledgeable about affordable housing projects in DC and suggests we reach out to her.

Sarah says she will reach out to Ed Lazere.

Judith will get advice from Monica Pallazio.

Ron says he will talk to Marcus Goodman, who has actually done the type of hard revitalization we are talking about.

Ron will speak to the writer of a particular article (...which one?)

Randy will reach out to Janeese Lewis-George.

The focus of our discussion with these contacts should be racial diversity, and economic diversity + housing choices so as to not price anyone out.

The group discusses who will take on the various writing assignments for the report (which will be 20-25 pages.)

Connie, Cal and Libby will work on Section I. (Connie noted who is tasked with the other parts?)

Suzanne Slater, President & CEO of Habitat for Humanity, DC, joins our meeting and introduces herself. Cal asks her thoughts on building a house vs. several units. Suzanne says that building to fit into the existing architecture of the neighborhood is crucial. "Nothing gets passed if you do not maintain the character of the neighborhood."

Sarah asks about building in poorer neighborhoods vs. here. Suzanne says it is important to not group too many low income people together. She requires mixed income levels on the developments she works on. She also says it is really important to get as much affordable housing as possible into the (our) neighborhood.

Cal asks if culturally, do people from other "racial wards" want to live here? About Ward 7 and 8, Suzanne says "it's not monolithic". They are becoming more diverse, especially Ward 5. Schools are the highest priority. The kids benefit from a diverse student body. The school tends to be an anchor to the community. A good proportion of people would jump at the chance to live here.

Re the Gateway Concept along Conn. Ave and the Community Center/Library: Suzanne thinks the city would go "way out of its way" to get affordable housing into the Corridor. It would find ways to deal with property owners and there would be good opportunities for expansion. She feels it is good to increase the height of buildings. The density would help small businesses.

Randy asks what can be done about the pressure to raise rents? Suzanne says market forces are on our side. Union Market is overbuilt and there are great opportunities here to create affordable units. The City may want to play "a greater role". There are many techniques - Community Land Trusts, refinancing, etc. Cal says we could use her input and expertise. Suzanne says she is happy to help and will speak with us again.