

**ANC 3/4G Town Hall Meeting
November 16, 2020
Public Input on ANC Task Force on Racism's Work Group
(Community, Education/Mental Health, and Housing)
Recommended Actions**

**Q&A's
Task Force on Racism, Housing Work Group**

Attendees at the ANC Town Hall Meeting that took place over Zoom on November 16, 2020 raised questions that were addressed by representatives of the Work Groups at the meeting. Other questions that were submitted online may not have been addressed. The Housing Work Group has provided responses to questions related to our recommended actions in the hopes of being responsive to concerns expressed or points raised, and to advance the conversation with the community.

This list of Q&As will be posted on the ANC 3/4G website. Additional questions can be submitted to 3g@anc.dc.gov.

Question: How will you ensure developers adhere to the small area plan?

Response: Small Area Plans are approved by the DC Council and become part of the DC Comprehensive Plan. All zoning and development plans are required to be consistent with the Comp Plan. For more information on Small Area Plans see <https://planning.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/op/publication/attachments/Small%20Area%20Plans%202020.pdf>.

Question: The work of the task force working groups is commendable. What strategies are contemplated to bring the neighborhood along and build support?

Response: The recommendations of Housing Work Group of the Racism Task Force are primarily to study a number of measures that could increase housing choice in the neighborhood and to proceed with a Small Area Plan for the Gateway corridor. We envision these undertakings to include information sessions, symposia, charrettes, and other interactive activities that would constitute a neighborhood conversation on these important issues. The Housing Working Group would like to start that conversation as soon as possible and is exploring options for information sessions in the coming year.

Question: What is the evidence that what clearly were racist exclusionary zoning policies and practices caused "missing middle housing" to disappear so that bringing back such housing would help make this community more racially and economically diverse?

Response: The segregationist strategy of using exclusive single-family zoning to ban modest home choices like duplexes and triplexes which provide housing for families of more modest means is discussed in many of the resource materials listed in the annotated bibliography that the Housing Work Group has prepared (see: https://anc3g.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TF-on-Racism_Housing-WG_annotated-bibliography_Nov-21-2020.pdf). A good summary appears in the Mayor's report *Single Family Zoning in the District of Columbia, April 2020*:

The District, like many American cities, has a history of using zoning and legal and financing tools as implements of racial exclusion and segregation. Mapping Segregation, a local research project, explains that "racialized lending policies worked in concert with restrictive deed covenants and exclusionary zoning both to concentrate white wealth and to shrink black access to land and capital." Federal policy, through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), greatly contributed to the "[institutionalization] of racial exclusivity as a criterion for mortgage lending." In fact, the 1937 FHA map that grades sections of the District bears a strong resemblance to the current single-family zoning map. Nearly all the District's

detached single-family zones were graded A, B, or C on this map. These three grades are described as being “protected” and “restricted” from “adverse influences,” while other areas are described as being for the occupancy of Black residents. While discriminatory lending and restrictive covenants are now illegal, zoning has continued to ensure that certain areas are unavailable to anyone who cannot afford a single-family home. Like many single-family neighborhoods in Northwest DC, Rock Creek West historically used deed restrictions against Black and Jewish residents and even though these are no longer in effect, the neighborhood “remains the city’s wealthiest and most exclusive area with the highest home prices and barriers to entry.”

Removing regulations that were imposed to achieve racist goals, and which continue to be problematic because their consequences – even if now unintended – exclude people is a good, perhaps anti-racist thing to do. Providing plenty of homes in many shapes and sizes increases the range of choices and prices in a neighborhood, giving a wider range of families the opportunity to live here (and a wider range of options for families who are already here to stay should their financial or family situation change.)

Question: What is the evidence that the “gentle density” increases recommended by the housing work group through construction of more duplexes, triplexes, etc will increase not more housing units, but more affordable housing units?

Response: The Housing Work Group was concerned with both (large “a”) “Affordable Housing” as used in the Mayor’s many reports on the affordability crisis and as used in Inclusionary Zoning and other regulations (see the Housing Working Group Glossary) as well as (small “a”) affordable or attainable housing. As we acknowledge in the report, “Gentle Density” development is unlikely to directly provide Affordable Housing, but will provide smaller, and therefore lower priced options in the neighborhood, eventually increasing the housing supply and lowering the cost of housing in the future. Recognizing the pressing need for more affordability, our report specifically asks that the District not only study the feasibility and appropriateness of Gentle Density and its impact on existing neighborhoods, but also study measures that require or encourage more affordability in Gentle Density projects.

Question: Could the representatives of the housing working group please say more about what a mixed use library/community center might look like?

Response: This type of co-development, or public private partnership, has been quite successful in other cities, notably New York and Chicago. It can take many forms, but it most likely would involve community center/library space on lower floors and apartments or condos on the upper floors. We are recommending a combination of subsidized rental and owner-occupied units, because historic denial of ownership opportunities to African Americans is a significant part of income inequality today. We can envision lots of shared programming opportunities, but the specifics of that are beyond our scope. We are hopeful that a gracious public space for outdoor community activities can be part of a coordinated campus-like plan, but we make no recommendations regarding architectural details. This should be a major focus of the Small Area Plan effort.

Question: What is the working assumption of the Housing Group about how the Safeway lot (which has multiple owners) can be deployed for a mixed-use development with an affordable housing component? Simply persuading the individual owners that it is in their collective interest to partner with one another to achieve this, or the use of eminent domain.

Response: This question is beyond our scope. The social equity challenge we identify is to reverse exclusivity by creating more housing choices in the neighborhood and that includes these blocks. We understand there are development challenges on this block as there are challenges presented by multiple owners and existing structures and leases, etc. on other blocks, and expect these questions to be addressed by the Small Area Plan.

Question: *The Parking Task Force (which worked in 2018-2019) did a survey of parking opportunities throughout the ANC. Did the housing group do a similar survey as to where affordable housing already exists?*

Response: No, we did not and it is a bit frustrating to not have a clear picture of housing in the neighborhood. The Mayor's Housing Equity Report October 2019 does a good job of looking at the big picture of where Affordable Housing units are located and the answer is very few in Rock Creek West—only 1% of the stock of affordable housing across the District is located here and very few affordable units are expected to be developed in the near future (see video recording for the slide included in our presentation at the ANC 3/4G public meeting held on October 26, 2020 here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwjeMw_gKUI&t=5776s) – hence, the Mayor's goal of adding close to 2,000 affordable housing units in Rock Creek West. As for other affordable or attainable units, our report asks for the District to create an inventory even though we are unsure how to achieve that goal.

Question: *We commend the work that the task force committees have done, and support the goals to bring in more income diversity and racially diversity in Chevy Chase DC. Getting down to brass tacks, what is the recommendation for the height of the redevelopment at the library and community center? Has there been discussion on how to mitigate the impact on the homes that abut the library/community center? What thought if any has been given to traffic on side streets around the redeveloped properties? Lastly, has any thought been given to how to mitigate the demolition and construction process necessary for the redeveloped and repurposed buildings? The old buildings likely have asbestos and homes right next to and near to the demolition will be greatly impacted by air quality, dust, risk to foundation from driving the foundation needed for a multistory building with underground parking garage.*

Response: All of these are legitimate concerns that will need to be addressed. We recommend that the ANC create a task force to work specifically on that development.

Question: *There are also reasons that Chevy Chase is such a coveted place for people to live. People want to live here because we are shielded from violence, crime, unkept properties, trash, neighborhood noise at all hours. We live here for the great schools and people all striving for the same things in life which is growth in life and success.*

Response: The Task Force on Racism generally, and the Housing Work Group particularly, agrees and is dedicated to making our neighborhood more inclusive and sharing these great qualities with more people.

Question: *How do we retain the village atmosphere that fosters the interactions we need? While we want to be diverse we cannot do that if it means sacrificing what makes our community great. I look forward to your response on how we do this.*

Response: We see this as a “both-and” scenario, not “either-or.” From our report:

...our re-imagined neighborhood will most likely look like the existing one. A leafy neighborhood of single-detached homes surrounding a vibrant mixed-use corridor — our Main Street — on Connecticut Avenue. The leafy streets may have a sprinkling of small duplexes or quadplexes mixed in, but they would be similar in scale and design to the single-detached houses. The overall feel of the streets will not change.

The Avenue will likely be a mix of newer modest apartment buildings on the east side, including the new Library/Community Center/Residential complex framing a handsome new public space. On the west side of the Avenue, historic structures like the Avalon Theater and the Arcade will have been preserved and other existing structures will likely be renovated or incorporated into new small-scale development. Parking lots will be moved underground and new buildings will line the Avenue with new retail and other activity-generating uses. It will be even more pleasant, interesting, and safe to walk along our Main Street.

This re-imagined neighborhood will include greater racial and ethnic diversity and offer

- more homes — increasing housing supply in the District;
- greater choices of housing types — encouraging a mixed-income neighborhood;
- more affordable housing — helping Rock Creek West meet its equitable share of the District's Comprehensive Plan goals;
- greater support for local businesses — helping our “mom & pops” to thrive; and
- improved opportunity — inviting minority entrepreneurs to open businesses.

Adding more density at transit-oriented and transit-rich neighborhoods like ours, is almost universally seen as the most environmentally sound way to build. It means less sprawl, less auto traffic, more transit use, and — critically for the climate — less carbon. It should be seen as part of a larger change in priorities, from what is now a more “auto-centric” to a more progressive approach based on social equity, environmental responsibility, and placemaking.

Issues Raised: A number of comments were made questioning the adequacy of the measures discussed to address the affordability crisis in the District generally or meet the Mayor's goals of close to 2000 additional Affordable Housing units, specifically. One questioner, advocating Social Housing policies such as those implemented in Vienna and some other European cities, noted that:

Those tools [discussed in the report] are proven to fail. The funds that the district appropriates are often funneled through developers rather than being devoted directly to providing affordable housing - if the ANC is really going to address this problem, it should undertake new thinking, rather than repeating failed efforts.

Another resident suggested that the District ‘merely’ purchase properties such as the Wells Fargo Bank property so non-profit developers can build Affordable Housing. Another even suggested that: *We can and should circumvent capitalism whenever possible.*

Response: The Housing Work Group notes that its first priority is, in the words of one resident who commented: *The question is, how do we as a community break through the racist policies that have created barriers to our community?*

With that in mind, and recognizing the challenge of affordability, we believe all possible existing tools should be used – from ADUs to Gentle Density to Inclusionary Zoning applied to private development to development of affordable housing buildings on public land – to add affordable housing to the neighborhood and the District. We also recognize that there is room for nonprofit developers to play a large role in this development and invite them to be part of the stakeholder group conversations we hope to have in the coming year/s. Given the realities of current budget constraints (especially in the wake of Covid) and the time it might take to implement a comprehensive and effective Social Housing program, we believe we should focus on using the available tools to break down racial barriers. As another resident commented:

*Whether one is a for-profit or a non-profit developer, no project gets built with private capital unless it can show a return on investment for the funds being borrowed to acquire land and construct the building. That is reality, not "greedy developers". One can have social housing if it is financed by the local government, but new construction of affordable units requires a subsidy of more than \$100,000 per unit. Even with the District setting aside more than \$100 M per year for the Housing Production Task Force (to subsidize new affordable housing construction), more funding per capita than any other city, the number of new affordable units that can be constructed is very limited. **So we have to use a variety of tools, including allowing private developers to construct market rate housing, and, by increasing permitted density, especially along CT***

Avenue, we can require that a specific percentage of those "bonus" units be set aside for affordable housing. [emphasis added]
