

**New Hanover County-City of Wilmington Workforce Housing Advisory Committee**  
**February 5, 2020 Regular Meeting**

**Committee Members Present:** Patrick Brien, Brandon Harris, Don Harris, Katrina Knight, Katrina Redmon, Steve Spain, Dave Spetrino, Paul Stavovy, Glenda Tate

**Staff Present:** Thom Moton (CoW), Suzanne Rogers (CoW), Rebekah Roth (NHC), Dylan McDonnell (NHC)

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**Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order and quorum established at 3:04 pm by Vice Chairperson David Spetrino.

**Approve Agenda**

Glenda Tate made a motion to approve to the agenda, which was seconded by Katrina Knight and adopted unanimously.

**Approve Minutes**

Ms. Tate made a motion to approve the draft minutes from the January 14, 2020 meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Knight and adopted unanimously.

**Public Comments**

No members of the public had signed up to provide public comment.

**New Business**

Roundtable Discussion on Committee Solution Strategies

Vice Chairperson Spetrino led the committee members in a roundtable discussion on the top housing strategies/solutions they would implement if they were the CEO of housing in the county.

The committee discussed a variety of factors that contributed to the affordability for the residents of New Hanover County and strategies or solutions that could increase accessibility to affordable units.

- Regulatory Barriers: The committee discussed how current development regulations and processes increased the cost of development and the cost per unit. Strategies identified to address this included:
  - Streamlining rezoning approval processes to reduce the number of steps and approvals, and subsequently, the cost and uncertainty that increased development costs.
  - Allowing more density and height to provide opportunities to reduce the cost per unit.
  - Implementing zoning reforms, such as form based codes, that could allow for more housing diversity.
- Public Perception: Committee members identified negative public perceptions about affordable housing, especially the rental units in high demand, as a major challenge to the development of new housing units. Strategies identified to address this included:

- Considering the cost to the community if a project isn't approved during the development process so that the idea that "no change" is an option is taken off the table.
- Providing models of how affordable housing can be provided in a high quality way.
- Improving the perception of rentals by encouraging property managers to invest more in maintenance and being a good neighbor by tightening maintenance codes.
- Community Investment: Committee members offered several strategies for leveraging community investment to increase the accessibility of workforce housing:
  - Offering tax incentives for developers and first time homebuyers.
  - Providing capital injections into anchor housing institutions so they are not as dependent on private donations or federal funding, which can constrain their ability to meet the community's needs, obtain financing for new projects, and develop innovative products.
  - Establishing renewable revenue streams (either innovative or tried-and-true like bonds).
  - Investing public funds in water/sewer expansion in unincorporated areas of county without utilities.
- Economic Development: Noting that affordability is tied to area median income as well as cost of housing, committee members discussed several strategies that focused on increasing wages and income:
  - Communicating the reality between the wage and cost of living divide, which can be lost when employers make decisions about salary offerings.
  - Recruiting clean industries that pay a living wage.
  - Allowing peer influence to affect wages by increasing the salary transparency of area employers.
- Public Policy: The committee voiced strategies that local governments could take to improve the accessibility to affordable workforce housing:
  - Identifying short- and long-term approaches on a regional scale.
  - Developing innovative transportation options that reduce the assumption that a personal car is necessary and a given for all residents, such as a regional public transportation network (though not necessarily a bus system, such as WAVE).
  - Ensuring school quality is high in all communities, especially in areas where housing is more affordable but public perceptions of schools is lower.
  - Implementing pilot programs and/or incentives to address gaps in the equitable distribution of affordable units and community investment across the county.
- Other: Other strategies identified included:
  - Opening up condo ownership options for existing multi-family units.
  - Providing housing units to fill the gap for residents who no longer qualify for Housing Authority units but who cannot afford market-rate rents.
  - Requiring the preservation of the number of affordable units, not necessarily the specific unit, to allow for redevelopment.

## **Announcements**

New Hanover County Senior Planner Rebekah Roth announced that New Hanover County Chairperson Julia Olson-Boseman would be delivering the State of the County Address on Monday, February 10 at 6 pm and was anticipated to speak regarding the county's workforce housing initiatives.

Ms. Roth also provided an update on the City of Wilmington's workforce housing zoning district option, which Glenn Harbeck, Wilmington's Director of Planning, Development, and Transportation, had presented to the committee in December. The Wilmington City Council and Planning Commission had met that morning (February 5) to discuss the proposed amendment and had requested staff provide additional information on how a fee-in-lieu might be used and ways the city could ease the administrative burden of reporting requirements associated with the workforce housing inclusion option. A hearing to gather wider public comment would be held at a future Planning Commission meeting.

Ms. Roth also provided an update on the rezoning request for the Wrightsboro property that New Hanover County planned to convey to Habitat for Humanity, which was presented to the committee by Wayne Clark, the county's Director of Planning and Land Use, in December. The proposal for rezoning would be considered by the New Hanover County Planning Board at their meeting on February 6, 2020.

Vice Chairperson Spetrino asked if anyone had additional questions or comments or announcements.

Ms. Knight suggested discussing the structure and use of a potential housing bond or trust fund at an upcoming meeting. Since the committee would be reviewing consultant proposals for the housing analysis and study at their March meeting, members generally agreed to plan on discussing this topic at the April meeting.

## **Adjournment**

With no further questions or comments, Vice Chairperson Spetrino adjourned the meeting at 4:37 PM.