

Howard County Council

Racial Equity Task Force



Meeting: Land-Use and Housing Policy Subgroup Meeting

Start Time: February 9, 2021 4:03pm

End Time: February 9, 2021 6:02pm

Task Force Member Attendees:

Jessica Coates
Suzanne Haley
Phillips Engelke
Ian Kennedy
Jonathan Edelson
Peter Engel
Isabella Battish
Vonda Orders

Task Force Members Not Present:

Herbert Smith
Taneeka Richardson

Council and Facilitator Attendees:

Lauren Marra
Felix Facchine
Colette Gelwicks
Kelli Berg

APPROVED Minutes:

Jessica Coates, Subgroup Chairperson, opened the meeting with a roll call and confirmed that a quorum of subgroup members was present. Phil Engelke, Task Force member, moved to approve the meeting minutes from the Land-Use and Housing Policy Subgroup meeting on December 8, 2020. Jonathan Edelson, Task Force member, seconded the motion to approve minutes. The minutes were unanimously approved by the subgroup members.

Ms. Coates began the meeting by reviewing meeting objectives and a check-in with subgroup members and staff. After the check-in, Ms. Coates gave a presentation on the real estate sales and pricing trends of Howard County. During her presentation, Ms. Coates shared comprehensive information on housing prices in Howard County and the surrounding region, including breakdowns of home sales and pricing information across different zip codes and different housing types in Howard County. Ms. Coates also provided information on housing supply and inventory in Howard County, which has been declining over time. Ms. Coates noted home price disparities in Howard County, with higher average home prices in Ellicott City and Western Howard County and lower average home prices in Columbia, ElkrIDGE, and Laurel. Ms. Coates concluded by highlighting several equity challenges in housing, including homeownership rates, lending and appraisal inequities, and disparities in home appreciation.

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Following the presentation, Task Force members asked Ms. Coates questions and provided comments about her presentation. Mr. Engelke began the discussion by noting the relationship between local school ratings and home value disparities across Howard County. Several task force members agreed with Mr. Engelke and noted that there is a notable relationship between schools and housing that they would like to explore further. Lauren Marra, facilitator, shared information on the Education subgroup and suggested a potential working group between the two subgroups to discuss this issue. Peter Engel, Task Force member, raised the point that school and housing integration is a powerful tool to address the housing disparities and school ratings issues mentioned by subgroup members.

Ms. Coates observed that there is a prevailing narrative about school value and ratings in Howard County, specifically that certain schools are perceived as good while others are perceived as bad. She expressed interest in addressing this narrative further. Suzanne Haley, Task Force member, agreed with Ms. Coates and identified that the Task Force has an opportunity to focus and work on changing the narrative. Isabella Battish, Task Force member, agreed with Ms. Coates' observation about school values and narratives in Howard County and added that access to school test prep plays a role in test score disparities.

Following the discussion on Ms. Coates' presentation, Ms. Battish, Mr. Engel, and Mr. Edelson presented information on zoning data, housing concentration, and population demographics in Howard County. Ms. Battish noted that roughly 77% of the County is zoned for only single-family detached housing. Ms. Battish also presented information on the concentration of different racial groups in Howard County, noting that Black residents of Howard County primarily reside in areas where multifamily housing is more available. Mr. Edelson added that there are short-term and long-term options available to address these disparities, including changing zoning regulations within the Planned Service Area (PSA). Mr. Engel shared that he sees an opportunity to impact the General Plan process in Howard County and change current land-use policies.

After the zoning presentation, Task Force members asked questions about the presentation and raised discussion points. Mr. Engelke expressed that there is an opportunity for different housing types outside of the PSA, including duplexes and fourplexes that would be roughly the same size as homes that are currently built in western Howard County. Ms. Haley agreed that developing creative solutions for housing outside the PSA is important, and she shared a personal experience about applying for a home loan. Ms. Battish agreed with Mr. Engelke and added that there is more suburban sprawl in western Howard County due to large house and lot sizes.

Ms. Marra recapped opportunities for recommendations, including the need for narrative and cultural change, opportunity for rezoning within the PSA, opportunity for multifamily housing outside the PSA, changing the supply of multifamily housing, and planning for long-term changes to the PSA. Mr. Engelke added that changing the kind and type of housing was an important consideration to add to the list. Ms. Marra asked if a smaller group of members was interested in putting these ideas on paper. Ms. Haley, Ms. Orders, Ms. Coates, and Mr. Engelke volunteered to prepare and bring back the draft recommendations for the next meeting.

Task Force members also discussed outstanding issues and questions, including a request for more information on the Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO). Several task force members also agreed that the subgroup needed to keep the focus on the zoning restrictions and housing policies that are preventing or stopping progress in the county.

After the group discussion, Ms. Marra reviewed upcoming plans and task force meetings, including the upcoming Public Hearing on March 4th at 6:00 PM. Ms. Marra also discussed the process for reviewing testimony, and task force members agreed to check back in on testimony at the next meeting after the public hearing. Ms. Marra also confirmed the date and time of the upcoming subgroup meeting:

- March 9, 2021: 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

Ms. Coates thanked members of the subgroup for participating and adjourned the meeting at 6:02 PM.