

Housing Workshop Notes

On November 16, 2019, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, on behalf of the City of Lynn, facilitated a summit where residents came to discuss different aspects of life in Lynn and share their ideas to address challenges and pursue new opportunities. Housing was one of several topic areas, and this event provided initial discussion with residents to ground a new planning process: Housing Lynn: A plan for inclusive growth, which will kick off in January 2020.

Approximately 35 attendees at the Lynn City Summit participated in the Housing Workshop in the morning. The workshop consisted of a presentation by representatives from the Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development (LHAND) and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), followed by a discussion of strengths and challenges, and ending with small group discussions of “big ideas,” which were then reported out to the entire group. The strengths and challenges were collected on sticky notes written by participants and grouped thematically by MAPC facilitators. Due to time constraints, some of the collected sticky notes were grouped thematically after the summit. A planned exercise to prioritize strengths and challenges will instead be conducted via an online and paper survey, which MAPC will post on the Housing Lynn website and the city will distribute at key municipal locations. Participants also submitted their big ideas on worksheets; MAPC staff collected these ideas and organized them by theme below.

The Lynn City Summit included a Spanish-language Workshop that discussed housing and other issues. The housing-related input from that session as well as the Housing Workshop is included in the following summary.

Presentation

LHAND Planning and Development Manager Jeff Weeden introduced participants to Housing Lynn: A plan for inclusive growth, which will kick off in January 2020. MAPC Chief of Housing and Neighborhood Development Karina Milchman described the plan in more detail, including its focus on **production of Affordable Housing and market-rate housing, preservation** of the existing housing stock (including Affordable Housing stock), and **protection** of the existing community against forces of displacement. Milchman noted the plan will qualify as a Housing Production Plan (HPP) under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40B. MAPC Regional Housing and Land Use Planner John McCartin then presented on Lynn’s demographics, housing stock, and housing affordability. For more information on Housing Lynn, visit mapc.org/housing-lynn, where you can also view the materials presented during this workshop.

The group had a short Q&A following the presentation:

- A participant asked if some segments of the population, such as lower-income residents and immigrants, may be under represented in the data. MAPC staff replied that US Census Bureau data used in this analysis typically does underrepresent those groups. Where possible, MAPC tries to use local data to gain a better understanding of these populations, and that knowing this data limitation will inform outreach and engagement as part of the planning process.
- A participant asked about the engagement process. MAPC staff responded that the public engagement plan is currently under development, but that it would include a working group of residents and stakeholders, public events, and targeted measures to ensure Lynn residents of all backgrounds have the opportunity to participate.

- A participant asked what would happen once the plan was complete. MAPC staff said a plan that qualifies as a Housing Production Plan must be approved by the City Council and Planning Board and then certified by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Staff said the City Council and Planning Board will engage in the process.

Strengths and Challenges

Participants were then asked to write down Lynn housing strengths and challenges on sticky notes. MAPC staff collected those notes and organized them according to broad themes. Collectively the group produced hundreds of individual strength and challenge notes, with many more challenge notes than strength notes. The lists below show broad themes identified by MAPC staff, with sub-themes. These themes were drawn from the discussion, as well as ideas that were written down but not discussed on the day of the summit. Many of these issues are deeply related with one another.

Strengths

People and Community

- Sense of community*
- Diverse community*
- Civic engagement, residents' commitment to community*
- History, arts, and culture*
- Community groups and organizations*

Housing Stock

- Diversity of housing stock, diversity of options and prices*
- Charm of housing stock*
- The Gateway North development*
- Housing Authority, deed-restricted Affordable Housing
- Mixed-income development
- Low-cost housing relative to the region (across housing types)*
- Strong neighborhood character*

Amenities and advantages

- Quality of life*
- Presence of North Shore Community College*
- Location and diversity of neighborhoods*
- New development coming to Lynn
- Access to transit*
- Strong economy

Challenges

Changing housing market

- Gentrification and displacement*
- Evictions and unfair housing courts/eviction authorities*
- Lack of tenant protections*
- Rent increases; rents are summarily raised, sometimes before leases end; contracts not respected*
- Speculation and flipping*
- Lack of housing availability, low vacancies
- Unmet emergency housing need and homelessness*
- Lack of Inclusionary Zoning*
- Not enough new market-rate housing development
- Not enough buildable land*
- New buildings are ugly/don't fit community character*
- Bad zoning*

Safety of housing stock

- Bad landlords, poor property maintenance, abandonment*
- Services cut off to force out tenants*
- Overcrowding and illegal apartments*
- Environmental contamination*
- Pests*

* Indicates that multiple participants stated this strength or challenge

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Issues with current Affordable Housing

- Need deeply Affordable Housing, some Affordable Housing too expensive for residents*
- Lack of landlords accepting vouchers*
- Nonprofit developers can't compete in current market
- Expiring deed restrictions on Affordable Housing
- Housing Authority officers act aggressively toward minority residents and there are not Spanish-speaking employees
- Need more clarity on public housing waiting lists*

Housing for specific populations

- Lack of family housing*
- Lack of housing for seniors wanting to age in place
- Lack of pet-friendly buildings

Issues related to homeownership

- Taxes and fees increasing*
- Tension between wanting affordability and the benefits of rising property values
- Functional obsolescence of older homes (difficult to sell)

Political context

- Racism and discrimination*
- Segregation, distribution of Affordable Housing keeps some neighborhoods unaffordable*
- City leaders don't seem to understand housing needs or have other priorities*
- Difficulty with civic engagement, particularly with marginalized or vulnerable populations*
- Lack of education among tenants and landlords on housing issues and misinformation related to housing issues and tenants' rights*
- General hostility to Affordable Housing*

Non-housing issues which impact/are impacted by housing

- Low-paying jobs, low incomes generally*
- Old infrastructure*
- School overcrowding*
- Violence and public safety*
- Transportation costs*
- Childcare costs*
- Resident access to natural resources: green space, waterfront, parks and playgrounds*

* Indicates this input was received from multiple participants

Big Ideas

Participants were then given worksheets to share their “big ideas” to address specific challenges and preserve specific strengths. In groups of four and five, participants discussed these ideas with one another, while LHAND and MAPC staff listened in on the conversations. In the last few minutes of the session, one participant from each small group reported on the discussion to all workshop participants. This list summarizes the ideas discussed in the workshop, as well as those shared via the collected worksheets of all participants. Participants proposed many of the same ideas, though they often targeted different strengths or challenges. This list, therefore, does not group ideas by the strength or challenge they were meant to address, but rather by buckets pertaining to the ideas themselves.

Housing Production

- Adopt inclusionary zoning (many participants proposed at least 20% of units in new developments be deed-restricted Affordable Housing. Some participants said developers could also pay into a fund).*
- Build more three-bedroom housing units.*
- Engage with/incentivize developers interested in building during the strong economy.
- Encourage mixed-income housing.*
- Encourage mixed-use development.
- Add market-rate housing on the waterfront/downtown.
- Encourage co-living opportunities.
- Use public land for Affordable Housing, related public benefits.*
- Facilitate community oversight of new development.*
- Work with nonprofit developers beyond LHAND (invite Harborlight Community Partners, North Shore CDC, etc.).
- Require union labor on new developments.
- Change parking rules in zoning to allow for more family housing.

Tax Policy

- Adopt a Real Estate Transfer Tax.*
- End tax breaks/incentives for market-rate developers.*
- Adopt an anti-flipping ordinance or tax. Employ a higher tax rate for out-of-town developers.

Community Priority

- Give priority to Lynn residents in new developments, set preference in RFPs.
- Require Community Benefits Agreements in RFPs.
- Facilitate Community Land Trusts for renters and homeowners.*
- Facilitate right of first refusal for tenants or organizations to purchase rental properties, help finance purchases.
- Enforce Fair Housing laws.*
- Work with other communities to pursue grants/funding for housing.
- Develop housing programs for middle-income residents.*
- Develop first-time homebuyer programs.*

Tenant Protections

- Advocate to lift the ban on rent control and establish rent stabilization.*
- Set safety standards for rental units, develop an enforcement plan for safety standards, and expand code enforcement staff capacity.*
- Increase renter protections.*
- Establish office or organization to coordinate renter protections, and educate renters on tenants' rights.*
- Establish right to counsel for renters, offer free legal aid
- Have walkthroughs of apartments with Landlords and City at once
- Meter water usage by unit

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* Indicates this input was received from multiple participants

Community Engagement

- Increased community engagement between elected/appointed officials and residents/community groups.*
 - o Some suggested a greater role for the Commonwealth and nonprofit leaders in bringing (City) officials and residents together.*
- Build connections with communities of color.*
- Educate residents on political process.
- Teach residents how to organize, mobilize, and push for policy change.
- Educate public on environmental contamination, pests.
- Offer translation for people who don't speak English.*
- Work more with children and teens through schools, youth programs.
- Put more value on history and diversity.
- Work with leaders in ethnic communities, religious institutions.*
- Work with local community-based organizations.*
- Work with small business leaders.
- Increase transparency from government officials and agencies.*
- Create greater role for grassroots organizations in communicating with and organizing the public.*
- Create a new role at LHAND to ensure public services reach public housing residents.

Non-housing Issues (that affect/are affected by housing)

- Clean up brownfields.
- Provide more access to transportation.
- Prioritize minority-owned local businesses in developments with ground-floor retail.
- Increase recreation opportunities: parks and playground, movie theaters.*
- Raise income level of Lynners through more accessible training opportunities.*
- Establish and fully staff a planning department.

* Indicates this input was received from multiple participants