Public Forum 1: Notes

On January 28, 2020, Housing Lynn held its first public forum, where approximately 110 people gathered at the Community Room in the offices of Lynn Housing Authority & Neighborhood Development (LHAND). The forum was held to introduce the general public to Housing Lynn, present key pieces of quantitative analysis on existing conditions related to housing, and to solicit insight from Lynners on their housing experiences and opinions about the future of housing in Lynn. The forum was conducted by staff from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) with assistance from City of Lynn staff, members of the Housing Lynn Steering Committee, and additional volunteers. Materials and activities were presented in English and Spanish (including simultaneous interpretation for all remarks).

The forum consisted of three parts: an open house, where existing conditions data was presented on posters; a presentation about Housing Lynn, its goals, and its timeline; and small group discussions on a vision for Lynn's future and housing challenges faced by residents. The forum provided detail-rich qualitative information about the experiences and desires of Lynners, not all of which was written down as part of the exercises. **All of the opinions heard by the Housing Lynn team are important and will help shape the direction of the plan, including those opinions that were not captured through written exercises and those not widely held by forum participants.** Nonetheless, these notes focus on the information written down during the activities or otherwise captured graphically.

Open House

The open house portion of the evening used posters (hung up at four stations around the room) to present information on the Housing Lynn process and on existing conditions data relevant to the discussion, including Lynn's demographics, its housing stock, and the affordability of Lynn's housing to its residents. These posters are available online on the Housing Lynn website. (While these posters did ask questions of the audience, only a handful of forum attendees responded to those questions. Given the small amount of information gathered, those responses will not be represented in these notes.)

Small Group Activities

Participants were seated at twelve tables of 5-10 people each, at which they had focused conversations about housing in Lynn. Ten groups conducted activities in English, with two conducting theirs in Spanish. Each small group was facilitated by a member of MAPC staff, a member of the Housing Lynn steering committee, or a volunteer.

This portion of the evening included two activities:

- **Visioning exercise.** Participants listed words that describe their ideal Lynn of the future, and then gave three ways housing could contribute to that vision.

- **Challenges exercise.** Participants co-developed a list of housing challenges facing the city, and then identified whether that challenge was experienced citywide or if it affected specific types of places in Lynn.

Visioning Exercise

Task One: Five words to describe an ideal future Lynn

Participants were first asked to imagine an ideal future version of Lynn and write down five words that describe that vision. Their visions were not restricted only to housing. Participants then discussed the words they wrote down, expanding their vision beyond the words themselves. Afterwards, MAPC staff reviewed the words written by participants, grouped like words into themes, and tallied the appearance of those themes.

Some notable themes related to the city's political economy, including affordability, good jobs and training opportunities, and a community that was "working class" (or "not just rich people"). "Affordable" was the most commonly identified theme written during the exercise. Other themes related to particular amenities or qualities they hoped the city would have, especially safety, good schools, and better transportation. Still other themes shared related to community, such as diversity and inclusion, openness, and cooperation. During discussion, some participants noted the relationships between themes, such as how affordability can enable diversity.

Table 1: Themes identified on six or more worksheets

Themes	Count
Affordable	25
Safe	23
Diverse / Inclusive / Integrated	22
Sustainable / Green / Resilient	13
Clean	12
Schools / Education	12
Friendly / Welcoming / Open	10
Jobs / Good Jobs / Training / Economic Opportunity	10
Transportation	10
Family-friendly	9
Vibrant / Dynamic / Lively / Fun	9
Community / Unity / Cooperation	8
Accessible	8
Working class / Not just rich people	6
Thriving / Flourishing / Prosperous	6

See Appendix A for a complete list of vision words.

Task Two: Housing's role in fulfilling your vision

Facilitators then asked their groups to imagine how housing could help achieve their vision for Lynn's future. Participants responded to this exercise in different ways:

- Some people explained housing's role as a fundamental part of community-building. For instance, one person wrote "Housing is one of the first steps in creating stability for folks/families. Without the stability of a most basic human need, none of the other goals can be achieved." Another simply stated "more housing = less crime."
- Some participants discussed housing in terms of rights, such as a "right to clean, safe, affordable housing."
- Some suggested specific types of housing that they wanted to see more of, such as "1-2-3-bedroom homes/apartments;" "affordable, socially conscious housing;" and "housing for currently displaced/homeless residents (transitional housing)."
- Some discussed housing challenges, including the doubling of rents, pest problems, and "shoddy/non-existent repairs."
- Some suggested specific housing policies and programs, for instance rent control, family financial stability programs, inclusionary zoning, tenants advocacy groups, the introduction of community development corporations, and incentives for local ownership.
- Some participants included advice about decision-making related to housing, for instance "diverse community input" and "make decisions based on need, not politics."

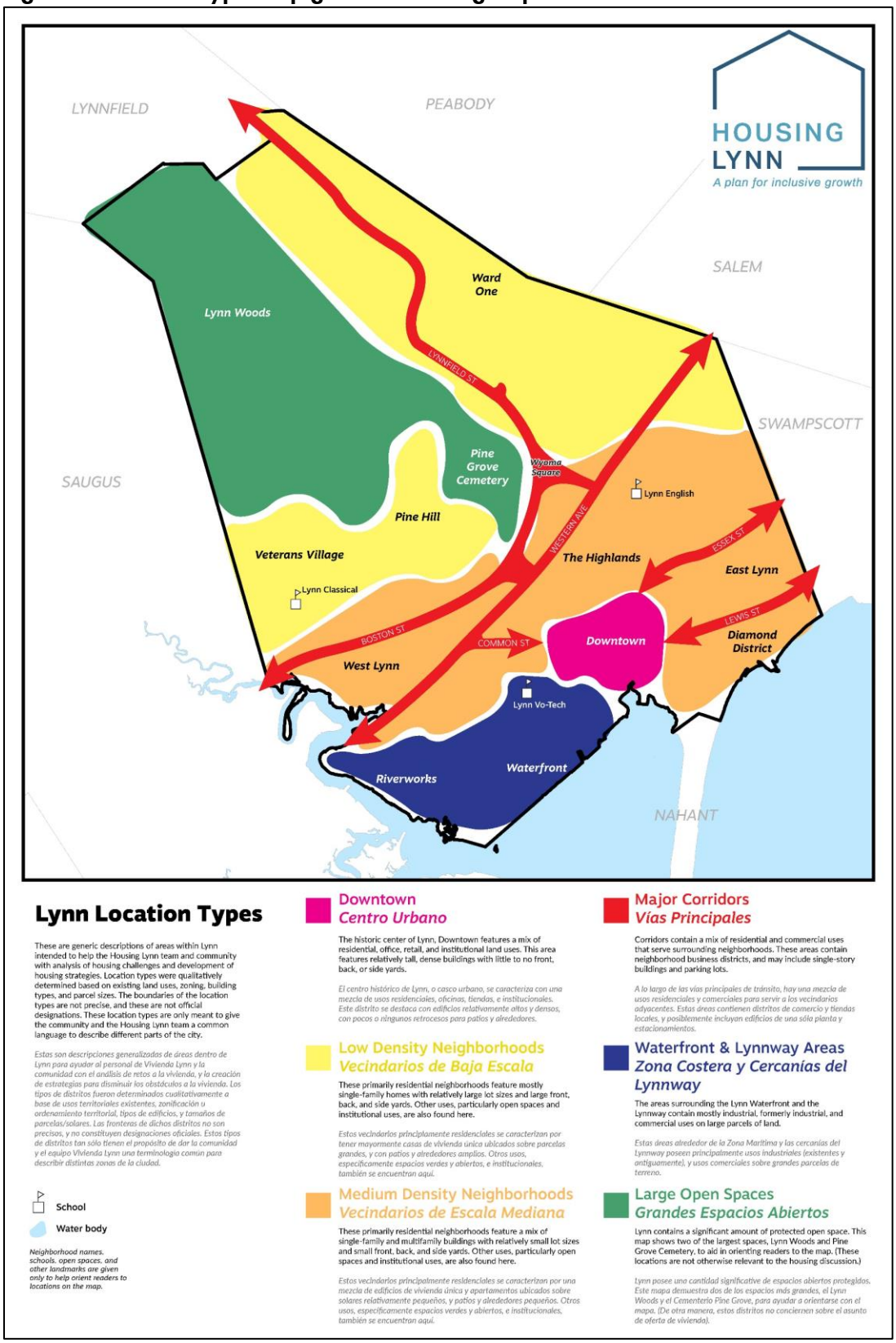
Overall, because of the different approaches taken in this section, it would be inappropriate to present analysis quantitatively. Insights from this activity will ultimately inform the plan's understanding of the vision, and the responses lay early groundwork for the plan to develop goals and strategies.

Housing Challenges Exercise

In the twelve small groups, participants next described housing challenges faced by Lynners. The facilitator asked questions to clarify the challenges described by participants, sought input from all members of the small groups, and recorded the challenges on a poster.

Participants then identified the location types in Lynn most effected by each challenge. Location types were given on a illustrative map of the city, which loosely divided Lynn into Downtown, Medium Density Neighborhoods, Low Density Neighborhoods, Major Corridors, and the Waterfront and Lynnway Areas. (Large open spaces were also mapped, but participants could not locate housing challenges in these areas.) Challenges could also be listed as "citywide," affecting all parts of the city more or less equally. A challenge could be identified as affecting more than one location type, and challenges could be both citywide and particularly prominent in certain location types. The map and further descriptions of each location type are represented below; the full version is located on the Housing Lynn website.

Figure 1: Location type map given at small group tables



The Housing Lynn team assessed the written materials produced in the Housing Challenges exercise, tallied the occurrences of repeated challenges, tallied the location types chosen by each group for each challenge, and organized those challenges into relatively broad categories. Through this assessment, we were able to understand the overall structure of housing challenges facing Lynners.

This exercise identified a wide range of housing challenges encountered in Lynn, highlighting unique aspects of the city, especially its socioeconomic diversity, changing demographics, historic building stock, and changing role within the regional housing market. The diversity of challenges is most evident in the mix of issues identified by multiple small groups (see Table 2).

Table 2: Challenges identified by four or more small groups

Challenge	Count
Affordability (rental and ownership)	10
Building conditions / Maintenance (overall)	8
Transportation access and traffic	7
Cleanliness / Trash	6
Availability of units / Inventory (generally)	6
Crime / Violence / Safety	6
Not enough family housing	5
Accessibility (physical) / Lack of accessible units	5
Awareness / Civic Involvement / Representation	5
Bad Landlords / Slumlords / Absentee Landlords	4
Pest infestation	4
Housing segregation	4
Open Space / Parks	4
Use of public resources and land without public benefit	4

Challenge categories
Overall, we found identified challenges fell into the following broad categories:

- **Affordability, displacement, and a changing market**
  Affordability was the most commonly cited challenge in the small group exercise, but it was seen as part of a category of interrelated challenges, like gentrification, tenant displacement, overcrowding, and an inability to continue living in Lynn. This category also includes certain landlord practices, such as raising rents monthly, harassment of tenants, and the destruction of home systems (like heating) aimed to remove low-paying tenants. High costs were largely seen as a citywide issue.

- **Safety of housing stock, code enforcement**
  The condition of the housing stock emerged as an issue equally as critical to the community as affordability and related challenges. This category includes lack of building maintenance, presence of trash, general uncleanliness, pest infestations, and shoddy repairs. This category also includes a view of landlords as "slumlords" and general disinvestment in the community. Some participants specifically identified weak code enforcement by the City of Lynn as a challenge. Immigrant communities Downtown, medium density neighborhoods, and major corridors were identified as most affected by these challenges.

- **Segregation and discrimination**
  Some participants cited segregation and discrimination as ongoing issues in Lynn. Segregation and discrimination were discussed along multiple dimensions—especially by race and ethnicity, by income, by immigration status, by family status, and by age. These were identified as citywide challenges, with Downtown and low density neighborhoods particularly affected by them.

- **Housing supply issues**
  Some small groups identified an overall lack of housing supply as a challenge in the housing market, contributing to the difficulty households have finding stable housing. Many groups also identified a lack of supply of certain housing options, most commonly lack of family-sized housing (three or more bedrooms) and housing accessible to people with disabilities. Limited transitional housing (such as temporary housing for the formerly homeless, the formerly incarcerated, or those fleeing domestic violence) was also noted as an issue. Supply challenges were largely seen as citywide issues, with some citing Downtown as having a particularly acute lack of supply.

- **Homelessness**
  Though homelessness is related to broader affordability challenges and a lack of transitional housing, some participants felt homelessness is a challenge apart from those other dynamics, representing a diverse set of conditions that require multiple simultaneous responses. Homelessness was cited as particularly affecting Downtown and the Waterfront and Lynnway Areas.

- **Issues with current housing programs and Affordable Housing stock**
  Some participants took issue with current housing programs and the administration of the Affordable Housing stock. These challenges included the expiration of deed restrictions on Affordable Housing units (allowing them to become market-rate units), lack of funding for maintenance of subsidized units, limits to program eligibility, length of the waiting lists, and more. These were seen as challenges affecting all of Lynn, with a slight emphasis on medium density neighborhoods.

- **Planning, politics, and advocacy**
  This is an expansive category for issues around urban planning, local politics, governance, and advocacy for housing. Identified challenges ranged from issues with the current zoning law to a lack of city planning; the expenditure of public resources without public benefits; a lack of tenant advocacy; a lack of communication between the government, residents,

and service providers; and an overall need for civic involvement and better representation of the Lynn community. For the Spanish-speaking participants, language barriers were noted as a particular challenge. These were largely viewed as citywide challenges.

- **Non-housing issues that impact/are impacted by housing**
  Participants noted many issues that are not explicitly about housing but that are related to housing in critical ways. Transportation issues (especially access to mass transportation and traffic) were the most commonly cited challenge in this category, closely followed by safety and crime. Open spaces and parks, as well as sustainability and resilience issues were discussed. Jobs and economic opportunity were cited, particularly as they relate to the ability to afford housing on low wages. The impact of housing on City revenue and the budget were also identified, tied in large part to the discussion of schools and service provision. Lastly, housing's impact on health—both physical and mental—was identified as an important issue. The spaital location of these issues varied considerably. Almost all were thought to be citywide by one or more group. Different groups felt crime and safety affected different areas. Transportation issues were thought to affect low and medium density neighborhoods considerably. Open space challenges were noted for Downtown and medium density neighborhoods.

Conclusion

In summary, this forum revealed a discrepancy between the vision of Lynn's future and the state of housing today. In line with data analysis already conducted by the Housing Lynn team, participants felt affordability and related challenges could threaten Lynn's diversity and inclusion, while housing could play a role in creating a more safe, sustainable, and vibrant community in the future. Challenges related to building maintenance and safety of the current housing stock also emerged as issues requiring greater investigation and attention. (There is little reliable data on building conditions and related issues, but additional public engagement and qualitative research can advance planning for these topics.)

The ideas emerging in this forum echo input received at the Lynn City Summit's housing workshop and prior Housing Lynn engagement. Altogether, this engagement will help to define goals for the plan, inform the development of strategies to address housing challenges, and set the course for further public engagement in this planning process.

Appendix A: Vision Exercise—Words that describe your ideal future for Lynn

The following table shows words given by participants to describe their ideal future for Lynn during the small groups' visioning exercise. (Only words written on the exercise worksheets are included.) MAPC staff grouped similar challenges together. A count of the number of worksheets listing that word is given in the right-hand column.

Table 3: All visioning words compiled on worksheets

Words	Count
Affordable	25
Safe	23
Diverse / Inclusive / Integrated	22
Sustainable / Green / Resilient	13
Clean	12
Schools / Education	12
Friendly / Welcoming / Open	10
Jobs / Good Jobs / Training / Economic Opportunity	10
Transportation	10
Family-friendly	9
Vibrant / Dynamic / Lively / Fun	9
Community / Unity / Cooperation	8
Accessible	8
Working class / Not just rich people	6
Thriving / Flourishing / Prosperous	6
Growth / Investment / Enriched	4
Public facilities / hospitals / infrastructure	4
Walkable	4
Increased housing stock / Options	4
Healthy (emotionally / mentally)	3
Advanced / Modern	3
Housing security / Tenants rights / Rent control	3
Strong	2
Equitable	2
Drug free	2
Connected	2
Forward-planning / Forward-thinking	2
Historical	2
Creative / Artistic	2
Senior-friendly / Elder-friendly	2
Multigenerational	2

Table 3: All visioning words compiled on worksheets	
Words	**Count**
Restaurants / Food	2
Less homelessness / No homelessness	2
New/updated city hall	2
Transparent government	2
Shopping local	2
Coastal development	2
Open waterfront / Open spaces	2
Justice / Fairness	2
Rent Control / Anti-displacement	2
Consistency	1
Considered Change	1
Beautiful	1
Fewer condos	1
Parenting programs	1
Empowered	1
Multicultural	1
Intuiting	1
Gang-free	1
Destination	1
Homey	1
Updated	1
Convenient	1
Much greater than now	1
Unique	1
New housing programs	1
Respectful	1
Holistic	1
Well administered	1
Well resourced	1
Spacious	1
Financially stable	1
Happy (quality of life)	1

Appendix B: Housing Challenges and Location Type Counts

The following table shows themes identified in the lists developed during the small groups' Housing Challenges Exercise. MAPC staff grouped similar challenges together. The left-most column lists the theme. The column "Count" gives the total number of groups that identified that challenge. The remaining columns give the location types that the small groups could identify as being particularly affected by the challenge. Note that groups could identify more than one affected location type; often this results in a "Count" column that is less than the sum of affected location types. Themes are broken out into broad categories, which are listed in the left-hand column in the black rows.

Importantly, the challenges written by facilitators, the themes as inferred by MAPC staff, and the broad categorizations by MAPC staff are all acts of qualitative interpretation. The counts given below are not reliable indicators of priority, and are only given to demonstrate a rough understanding of the range of responses.

Table 5: Compiled housing challenges and affected location types

Challenge theme/category		Location Types					
Safety of housing stock, code enforcement	**Count**	**Citywide**	**Downtown**	**Low Density Neighborhood**	**Medium Density Neighborhood**	**Major Corridors**	**Waterfront & Lynnway**
Building Conditions / Underinvestment / Standards	8	2	6		4	3	2
Age of housing stock (lead paint, property values)	2		2		2	1	1
Adequate & Consistent Regulation	1	1	1				
Bad Landlords / Slumlords / Absentee	4	3	3	1	1	2	1
Pest infestation	4		3		4	2	1
Cleanliness / Trash	6		4		5	3	2
Affordability, displacement, and a changing market	**Count**	**Citywide**	**Downtown**	**Low Density Neighborhood**	**Medium Density Neighborhood**	**Major Corridors**	**Waterfront & Lynnway**
Overcrowding	1		2				
Affordability (rental and ownership)	10	9		2	3		
Evictions	1		1		1		
Displacement	1	1	1				
Tenant protections	1	1	1				
Violation of tenants' rights	1	1	1		1	1	
Rents rising too fast	2	2					

Segregation and discrimination	Count	Citywide	Downtown	Low Density Neighborhood	Medium Density Neighborhood	Major Corridors	Waterfront & Lynnway
Housing Segregation / Discrimination	4	3	1	2			
Economic Diversity	1	1					

Housing supply issues	Count	Citywide	Downtown	Low Density Neighborhood	Medium Density Neighborhood	Major Corridors	Waterfront & Lynnway
Availability of units / inventory (generally)	6	5	2		1	1	
Lack of affordable supply	2	1	1	1			
Not enough transitional housing	2		1	1			1
Not enough family housing	5	5	1	1		1	1
Accessibility (physical) / Lack of accessible units	5	4	1		1	1	
Workforce Housing	1	1					
Senior Housing	1	1					
Housing for singles/couples	2	2					
Multi-unit, multi-bedroom, multi-generational, income generating	2	1	1		1	1	
New housing is all luxury	3	1	2	1			2
Condo conversion	1		1				

Issues with current Affordable Housing and programs	Count	Citywide	Downtown	Low Density Neighborhood	Medium Density Neighborhood	Major Corridors	Waterfront & Lynnway
Losing affordable units & houses	1	1	1		1		
Not enough funding for upkeep of subsidized units	1	1					
Lack of community ownership & control over housing	1	1					
Lack of resources & programs	1	1					
Program eligibility	1	1					
Programs for immigrants & newcomers	1	1	1		1		1
Programs to stabilize rents	1	1					
Boston vouchers	1		1		1		
Lynn resident priority for new Affordable Housing	1	1					
Assistance for rehabs	1		1		1		1
Affordable Housing waiting lists	2	1			1		

Homelessness	Count	Citywide	Downtown	Low Density Neighborhood	Medium Density Neighborhood	Major Corridors	Waterfront & Lynnway
Homelessness	1		1				1

Non-housing issues that impact/are impacted by housing	Count	Citywide	Downtown	Low Density Neighborhood	Medium Density Neighborhood	Major Corridors	Waterfront & Lynnway
Housing and social determinants of health	1	1	1		1		
Mental wellness	1	1					
Crime / Violence / Safety / Forced into unsafe areas	6	2	4		3	2	2
Transportation access / Traffic	7	5	1	3	4	2	1
Parking	3		3	1		1	1
Infrastructure (schools, parking, trash, police, fire, hospitals, supermarket)	1	1					
Flooding	1	1	1			1	1
Revenue / Tax base / Budget	3	3					
Economic Opportunity / Jobs / Income	3	3					
Open Space / Parks	4	3	2		3		1
Perception	1	1					
Family-friendly	1		1		1		1
School crowding	3	2		1			
Lack of smart growth planning	1	1					
Lynn resident priority for new construction jobs	1	1					

Planning, Politics, and Advocacy	Count	Citywide	Downtown	Low Density Neighborhood	Medium Density Neighborhood	Major Corridors	Waterfront & Lynnway
Zoning / Permitting	2	2	1				
Density	1			1			
Planning / No planning	2	2					
Plan for walking people	1	1					
Mix of housing stock	1	1					
Cost of development (because of aging infrastructure)	1	1					
No land to build on / fewer development opportunities	2	2					
No non-profits / CDCs	1	1					
Public resources / land w/o public benefit	3		3	1	1		2
NIMBY	1			1			
“Landlocked / poor”	1	1					
"Too much" (Decision makers)	1	1					
Sold off library & fire station instead of using for affordable housing	1					1	
Electeds don't address certain areas	1	1					
Aging population w/o adequate housing support	1	1					
Homeowner/homebuyer access to/knowledge of workshops and assistance	2	2					
Lack of advocacy (self/other) supports for low-income tenants / Housing 101	2	1	1		1	1	
Awareness, Involvement, Representation	5	4	1		1	1	
Communication / Accessibility of housing issues	2	1					
Transparency / Communications with government & service providers	2	1					
Fear of speaking up	1	1					
Language Barriers	3	3					