

REGIONAL HOUSING COUNCIL

Wednesday December 8th, 2021 Meeting Minutes

ATTENDEES:

Lacey: Carolyn Cox, Kelly Adams, Scott Spence

Tumwater: Michael Althaus, Joan Cathey, Brad Medrud, John Doan

Olympia: Jim Cooper, Dani Madrone, Keith Stahley, Darian Lightfoot

Thurston County: Carolina Mejia, Ramiro Chavez, Keylee Marineau, Tom Webster, Jacinda Steltjes, Schelli Slaughter

South County: Holly Smith

Public: Ted Kelleher

Meeting began at 4:00 pm.

Agenda Item 1: Agenda approved

Agenda Item 2: Public Comment, none

Agenda Item 3: Minutes from October: Agenda Item missed, not approved

Agenda Item 4: Presentation from Ted Kelleher

Topic: what to expect in coming months regarding increasing rent and potential evictions. Ted is from Department of Commerce and heads the department managing rental assistance. First comment is that after reviewing data he does not have a clear answer or prediction. Bureau of Labor statistics data: rent increases were at 5% pre-pandemic, continued to increase during pandemic but to lesser amount (2 – 4%). Another source indicated rent decrease over same timeframe, although this data was a smaller sample size. Overall not a substantial increase in rent. House prices have increased substantially more than rent. Vacancy rate is staying around 4%. Strong correlation is standard between rent level and homelessness. Administrative data last year showed a 2% increase in homelessness in Washington state.

Questions: Councilmember Smith asked if the employment rate includes people looking for jobs. Measuring people looking for jobs, do not know how many people left job market completely. Keylee commented that Nick Yuva from Commerce (works with Landlord Mitigation program) is hearing about 25 – 75% rent increases. Are the anecdotal rent increases captured in this data? Yes, however noted that the data is through October, the last month of the moratorium. Discussion followed regarding rent burden and the need for census data to determine that. Commissioner Mejia commented on the rent assistance that is put out, combined with unemployment rate, will this data change once the resources run out. Commerce is putting out \$1.5B in rent assistance, unknown how or if that will continue, also a Federal discussion of expanding the housing vouchers. Discussion followed regarding the needs of people with fixed income, racial inequity in the rental market, inflation issues, and the changes that happen when communities become a higher income area but lower income workers become priced out.

Agenda Item 5: Lacey Homeless Strategies Workgroup

Scott Spence and Kelly Adams gave an overview. The Community Workgroup on Homelessness is a 23 member workgroup developing recommendations and strategies to the City Council. They will have a 2 week open house starting on Friday, after which they will finalize their recommendations to Council. Have had an open and transparent process to develop the goals and the plan. Open house will allow the public to provide their thoughts on the plan.

Agenda Item 6: Letter to Port of Olympia in Support of Oyo hotel

Tom gave an overview, regarding a potential acquisition of the Oyo Hotel by the Housing Authority. Information came out that the Port was not moving forward with requesting a waiver from the FAA. However after other jurisdiction input and offers of assistance the Port is moving forward with the waiver request. The question to the RHC is if the RHC wants to submit a letter of support to the Port regarding this waiver and potential acquisition. The concern is that there is an underlying Deed Restriction that states that the property cannot be used for residential purposes and that some kind of financial benefit comes to the FAA, both of which are substantial hurdles. How much is the lease revenue? About \$45K a year, extended over the life of the lease becomes substantial amounts of money. However when taken by the year, it is less than \$1K a unit per year. County Manager Chavez commends the letter and encourages the RHC to submit, recommends making the end of the letter more direct, Chair Cooper agrees. Council member Cox recommends adding statistics regarding the need for Senior Housing.

Direction for Chairs to work with County Manager Chavez and Staff to make revisions to the letter and submit to the Port.

Agenda Item 7: HCRP Report Update

County was asked by Commerce to prepare a report on the progress regarding the Homeless Crisis Response Plan. County is mid-way through the 2019 – 2022 Plan. Items to address include 1) the current status of homelessness in the County, 2) performance meeting goals, and 3) plan changes. Keylee gave an overview of the specific objectives and measures of success of the Plan. At the start of the Plan implementation, the pandemic hit, which resulted in the need to modify many tasks such as outreach and sheltering. New funding (ESG, EHG, ERAP, TRAP) related to Covid resulted in increased funding to outreach, shelter, rent assistance. Interfaith works has started a respite bed program with help of FEMA funding. Commerce also prioritized racial equity in the HCRS, \$150,000 set aside in the Housing budget to hire a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion consultant to address and reduce racial disparities in the system. Have also met the 300 PSH unit objective, and will be adding more PSH units through the PSH plan being developed by the RHC.

Agenda Item 8: Technical Team Updates

Tom gave an update on Regional MOUs, discussion of use of ARPA funds, committing to regional projects. Proposed key elements of an MOU: reiterate commitment to work regionally, state the amounts jurisdictions are able to commit, listing potential projects (land acquisition, hotel acquisition and conversion, other projects), stating that each jurisdiction would retain financial control of ARPA, with ILA developed for each specific project, funds for support of a new position at the County for program management. Looking for RHC guidance on if developing an MOU with these elements is a useful task. County BoCC has set aside the ARPA funds for regional housing projects. Discussion followed

regarding intent, transparency, regional commitment for housing projects, long term operation and maintenance of these projects. Need to add language regarding long term commitment to operate the projects. Decision to let the Managers determine the best document to develop and finalize for this topic.

The 2022 Request for Proposal (RFP) funding cycle will begin soon, it will be a smaller amount of funding because last year the RHC awarded 2 year contracts. The RFP this year will be primarily for cold and hazardous weather, and capital projects. The 1277 funds will not be available for an RFP until late spring, so County will have a second RFP later in 2022. The County has also submitted an application for hotel leasing/Rapid Rehousing funds which should become available in January.

Commissioner Mejia added that the Commissioners reviewed a draft Home Fund ordinance. BoCC consensus on the Home Fund coming to the RHC for oversight. BoCC will review an updated ordinance after legal review in January. Manager Chavez added he is working with County legal on the ordinance to develop a final draft for BoCC to consider in January.

Agenda Item 8: HAT and RHC Retreat Update

Chair Cooper has met with Keylee and Megan regarding a retreat. Need to discuss facilitator, funding, location, timing, and public information session. Discussion follows regarding procurement of facilitator, which jurisdiction can take the lead on this, cost sharing among jurisdictions.

Agenda Item 9: Good of the Order

Keith gave an update on the Deschutes camp clearing. All people living there have left the property. Thanked the County and OlyMAP for their work on this. Roughly 50 people were moved to hotels. Refuse cleanup at the site is ongoing. Clearing the north end of Ensign Road will be happening as well. Interfaith Works and LIHI will be hosting the Unity Commons grand opening on December 21st.

Public Health Director Schelli Slaughter will be leaving the County in early January, RHC members gave individual thank you messages.

Meeting Adjourned: 5:40 pm

Next Meeting: January 26th, 4:00 pm