

REGIONAL HOUSING COUNCIL

Wednesday June 28th, 2023, Meeting Minutes

PANELISTS:

Lacey: Carolyn Cox, Rick Walk, Ryan Andrews, Jennifer Adams

Tumwater: Michael Althaus, Lisa Parks, Brad Medrud, Erika Smith-Erikson

Olympia: Dani Madrone, Clark Gilman, Darian Lightfoot, Jacinda Steltjes

Yelm: Brian Hess, Gary Cooper

Thurston County: Carolina Mejia, Ramiro Chavez, Taylor Rome, Tom Webster, David Bayne, Elisa Sparkman, Leah Tangeman

Advisory Boards: Grace Lee

Meeting began at 4:00pm

Agenda Item 1: Agenda approved, motion and second

Agenda Item 2: Minutes from June 14th meeting, motion and second, approved.

Agenda Item 3: Public Comment – No Public Comment

Agenda Item 4: Providing Comments to Commerce: Homeownership Strategy and Southport Financial

Jacinda provided update on the comments to Commerce. Within the agenda packet there is a draft letter to be sent to Department of Commerce. Historically, Department of Commerce issues Housing Trust Fund dollars for homeownership projects and then sends a separate Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for multi-family rental housing. This letter is specific to the homeownership NOFA, 2023-2025 investment strategy of approximately 38.8 million dollars. Commerce invited jurisdictions to submit public comment through June 30th, 2023. There are two main issues that are highlighted in the letter.

The first is concern is that 30% of the 38.8 million is to be dedicated to projects that are considered rural projects. This is a shift in policy than what we've seen in recent years in which Commerce has had more geographic pools and means that Thurston County is competing with other projects in more urban areas with more resources. The second concern that the letter addresses is the proposal of 50% of the funding being directed to projects that are developed by 'By and For' organizations. While there isn't a disagreement with funding set aside for By and For organizations, there aren't many By and For organizations in Thurston County that are ready to step into a development capacity role. The preference is to have a transition period where that funding is directed to help build up By and For organizations and grow their capacity just before launching such a large percentage of the funding.

Carolyn asked for a definition of By and For organizations for the listener. By and For Organizations are operated by and for the community they serve. Their primary mission and history is serving a specific community and they are culturally based, directed, and substantially controlled by individuals from the population they serve. At the core of their programs, the organizations embody the community's central cultural values. These communities may include ethnic and racial minorities; immigrants and refugees; individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, individuals with disabilities or who are deaf; and Native Americans.

Next, Jacinda presented information about the letter to the Finance Commission. Earlier this year, the Regional Housing Counsel (RHC) voted to award Southport Financial 1.325 million dollars and City of Olympia matched that as public leverage for the Lansdale Pointe Project, which would deliver 162 affordable units. This project applied to the Washington State Housing Finance Commission 4% Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Bond Program which was more competitive than was originally thought. That finance opportunity was overprescribed with approximately \$274 million in requests and the Finance Commission awarded about \$252 million. Southport was not awarded. Southport Financial reached out and requested that the RHC draft a letter. The RHC Technical Team supported this measure because in July, there may be 4% bond funding that is not used elsewhere in the state budget and could be directed to “below the line projects,” one of those being Southport. The Finance Commission had a soft target of about 40% of funds to direct towards Balance of State Projects so this would meet those criteria. The purpose of this letter is to communicate that the RHC urges the Washington State Housing Finance Commission to reconsider this project and its ability to meet the targets that the commission has set.

Dani made a motion to approve these letters, Carolina seconded, unanimously approved.

Agenda Item 5: RHC Annual Work Plan

Tom presented a draft of the RHC Annual Work Plan. This work plan is intended to be an 18-month work plan for the remainder of 2023 and 2024 and was created by the RHC Technical Team. Tom stressed that this is a working document and encouraged discussion and input from staff. The Work Plan is broken down into three broad areas: individual projects, ongoing activities/maintenance, and the “parking lots” – things that don’t take center stage right now but need to be remembered. Tom walked through the individual projects, RHC maintenance, and ongoing activities at a high level. Within the plan, there is a rough estimate of staff time and leading jurisdictions.

Carolina asked if it would be helpful to hire an external agency to help with legislative tracking and legislative agenda development. Tom said they can look at all possibilities of how this can be structured. Ramiro stated that there is an opportunity to highlight the Regional Housing Counsel and to develop a legislative agenda for the RHC and build a presence. Carolyn brought up a previously mentioned conversation around making the RHC an independent organization and Ramiro stated that there are some mechanical elements to be worked through but is something to continue to explore. Dani offered the idea of putting this topic on an upcoming agenda to decide if they want to hire a third party for assistance or discuss alternatives. Another idea Dani presented is balancing the workload by categorizing items in order of how critical they are to accomplish. Michael mentioned that the Housing Action Plan review, the Fair Housing Plan review, and the RHC structure review seem like the foundation for all next steps. The RHC Annual Work Plan can be found in July’s Agenda Meeting Packet for reference.

Agenda Item 6: Communications Update

Elisa reported that she has been working on announcements from the RHC which includes news releases and informational material and has also established a new review and development process with the Tech Team and review and approval process of the Chair and Vice Chair. Courtesy emails will be sent out to RHC members the day before or the day of an announcement to notify staff when possible. The 2023 Funding Announcement went out last week and the Maple Court News Release went out today, which included an informational document about the Right of Way Initiative. Elisa continues to update the

Office of Housing and Homeless Prevention website with RHC materials and is working to develop a Communications Plan.

Agenda Item 7: Good of the Order

Olympia: Dani shared that they adjusted then minimum parking plan for residential housing. This was a controversial issue for the area, and they landed on not requiring minimum parking for residential units within a half mile of frequent transit. There is an exemption for downtown existing dwellings and the rest of the City requiring just .5 parking spaces per unit.

Darian reported that the Purchase and Sale Agreement for Franz Anderson was signed by the city council and the Low-Income Housing Institute (LIHI). The Purchase and Sale Agreement for the old mitigation site (Franklin and Olympia) was also signed with a developer TWG to develop about 80 units of low-income housing in the downtown.

Tumwater: No Update

Thurston County: No Update

Yelm: No Update

Lacey: No Update

Meeting Adjourned: 5:34pm

Next Meeting: August 23rd, 4pm – hybrid