

Affordability Focus Group Summary

October 14, 2024

General Themes

Housing Affordability & Accessibility

- **Cooperative Housing:** Seen as a vital option for young adults, especially under 24, enabling them to live in central, walkable areas like Ann Arbor. Suggested zoning changes include removing caps on unrelated occupants and allowing interior conversions of single-family homes.
- **Homeownership Challenges:** Entry-level homeownership is out of reach for many, including new faculty, due to high prices and student debt. There's a mismatch between what's being built (large homes) and what's needed (smaller, attainable homes).
- **Neighborhood Equity:** Some neighborhoods feel neglected in planning and development. Participants want to see intentional development and equitable distribution of resources and attention.

Missing Middle Housing

Strong support for housing types like duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes to fill the gap between single-family homes and large apartment buildings. ADUs are seen as insufficient and sometimes culturally problematic.

Zoning & Development Standards

Concerns about preserving single-family zoning while allowing for moderate density (e.g., 4-unit buildings). Some support for stacked flats as a good urban form.

Financing and classification of multi-family housing (e.g., student-oriented developments) could be better regulated to assess impact fees and ensure community benefit.

Vision & Goals

Diversify Housing Options

- **Inclusive Design:** Emphasis on universal design for both aging in place and accessibility for people with disabilities.

- **Regional Constraints:** Ann Arbor's fixed boundaries limit expansion, making internal density the primary tool for growth.
- **City-Owned Land:** Suggestions to prioritize affordable housing on public land and avoid selling to private developers. Interest in codifying this approach.
- **Cost Challenges:** High construction costs make affordability difficult without subsidies or incentives.

Prevent Displacement & Support Vulnerable Residents

- **Housing Support:** Support should extend to residents at risk of being priced out, even if not displaced.
- **Tenant Protections:** Proposals include tenant opportunity to purchase, financial education, and state-level advocacy.
- **Wealth-Building Limitations:** Tension between maintaining affordability and enabling wealth-building through homeownership.
- **Property Tax Burden:** Downsizing is financially difficult due to large tax increases for new buyers.

Leverage Public & Institutional Land

- **School District Coordination:** Include schools in land use planning to support family housing and enrollment goals.
- **Parking vs. Housing:** Redeveloping parking lots is controversial due to downtown access and business concerns.
- **Transit & Connectivity:** Calls for improved public transit and inter-neighborhood connections.
- **Institutional Partnerships:** Interest in working with hospitals and churches to repurpose land for housing.

Open Questions & Ideas

- **Tiny Homes:** Interest in legalizing and supporting tiny home development as an affordable ownership option.
- **Comprehensive Plan Integration:** Desire to align the city's comprehensive plan with state-level affordable housing incentives (e.g., LIHTC).
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Request for sensitivity around historically Black neighborhoods due to concerns about erasure and renaming.