

TO: Housing Methodology Committee

DATE: March 12, 2020

FR: Deputy Executive Director, Policy

RE: Report on Engagement with Community-Based Organizations

Overview

To provide additional input for the Housing Methodology Committee (HMC) to consider in the RHNA methodology, ABAG staff conducted a series of seven focus groups with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) throughout the region between January 14 and February 1, 2020. Focus group participants were asked questions about regional housing issues in an interactive setting and encouraged to discuss thoughts freely with other participants. The CBOs included Acterra, Center for Independent Living, Green Hive, Sacred Heart, Sound of Hope Radio Network, and West Oakland Indicators Project. There were 61 participants total in the focus groups.

The focus groups heard a background RHNA presentation from ABAG staff and then participated in a discussion about where housing could go in the Bay Area. Staff encouraged participants to share their perspectives on the housing challenges they face as a foundation for thinking about where housing growth should be prioritized. To help community members better understand the concept of the RHNA methodology, staff shared maps of the Bay Area showing some of the ideas for potential methodology factors that had been discussed by the HMC, including job centers, areas served by transit, and the State's Opportunity Areas. Sessions were conducted in Spanish and in Chinese where needed and presentation materials were translated. A summary of themes from all groups follows.

Overall Themes

- Overall, people commented that more housing was needed everywhere for everyone.
- Participants mentioned many issues that we are aware of: homelessness, overcrowding, displacement, long commutes, cost burden, and lack of construction workers.
- Addressing homelessness and avoiding displacement were common concerns.
- There is also a need for more funding/financing for affordable housing and to re-invest in communities that are under-resourced and to support new housing with resources/services, e.g., schools, police, fire and other social services.
- Many participants emphasized linking housing to jobs and the importance of communities who have not provided housing, especially affordable housing, to do more.
- For this reason, there was support for more housing in high resource areas that provide good opportunities, particularly access to high-performing schools. However, people were concerned about putting housing in those areas due to racism and classism

concerns. Some commenters felt that more new housing in neighborhoods with mixed racial groups and incomes and education levels would be better.

- The other major comments focused on putting housing at the intersection of job centers, transit and high resource areas.
- There was support for having more housing near transit, but many people were concerned about public transit availability, reliability, safety and cost to riders.
- Several groups commented on the need to be involved in local housing element updates.
- Several groups emphasized the importance of ensuring RHNA enforcement through incentives or penalties to ensure the needed housing gets built.

Community Based Organizations

The following is a brief summary of each focus group meeting.

Acterra (Palo Alto) – provider of environmental education in the region, with a focus on Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

Many of the comments from participants at Acterra focused on getting employers to do their part to provide more housing and on encouraging wealthier South Bay communities to do more to zone for housing for all economic levels. Additionally, participants discussed the negative tax implications for housing as compared with retail and long permitting processes for communities.

Community Resources for Independent Living (Hayward) – peer-based disability resource agency that provides advocacy and resources for people with disabilities to improve lives and make communities fully accessible.

Staff met with two groups, Spanish speakers and people with disabilities. The Spanish language group commented about racism in a variety of housing policies and highlighted the need to address homelessness. They expressed concerns about focusing housing near transit because of safety issues and a lack of convenience. They also didn't want to put people of color, particularly people with lower incomes, in high resource areas because they would be subject to racism/classism and would not have access to their social networks and community connections. The focus group of people with disabilities thought housing near transit was very important, but was also concerned about transit safety. They strongly supported having affordable housing in every community. Affordable housing in high resource areas would allow people to see and experience more possibilities, but there were also concerns about becoming isolated when living in communities that do not have the social services that people need.

Green Hive (Vallejo) – co-working space.

Participants were concerned about lack of resources, including housing at all levels and jobs in Vallejo and Solano County. Several people commented that more investments are needed in communities that suffer from disinvestment. In particular, they were concerned about directing additional growth to places like Vallejo that struggle to provide sufficient public resources and

where the market does not support the multi-family developments needed to provide affordable housing. There was a concern about displacement and long commutes for Bay Area residents. Comments included wanting job-rich areas to also provide housing for all income levels, and a greater emphasis on having more “teeth” for RHNA. Overall, participants thought that, in a perfect world, we would place housing at the intersection of high resources, jobs and transit.

Sacred Heart Community Service (San Jose) - the Community Action Agency for Santa Clara County, providing essential services and self-sufficiency programs for individuals and families in need.

Several Sacred Heart participants were experiencing homelessness, and the conversation focused on providing more housing for the homeless and some of the challenges with accessing the resources currently available to the homeless, such as transit passes. Participants emphasized concerns about avoiding displacement and addressing its impacts. They also highlighted the importance of the RHNA process truly having an impact on creating new housing, particularly in wealthier communities. Additional concerns included lack of public transit and influence of large corporations on what gets built.

Sound of Hope Radio Network (San Francisco) - a non-profit radio network providing news, music and information to expatriate Chinese in the Bay Area

Participants were focused on providing more housing overall, particularly affordable housing, in order to address displacement. There was support for more low-income housing located near transit and more housing near jobs in general, with affordable housing near minimum-wage jobs. Comments included wanting housing in high-resource areas to enable access to educational opportunities and also to provide additional housing choices outside of San Francisco. There was a general desire to see more investment and resources for people with minimum-wage jobs to have opportunities and support to improve their circumstances.

West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (Oakland) - a resident-led, community-based environmental justice organization

This group proposed a number of possible methodology factors including past performance in permitting low- and very low-income housing, vacancy rates, health indicators, levels of homelessness, areas prone to natural disasters, linking housing types to job types and looking at warehouse areas for development. Participants were concerned about a range of issues, including access to transit, homelessness, and assuring that areas that have not traditionally done so provide a range of housing choices — everything from studios on up. There was also an emphasis on improving connections between school districts and RHNA/local housing planning. Participants also highlighted the importance of considering the relationship of housing to transportation, including thinking about the impact of parking policies, and increasing transit services in places that avoided adding transit as a way to self-segregate.