

Item 24-0381: Update on Mayor's Taskforce on Housing Development Policy - Final Housing Development Policy Guide

Community & Economic Development Committee

Wed, Apr 10, 2024 6:30PM

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 01:13

We have no public hearings or appearances, and we have no action items. So, we will move on to our first information item, which is 23—24-0381 the update on the mayor's Task Force on housing development policy, and the final housing development policy guide. Director Homan.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 01:40

Alright, so we did a similar update to the City Planning Commission earlier today. So, I'm going to try to run through it in a similar manner. I'll try to customize it a little bit to what is most relevant to this particular committee. But if there are any questions anytime during my overview or after, I'm happy to answer them, and I know Dave was heavily involved in the process as well.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 02:03

So, what we included in your packet was the final housing policy guide which is the culmination of the mayor's task—the work that the mayor's Task Force on housing did. What we've been doing over the last six months is going through a process that really spent about the first three to four months doing pretty significant stakeholder engagement.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 02:27

So, we had two buckets of stakeholders. One was external stakeholders, so those that aren't part of city proper. So that included realtors, developers, home builders, housing nonprofits, community-based nonprofits, community leaders. And the other bucket of stakeholders was internal stakeholders, primarily city staff that are involved in various aspects of the development approval process, from concept to when the building is actually turned over and certificate of occupancy is issued. So that involve the planning team, the inspections team, the engineering team, legal department, and I believe a few others.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 03:11

The engagement on both internal and external stakeholders included surveys, which we got really great response rates on, as well as group interviews, one on one interviews, and a few focus groups with the development community. From that stakeholder engagement, our consultant was able to glean some themes that they started hearing around how they could organize a series of recommendations based on their findings.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 03:40

So, without getting into the details, I'm going to give you a bit of an overview based on the executive summary that you'll see in the actual guide, I believe on PDF page three. But the recommendations are organized into five themes. One is around the vision. They're recommending that we create a community vision that acknowledges that we very much need housing-centric policy for the city. For those of you that have taken a look at our city's comprehensive plan, we do have an existing community-wide vision for development, but it is silent on our philosophy on housing. So, we know as we move towards updating that plan that's something we'll need to take a look at.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 04:23

The second theme was around process, and the recommendations within that are really about creating a positive development approval process. That means making sure from concept, to the entitlement process (which is when a rezoning is approved or when a subdivision is approved), all the way through issuing the permit and doing inspections it's a good experience—that we're very honest about what's expected of the developer. We help them through the process efficiently. We—but at the same time we ensure they're meeting all the city's standards. And making sure that it is ideally a win/win for the city and a win for the developer. We believe that can differentiate us as a city, knowing that getting through the process in other communities can be very difficult.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 05:12

The third theme of how we organized recommendations was around activating existing housing-centric policy. Our consultants, after they reviewed all of our plans, all of our ordinances and all the background information we gave them, they came back to us and said, "Hey, you guys actually have really good policy already on the books." But they have recommendations around making sure that we find ways to encourage activating the existing policy that we have.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 05:48

The fourth theme and recommendations under that are about being more proactive in how we approach, um, housing centric policies. One of the key recommendations they have in there is equipping the Redevelopment Authority or the Appleton Redevelopment Authority, and utilizing tools such as TID and grants and other instruments that they have at their disposal—to use the authority that they have to assemble land and then use that to incentivize housing development within the city which, knowing conversations we've had with the Redevelopment Authority, they were eager to start doing projects and planning again. So, I think that aligns very nicely with some of the conversations we've been having with the ARA.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 06:39

And then the fifth theme is around our—they're recommendations about how we can better communicate. We're very good as a city in being responsive to inquiries and needs and requests that come to us. One of the things we know we need to get better at is how we communicate how you do things from as simple as "How do I build an accessory dwelling unit? What is the process?" Because right, you got to dig into the code, and then you got to call the inspector, and then the planner gets called, and then we're like, "What do we do?" So, we know we can do better there. But we also know that simple things like making the development section of our website and how you find things and how you get questions answered and how you know who to call or what to do is something that we can leverage the city's website update to make it better, and then continuously make it better.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 07:35

So, I reviewed a lot of the next steps of how we intend to use this guide during my overview. So, I've already talked about the comprehensive plan and sub area updates. We'll be going out for RFP now that the Council has obligated ARPA funds for that. We'll be using the city website update for better communication. We'll also be working towards implementing a Tyler Munis community development module, which is a enterprise system wide, multi department effort to consolidate how we do permitting and approvals not just within community development, but we anticipate it will touch DPW, engineering, possibly the fire department as part of the i-series sunset. So, are any of you on the IT committee? No? You are. So, you're familiar with this, with i-series and how it is needing to go away. So, we're going to use that opprotu—

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 08:39

The code on one in the 80s. If that tells you how old it is.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 08:43

That gives a new perspective.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 08:45

It is an antiquated system, and it doesn't do everything we need it to do. So, we're going to use that as an opportunity to really—the need to have to switch to something new to take a look at how we do things so we can all get on the same platform, make things much more efficient and user friendly internally, and hopefully make it easier for developers and homeowners to apply for things, pay for things, know where they're at in the approval process, and hopefully cut down on lots of emails and phone calls. Right Dave?

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 09:15

And then really the other piece, and this won't necessarily come through CEDC, but you would see it at the Council level is zoning code revisions. Even though we know we have quite a few good housing centric zoning code provisions within our zoning code, we know there's more to do. The planning team's already been working on some of these. So just know that's in the works. When that does come through, it would start at City Planning Commission.

Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 09:42

So that is the cliff notes of what we've been doing the last six months. Just know that the guide is intended to point us in the right direction as we move towards things like the comp plan and other things that we probably needed to do anyway and it will allow us to set those things up so that we are aligning with the recommendations of this plan. Dave, do you have anything to add?

Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 10:12

District [...]. Thank you, Chair, maybe just to piggyback on what was a really good summary, the way I've viewed this entire effort is we have done some previous planning work and market study that told us in the past couple years that there was a need for additional housing supply. And so, when we began this undertaking, it was really an exercise in self-reflection in terms of what can we do better to help achieve that goal of additional housing supply. Now, by embarking on this process, we not just self-reflective but solicited good critical feedback from external stakeholders that have a role in housing production and management and everything else that goes along with it. So, I thought it was a well-done process. Shout out to Green Bicycle Company, the consulting firm that we worked with on this process and all the folks internally and externally that helped along the way.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 11:22

I'm going to say something, and then I will put—I had the honor of—I don't want to say I served on this task force. I observed the task force. And I too, was really struck at the way people who—stakeholders who represented really disparate interests in the community came together towards this common goal. I give Green Bicycle, the consultants, a lot of credit for, you know, herding the cats, as it were. But just I felt like it was a spirit of cooperation, rather than everybody trying to get their piece of the pie. And they had a lot of great suggestions for us. And I know that Director Homan and city plan—essentially, when they did the interviews, the people said, "You know, you're doing a lot of great things, right; it's just we don't know where they all are."

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 12:23

And we all acknowledge that we need a lot of housing at every level. And a question came up at plan commission from Commissioner Robbins, who was also a member of the task force, about, you know, about our

emphasis on affordable housing. And I think that, you know, the comprehensive plan updates will and should address a lot of this. I mean, we were in the same situation when the plan was done, originally, but it wasn't—the housing shortage wasn't at the magnitude that it is now. So, I think that these updates that we're doing and the process changes to make it easier. And I want to—a personal example from the Council, Alder Firkus and myself (and I can't remember the other cosigners) we were really happy. We worked with the community and economic development department, and we put together our resolution, and we changed the city code to allow accessory dwelling units. And then we sat back and nothing happened. And then we would—I was—we saw a couple of times on the board of zoning review and they, accessory dwelling units, came forward and they didn't meet code. So, they had to deny. And you know, we said "Oh, well, what did we do wrong?" And this is a perfect example. And I am so happy that director Homan and Deputy Director Kress talked about that one, because it's something we have already done in the city where you can do this, but nobody knows how. And I think that that's going to be a big—and, you know, speaking of affordable housing, but not just affordable housing, letting seniors stay in their homes. And just so that's a big step, just to get—so I would vote for that moving to the top anyway. And I just want to thank everybody who served on the task force, the department personnel who helped guide it, and I think it was an absolutely worthwhile effort, and I think all of you should be super proud. Thank you. Anybody else? Alder Jones.

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 14:48

I attended the League of Wisconsin municipalities conference last year. Thank you for fielding all of my panicked emails to you throughout the conference. And housing is a huge part of my passion, and I'm sitting in this and I'm hearing ideas, and I'm just panicking. There's so much to do. And it's such a big issue. And a lot of the things I wrote down from those notes are in here. And that is so exciting to see that we are being so proactive about this and working from so many different angles, bringing so many people—different people—together to make this happen. It's literally giving me goosebumps. I am so proud of all of you. I am proud to be a part of this community, and wildly excited to see how we can better serve our people. Thank you.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:43

Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 15:44

Thank you, Chair. I looked through this a couple times. I've been on this committee for four years. I really enjoy this committee. I think that this department is probably one of our most important departments in the city because one of our biggest demands is housing. And I see we're on the right trajectory based on our skyline getting higher and, you know, all these projects going on. I see that in the report, we're still behind where we want to be, and I'm hoping that with this new information and the new direction we're taking that we can start to catch up to that number that we need to be at. I'm optimistic about it because I know that our staff is passionate and our alders are passionate and we'll work very hard to make it happen. And I look forward to the day where we can say we've met that goal. I really am looking forward to it because we will. And Thank you. Thank the committee as well. I'm going to miss you, Joss.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 16:59

We're not done yet. We have another item.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 17:01

I just wanted to put it out there.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 17:02

Okay.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 17:03

I'll say it again later.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 17:05

He wants to be the first one.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 17:09

And I kind of—yeah. But yeah. Just wanted to put that out there and, yeah, thank you.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 17:18

All right. Thank you all again.