

## Item 24-0326: Update on Mayor's Taskforce on Housing Development Policy - Final Housing Development Policy Guide

City Plan Commission

Wed, Apr 10, 2024 3:30PM

**Mayor Jake Woodford** 13:27

Alright, moving on now to information items. Item 24-0326 update on mayor's Task Force on housing development policy, final housing development policy guide. Director Homan. All right, thank you.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development)** 13:42

All right. So, we're really excited to be presenting the housing policy guide. A little bit of context as to how we got this started, why we got it started. It shouldn't be news to anybody that we're in the middle of a nationwide housing crisis, and while the city can't solve the crisis in its entirety, we really wanted to focus on what should we be doing or could we be doing from a municipal perspective to move the needle on housing affordability, knowing that there's other things that are out of our control from interest rates and federal and state policy.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development)** 14:18

So, what we did is we formed—the mayor formed—a Housing Development Policy Task Force about six months ago, which included two commissioners that are sitting here today, so feel free to weigh in at any time when I give this overview. And we developed a process where we did really deep stakeholder engagement both in the development space (so realtors, home builders, developers, engineers, community nonprofits, community leaders), as well as engaging internal staff that are involved in the development review process, so not just the community development team but also engineering and inspections.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development)** 15:03

And we did a series of surveys. We did one on one interviews. And we also did focus groups throughout our group of stakeholders. And then the consultant—the third-party neutral consultant that we hired—really listen to what they heard, and started to pull together a series of recommendations that they organized around five different themes that are outlined in your memo. And if any of you have the guide in front of you, there is an executive summary at the beginning. So, if you're looking for the cliff notes, take a look at that.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development)** 15:41

But there's really five themes that emerged from the process we went through. One is the need to create a community vision that acknowledges that we need to prioritize housing. It is the jurisdiction of the planning commission to oversee the city's comprehensive plan, and at present, the vision for our comprehensive plan doesn't really get into the need for housing, housing diversity, and affordable housing. So that was one of the themes that emerged. And again, if you look at the executive summary, there's a series of recommendations within that theme.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development)** 16:14

The second theme is process, the need to create a positive development approval process at the municipal level for housing centric projects. And the good news of that is if we can make it a positive process for housing centric process, it will also be a positive process for industrial, for commercial and, and all developments that come through the city.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 16:37**

The third theme is activating existing housing policy for—so I believe most of you have been on the City Planning Commission for longer than I've been at the city. We've done a lot of great work already with updating our zoning code. There's already a lot of good policy in there. What the consultant determined was, we don't always do the best job of communicating it or educating or making it easy to be aware that you can do, say, an accessory dwelling unit. So that's really what the recommendations within that theme are focused around.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 17:13**

The fourth is about being proactive and encouraging policy and fiscal incentive to catalyze housing centric policy. And that kind of goes back to the point you made at the beginning of the meeting, Mayor. This guide will be able to help us where we have say a TIF district or other fiscal policy to use those levers to encourage the housing types that we know our community needs.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 17:40**

And the fifth is really around communication. Series of recommendations making sure that when we have made a positive policy change, or when we have made a process change, that we're doing a much better job of communicating it to the right stakeholders. So, in the case of subdivision development change, making sure the engineers and the developers are aware proactively, and for things like accessory dwelling units, making sure homeowners and those small builders are aware that this is something that you can do and here's the process to get through it.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 18:13**

We know that the guide is advisory, and it's kind of pointing us to future work. We will have a lot of future work that will work its way through this plan commission. Some of the things that we're working on internally right now include a series of zoning code reforms that ultimately planning commission would be briefed on at a high level and then if Planning Commission finds that acceptable, we'd be going through the formal code revision process.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 18:43**

The Common Council has also recently allocated up to \$400,000 for city planning efforts to include a comprehensive plan update as well as corridor and sub area plans. So, we intend to use the findings of this guide to glean insights on how we approach that work.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 19:03**

And we'll also be pursuing I'd call them more administrative things, but really will help us implement these recommendations. Currently at our development review process is managed by duct tape, bubble gum, and bootstrapped methods of managing development review from an AS400 system in some areas to emails, and I don't know how else to describe it. But we're working towards a new system that will utilize Tyler Munis, the community development module that once implemented in a couple of years will make things much more transparent both to our external users as well as make it simpler for me to know what Pete's team is working on without me needing to meet with Pete or call Pete or email Pete. We can just see it.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 19:54**

And lastly, the city is in the process of updating our city website. So, we're hoping to use that process to make it much easier to find information, have it in the right places, and not have it be kind of a mystery box. I'd say that's kind of where it is right now, right, Dave? So, customer self-service is the goal, clarity in process, and making it really easy to figure out what you need to do, who you need to talk to, and how you get things done.

That's it in a nutshell, and I'd be happy to entertain any questions or see if Dave or any of the team members involved have anything to add. Dave? Okay.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 20:35**

All right. Commissioner Robins.

**Sabrina Robins (Commissioner) 20:37**

Well, I want to commend you all on a great process, and I thought the consultant and that team did a great job. Were you—were there any surprises in the findings or any ah has going through this process for you all?

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 20:59**

I didn't have any surprises. I feel like some of the things I was seeing were validated. Dave, did you have any surprises?

**Mayor Jake Woodford 21:07**

Mic?

**Deputy Director David Kress (Community and Economic Development) 21:11**

Thank you. No, nothing that just, you know, blew me away in any way. I think what this effort really helped us do was, as Director Homan alluded to, just really reinforce some things that we were picking up on and noticing internally or based on conversations we'd have externally. And it can't be overstated how much engagement happened as a part of this effort. And I think that that really helps, you know, sort of reinforce or validate those topics that we need to be continually focusing on to make those necessary improvements.

**Director Kara Homan (Community And Economic Development) 21:47**

Can I add something? I wouldn't call it an Aha, but I do want to just reiterate an observation that our consultant had said to me when we were probably just wrapping up the engagement process and getting into recommendations. She made a note that—this was after she completed both the internal and external stakeholder interviews and surveys—of how great of a team we have. She got a lot of positive feedback internally about how well everyone works together, how professional they are, how responsive our team members are to external, developers. And really the only piece she had is most people are just frustrated, because we don't have the tools we need to make the process better. So, it—if anything, it gave us the guidance and the direction we need to finally make those investments in software and tools that the great team we have can use to make things even better.

**Sabrina Robins (Commissioner) 22:49**

Thank you.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 22:50**

I'd say one of the surprises for me came at the outset of this, which was how many different partners were willing to engage in this conversation and in this process. That that was actually what set this in motion was, as we were having—Director Homan and I were having—conversations with different folks in the community, you started to hear similar themes coming from folks who maybe didn't always have obviously aligned interests in the past. And that, to me, was a pleasant surprise early on in this process. Because if you look at who served on this task force, who was a part of it, or the organizations that they represented—the Chamber of Commerce, the homebuilders Association, Realtors Association, Habitat for Humanity, Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development, FORE Development a private developer, and Mark Winter homes an area homebuilder—that's a really interesting group of people and interests to come together around a topic. And that was a pleasant

surprise that everybody was willing to roll up their sleeves and get involved with us. So, I deeply appreciate that engagement from members of the taskforce including our own plan commission members, Commissioner Robins and Commissioner Fenton, who joined us in the work. Just a lot of really good work and some important insights for us.

**Sabrina Robins (Commissioner) 24:26**

One of the things that may not have come through is the information that I learned and gathered, I went and shared with other community members that typically wouldn't have access to this. I was very impressed that they were interested in the work that you're doing and that they were being informed. I spoke at a couple of churches about this, and so I want to thank you all for allowing space for those that don't have the privilege and honor to take off their jobs to come and sit and learn. but more people care about the city and housing and having a thriving life then maybe we really get a chance to directly impact. So, I want to thank you on behalf of these other communities that I've reached out to.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 25:26**

Thank you. Discussion. Yeah. Commissioner Fenton.

**Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 25:32**

Thank you, Your Honor. Um, I'll just add to what the mayor said. I was more of an observer. I, you know, a few years on the planning commission. But what struck me was this sense of cooperation, because I too looked at the people—I didn't have the benefit of the preliminary discussions—I looked at the groups, the stakeholders who were going to be involved in this, and I didn't have high hopes that we could get to a common goal. But I think in the first or second meeting when we talked about stakeholder interviews (and I won't name individuals, because I don't exactly remember) but there was some saying, "Well, these people will be hard to talk to." And then somebody speaks up and says, "Well, let me put together a meeting with these people." And so, it wasn't just the stakeholders presenting their own views; it was stakeholders actually working to bring other people in to get the information that was needed. So, I was really excited about how everything went, and I'm excited to see this move forward.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 26:46**

Further discussion? Well, I already sort of mentioned it, but I just, again, want to thank all of the members of the task force who participated in this work, and especially I want to give praise to our consulting team from Green Bicycle Company did a great job facilitating the conversations and being flexible with us as we worked our way through the process. This was a new process for us as a city, and I appreciated the approach that Green Bicycle took of, you know, not just bringing in a standard formula that sometimes you see with consultants—they bring in a standard formula and apply that their model to your work and are inflexible—and that was anything but that with Green Bicycle. So really appreciated that.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 27:36**

Also want to thank Director Homan, Deputy Director Kress, Lindsay Smith, principal planner, Matt Rehbein, and the entire community and economic development team for their leadership on this work. And I'm excited about having this in front of us now.

**Mayor Jake Woodford 27:54**

Sometimes, to make changes to process internally, we need that input from the outside. And not only did we get that input, we've memorialized it in a document that will help guide our work. So really, really grateful for the opportunity now to take what we've learned and to take this document and start putting it into action. And we have not been waiting to start putting this stuff into action until this was rolled out and in front of everybody.

There are many pieces of work already in motion, whether we're just talking about like process mapping or starting to get the planning pieces lined up. And the Council has been incredible in their support in terms of allocating funds now to do comprehensive planning, update our comprehensive plan. We're coming due, and we have a clear path now to getting that done. So, we're in a in a great process and excited to see the work that that will come. So again, just appreciate all the hard work that went into this and excited to see where we go from here. Any further discussion on this item? All right.