

Advisory Team Meeting #16

November 10, 2021

6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Summary notes are below. A recording of this meeting is also available on the website at www.red-wing.org/1032/Policy-and-Practice-Project-Meetings

Team Members Present

Michael Holmes, Sara Kern, Alexis DeVries, Liz Magill, Janet Yaneth Santiago

Team Members Absent: Steve Blaine, Cory Koplin, Marvin Bradford, Racheal Savage, Sam Malcom, Cholwe Hantuba Walker, Thomas Young (came but had to leave soon after meeting started)

Facilitator: Michelle Leise, City of Red Wing Community Engagement Facilitator

Guests: Corrine Stockwell, Interim Executive Director HRA. Maddy Schwartz, Housing Resource Specialist at Goodhue County Health and Human Services

Meeting Notes

Meeting began around at 6 p.m.

--Members did a quick check-in with their name and one thing they do to stave off the dark-days of November feeling.

--Maddy Schwartz, the new Housing Resource Specialist at Goodhue County Health and Human Services introduced herself. This is a new position at the county.

How do people experience housing in Red Wing in their daily life?

First, there was a brief recap: Last meeting, the team heard lots of information on what housing resources are available in Red Wing and what the situation is from a data standpoint. Guests from the HRA spoke at the October meeting. Ali Niemi also spoke at that meeting; Ali wrote the Red Wing Study of Homelessness and Housing Instability this fall and who is now hosting community meetings on these subjects. about what housing resources are available in Red Wing

This November meeting was time for the Advisory Team to discuss issues the members had brought forward at an earlier meeting – and talk about their own experiences and those of people they know. The purpose is to hear how people are experiencing in real life the housing opportunities, resources, barriers, and the situation overall in Red Wing.

Eight sheets on the walls around the room had eight different titles on them – subjects the team identified earlier this fall as important. Under each title were areas for “Experiences,” “Ideas,” and “Concerns/Challenges.”

Team members spent time going around the room and writing their comments on sticky notes and posting them on the sheets. The two guests (from HRA and Goodhue County) were also asked to provide their comments and use an asterisk next to their notes so it would be easy to identify which comments came from team members and which came from guests.

Here is a summary of those comments and subsequent conversation around each topic. The text in italics shows what was put on the sticky notes. The rest of the text summarizes the group's discussion about each topic.

Mobile Home Parks

Experiences:

- *Rent increases every year*
- *We don't see much improvement in roads and parking spaces*

Ideas:

- *How do we inspect mobile home parks in Red Wing and Minnesota?*

Because mobile home parks are often owned and the land is rented, the City's new Rental License Program does not affect mobile homes so at this time they will not be inspected regularly by the rental inspector.

Is there a need and a way to do health and safety inspections at mobile homes?

Could the City's rental inspector inspect a mobile home's land or yard for health and safety issues? Can they inspect the roads that are not owned by the City?
Is this a need?

Concerns/Challenges:

- *Who regulates the rent payments?*
- *How can there be better upkeep?*
- *Private ownership versus corporate*

Housing Limitations for Undocumented Residents

Experiences:

- *People without SSN can't apply for any housing programs. Are there any programs that accept income proof with an tax identification number?*

Residents who do not have a social security number

If someone does not have a social security number, are there programs where a manager could accept another kind of identification such as a Tax Identification Number?

Corrine at HRA mentioned the SAFE Program (Jennifer Cook at HRA will know more). Corrine says this can be done – we need more information. Rapid rehousing does not discriminate based on immigration status – probably through the SAFE Program. We need to find out more.

Landlord Tenant Issues

Experiences:

- *Not being able to hang a Black Lives Matter flag because it's "political."*
Renting for four years. Never had an issue until recently.

Ideas:

- *Develop a type of "second-chance" program.*
- *Change disqualifying standards as they often disqualify who those programs are for.*

Let's look into a type of "second-chance" program would help people who have had a criminal past. The programs that people with a criminal past are trying to get into often disqualify them from getting into a lot of programs. Is there something out there or something that can be created?

- *Some type of landlord/tenant advocate and mediation*

This would help with landlord-tenant communication and finding common ground.

- *Making some basic rules for both renters and landlords*

We need more education on this. HRA says they are trying to get out information on rights and responsibilities for renters, landlords, and also seniors.

The City just created a brochure on these resources for online and at various locations around town – in Spanish and English.

How do we get this information out better?

Can we do a City Q&A column routinely about housing with different questions being covered each time? Similar to what the Police Chief used to do in the newspaper "Ask the Chief." This could be in City Beat, on social media, and in the newspaper.

- ** Knowing your rights as a tenant is important – i.e. leases, security deposits, landlord responsibilities, etc. (guest comment)*
- ** Need mitigation services to ease tensions between tenants and landlords. (guess comment)*

Concerns/Challenges:

- *Slum landlords*
- *Income is too low and rent is too high*

It's often hard for single parents especially to find a place to rent they can afford.

Even though lots of housing is going up around town, many of the units are not affordable. The areas where TIF (tax increment financing) was used still is not affordable to many people. The financing is complicated. (October Advisory Team notes also document this issue and details about the financing.)

150 (households) families or individual people are on the waiting list for "Housing Choice Vouchers" (previously called Section 8.) No one is being added to the list right now because it already takes roughly 18 months to get into housing from this list. New vouchers are still being given out each month to people on the current waiting list, but no new people can get on the waiting list yet.

The HRA explained with housing so limited, landlords can decide to charge more than they did in the past because there is not much competition right now and often a rent is too high for a voucher program (vouchers will often only pay for 30% to a max of 40% of a person's income (40% if the rent includes utilities.)

Also, HRA explained that Red Wing has reached its limit of low-income housing units. Who sets the number of units? State and federal governments. How do people change that number? Call their state representative? We don't know – we need to find out.

HRA explained, however, that Red Wing CAN do more project-based voucher programs, like Jordan Towers or Maple Hills/Common Bond Housing. HRA says we need more of these type of project-based housing units. In these programs, the voucher stays with the program (like Jordan Towers) and does not travel with the renter who then looks for a private landlord. Red Wing can get more of these. What would need to happen to fund more of these in town?

- *Some places do not accept pets*

Homelessness

Experiences:

- Very hard to get in anywhere. Friend has two kids and was technically homeless, and the county said they can't do anything unless she went to a shelter?

One requirement for getting into some homelessness programs is that you need to prove one night of homelessness. You need to show them a slip from a homeless shelter. They don't count it if you are staying with a friend or family member. It's bureaucracy but it's necessary based on what the federal government requires.

Maddy said when people don't qualify for a county program, the staff tries to get the client somewhere else but there could be a better system for this. Sometimes residents get turned around and are getting told by different agencies to call other places.

There is a new flyer on where to go to access services. City could translate that flyer into Spanish. The sheet from HOPE Coalition that shows where and how people can access homelessness resources.

Landlords say renters need "renter experience" but when people are so young it's hard to get that renter experience. Maybe there could be a class people could take to get points, including young renters, and those points could equal some experience?

Ideas:

- Permanent Supportive Housing for folks with disabilities (physical, mental, addiction) is needed. Seattle has a great model.

What is supportive housing? It's a service where people live in a complex of some kind with a case manager on site. People there don't need to use all the services available there, but they can. The requirement for living there is that someone in that household has some kind of disability. It helps people have more success. Seattle has complexes downtown – these kinds are usually subsidized. The "supportive" part of it is having the case manager on site.

Racheal (an Advisory Team member who could not attend) had also mentioned this as a priority – housing for those who have physical disabilities.

Supportive housing is needed. The challenge is staffing that with professionals. Liz mentioned there is an agency in town who is researching this and hoping to open up something relatively soon.

- Are there building incentives to create more housing stock?

What about the St. John's Hospital property now that the building is coming down? Some people feel that the neighbors there will not let subsidized housing happen there. Neighbors don't have voting power, but they can influence and they do sometimes change the will of either a developer or city leaders who vote on zoning issues.

Is it helpful to have more affordable housing advocates approach city leaders, land owners, and/or potential developers?

Providing more facts and less emotion helps in advocating for ideas – and for things like supportive and/or affordable housing. Hard data can be helpful.

- Emergency housing

Education

Experiences:

-None listed

Ideas:

- Landlord education on de-escalation. Resources for rental assistances if tenants are behind.*
- More financial literacy (How two create generational wealth)*
- Educate people who haven't experienced these issues on why those who do experience these issues do or did [experience them].*
- * Education on the need for affordable housing, supportive housing, transitional housing and need to address NIMBY (the effect of "Not in My Back Yard"). (guest comment)*
- * Need financial literacy programs to assist low and moderate incomes to become self-sufficient (guest comment)*
- More education on homeownership, especially with the younger adults*
- You Ask – We Answer – create this kind of Q&A format with housing on a regular basis (for example, the police column on facebook). And workshops.*

Concerns/Challenges:

- I have heard so many times to educate people to end homelessness but what we need is more housing and higher incomes.

Right now it's cheaper to own a home than to rent. Is there a way to expand the HRA's grant program to get more people toward home ownership? Maybe we could house people more quickly and in a more stable way.

Step Up programs and Section 8 homeownership education program – we need the education on how to go from renting to home ownership. Three Rivers and also SEMCRA (Southeast Minnesota Multi-County Housing and Redevelopment Authority) has a home-buyer education course. Maybe we could utilize that here. (SEMCRA does not cover the Red Wing area but they work in tandem with the HRA.)

County Homeless Response Team – there is a group that gets together and shares what each organization does.

Red Wing and Goodhue County needs to get together in the same room – every organization – to build some trust and collaboration and to provide better, more streamlined information to clients/residents.

Opportunities are available through Habitat and the HRA and others, but often people don't know how to access those opportunities through grants or loans, etc. Even Habitat has programs that lower one's mortgage.

Need a single place to learn about everything regarding housing.

Also needs to teach future homeowners how to take care of a home.

HRA says we need to know more about each organization and the groups need to know how best to work together.

How can we teach people how do they get to what they need? What door do they walk through first? The feedback from other people is that they are spending too much time trying to track down where to go and what to do.

Zoning Issues

Experiences:

-None listed

Ideas:

- Can the City explore zoning for shelters and identify places for it?*
- * Allow for multi-family buildings - can increase housing stock (zoning that allows for higher density housing) (guest comment)*
- Only accept NIMBY if proof of a concern is or will happen*

Concerns/Challenges:

Parking – we do not need 2 spots for every apartment.

Stigma of Section 8 by Landlords and Residents

Experiences:

-If the City is committed to equitable work, they won't listen to the loudest voices but recognize that under-represented people are facing the hardships of not building apartments, shelters, treatment and recovery centers, etc. Do the right thing, not what the naysayers want. Bottom line: Ignore NIMBY.

- My uncle's parents moved out of their home because they heard low-income housing was going to be in the old hospital area. They thought it would bring bad people to the neighborhood.

Ideas:

- Could the HRA be supported in expanding the Section 8 Homebuyers program?

Concerns/Challenges:

*- * Landlords base rents higher to avoid renting to Housing Choice Voucher holders. (guest comment)*

*- * Society thinks Housing Choice Voucher residents will destroy property. (guest comment)*

*- * Society views Housing Choice Voucher residents as unemployed – not the case generally. Wages are just too low to afford the rent. HRA numbers show that very few vouchers are used by those without a job. (guest comment)*

Discrimination

Experiences:

-Neighbors not accepting of a different race other than theirs.

- Several Black residents have reported applying for rentals in Red Wing and once they meet the landlord in person, the apartment is magically no longer available.

Ideas:

- Getting to know your neighbors before assuming the worst.

What tools are available against discrimination? The Fair Housing Act is one tool against discrimination. HRA says there are forms you can fill out on this.

The MN Department of Human Rights also has an office that will take human rights complaints.

You can also document conversations and actions against a landlord or manager. Every bit helps.

HRA talked about a program in Duluth called 1 Roof Community Housing that assists with all kinds of landlord-tenant issues. Michelle will send the link out to the group to learn about it.

Concerns/Challenges:

- People not willing to look at the bigger picture.

Can an organization report discrimination even if they have to be confidential with their clients' names? HRA said they think that organization could still file a claim through the Fair Housing Act.

Young renters are not getting rented to because they need "tenant experience."

Can people take a tenant education class to get points that would give young renters points? That may give landlords an incentive to rent to you.

Next Steps:

- Type notes and send to the Advisory Team and Ali Niemi
- Advisory Team can send in additional questions if they have them
- Michelle will reach out to others and try to bring forward answers or examples to the next meeting.

Topics Tentatively Planned for 2022 Advisory Team Meetings:

- Police and Fire policies and practices
- Hiring and Retention
- Community Development – Zoning, Planning
- Economic Development

The meeting was two hours and ended at 7:55.