

Belmont Housing Trust – HPP Subcommittee

Minutes for the January 9, 2023 Meeting

Present:

Subcommittee members: Betsy Lipson, Judie Feins, Aaron Pikcilingis, Julie Wu, Anne Mahon, Helen Bakeman, Carl Solander

HPP project team members: Lydia Slocum, and Courtney Lewis, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC); Gabriel Distler, Town of Belmont.

The meeting was called to order at 2:07.

MAPC Lydia Slocum provided an overview of the meeting, stating that a series of slides will share survey results and key findings that will go into the final HPP (factors/constraints, opportunities, target numbers).

Main points from the slides:

- The survey response rate was higher than in other towns that MAPC has worked
- Priorities and housing goals identified by respondents are indicated on the following slide images:

Survey Responses



541 people (2.8% of Belmont adults) accessed the survey, with an response of about 300 per question (1.5% of Belmont adults).

Housing priorities:

- Overall housing cost burden (40% of respondents rated it as high priority)
- Amount of affordable housing (SHI) (36%)
- Local affordability gap (26%)
- School enrollment (24%)

Participants could also add in housing priorities not included in the list. The most commonly cited priorities included:

- Barriers posed by current zoning or permitting process
- Lack of smaller housing types
- Lack of housing density near transit, and a desire to increase density appropriately across town
- Sustainability and climate concerns
- Opportunities for aging household to downsize
- Current residential tax burden

Survey Responses



Housing goals:

- Previous HPP goals:
 - Housing for seniors - 49% feel it is still a high priority
 - Housing for new families - 32% feel it is still a high priority
 - Housing for ELI / VLI households - 46% feel it is still a high priority
- New housing goals:
 - Housing near transportation options (70%)
 - Housing for seniors seeking to downsize (68% of respondents rated this as a high priority)
 - Smaller housing types (such as cottages, duplexes, townhomes), mixed-use developments (commercial on ground floor and residential above), and reuse of existing buildings (all around 60%)
 - Housing for the local workforce (i.e. teachers, firefighters, etc.) (57%)
 - Housing for people from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds (53%)

Survey feedback will be provided to the community in the next HPP town wide forum on January 31.

Other slides addressed factors, constraints, and opportunities related to development. The maps indicate factors that increase or decrease the suitability of development.

The subcommittee agreed there needed to be an opportunity to provide local knowledge to adjust the maps. There was discussion about the space along Rt 2 near Acorn Park that belongs to the state but if Belmont could obtain the land that it might be used for commercial development or affordable housing. In addition, subcommittee members pointed out other areas on the maps that were incorrectly labeled to be interpreted as possible for development.

In reviewing the slide on MAPC's audit of our zoning, a suggestion was made to strengthen the language to make clearer that Belmont's zoning currently does not incentivize development for affordable housing. In comparison to other towns, there is more that Belmont's zoning can do to encourage this type of development. A suggestion was made to incorporate current state 3A law and how that can be a strong tool to advance affordable housing. Another comment was to add the town's comprehensive plan as another tool to leverage the development of more affordable housing. Gabriel Distiller, planning staff representative, noted that, due to staff shortage, Belmont is delaying work on the comprehensive plan.

The target production slide presented that Belmont's SHI is currently 8.2% (based on 2020 Census). Discussion points included the importance of holding onto various goals of advancing affordable housing that might include naturally-occurring housing while focusing on HPP's primary goal of more deed-restricted affordable housing.

In reviewing the suitability map, there was discussion about making this map interactive so that subcommittee members could add local knowledge. Comments also included ways that the town could facilitate purchase of church property, recognizing factors that make it difficult for both entities.

MAPC explained the final HPP will include a list of opportunities in an implementation matrix that scores challenges. A comment was made that we need to decide whether to include sites on the list that have not been vetted by the owners. An example of this is the parking lot owned by St. Luke's which seems to offer an opportune site for housing development.

Discussion of other prospective or interesting to consider sites included over the Waverley train tracks, at the municipal lot in Belmont center, and at various properties owned by faith-based organizations.

MAPC reminded the subcommittee that the HPP is simply providing a list of sites that have potential to expand opportunity for affordable housing and strategies that could be used to facilitate this.

Upcoming Community Participation Meetings:

- January 31, 2023. Housing Trust is targeting this date for a community forum to elicit suggestions for opportunity sites for housing development. The ideal outcome would be a list of sites and their associated potential for number of units per site.
- Late February/early March: HPP event to discuss vision for Belmont based on our score on AARP's livability index (a measure the State is requiring in comprehensive plans). Input will inform the HPP and also will be incorporated into the comprehensive plan.
- Late March (tentative): Final community forum presentation on the HPP with goals, needs and strategic recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,
Betsy Lipson