

Diversity and Inclusion, Housing and Transportation Subcommittee Meeting
Broadcast Via Live Webinar and Teleconference, Tuesday, March 24, 2021
Page 1 of 5

Diversity and Inclusion, Housing and Transportation Subcommittee Meeting was held on Wednesday, March 24, 2021 at 12:00 p.m., Olivia Rocamora, Chair, presiding.

I. Call to Order

Chair Rocamora called the meeting to order at **12:00 p.m.**

II. Prayer – Rev. Dr. Bill Murray, Rector, Holy Innocents’ Episcopal Church

III. Roll Call - City Clerk

Members present: Olivia Rocamora, Nicole Morris, Bill Murray, Jose Osorio, Raquel González,

IV. Approval of the Meeting Agenda

Motion and Vote: Member Murray moved to approve the March 24, 2021 Meeting Agenda. Member Osorio seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

V. New Business

A. Introduction of subcommittee Goals

Proposal: Narrowing our focus to Housing only. There is a Transportation Master Plan to be presented to City Council on April 6, 2021. All agreed to go with this. She also mentioned that she would like to use the terminology of housing affordability versus affordable housing. She shared some goals for Housing Affordability:

- To speak with experts on housing affordability in Sandy Springs as it relates to
 - Diversity – multiple cultures, perspectives;
 - Inclusion – giving power, voice, representation;
 - Equity - results, policy, reform, etc.
- To synthesize the recommendations from experts and report back to the Task Force with both a summary (Diversity, Inclusion) and recommendations for action items (Equity)

B. Presentation of Research / Interviews with Experts

Bill Murray talked with Kristin Byars Smith, Assistant City Manager of Sandy Springs and reported that the fastest take-away is this is a much more complex issue than any ‘one-click’ group panel conversation could have. She shared the 2 documents, 300+ pages, and that we are not the only city dealing with this across the nation. She shared some articles about Boulder CO, Austin TX and Dallas TX, where they are having those conversations around housing affordability and programs that build a community. He reported he had a conversation with Tamera Carrera, retired Executive Director of the Community Assistance Center (CAC) and her conversation was that Sandy Springs is committed to looking at affordable housing. She said that she wanted to see that when we talk about housing affordability it’s not just ‘here’s the one part of town’ that is the affordable housing district, and everyone knows that is the affordable housing district because then it separates community. Her biggest concerns were how we have conversations around housing affordability that truly integrates and brings community at the same time; people of different backgrounds; different viewpoints; and, different economic levels can all be in the same conversation. Her other concern was, how does our group make sure they can advocate as many voices at the table for all the

51 conversations. We can come up with great plans; then a new mayor, a new administration comes in, and
52 things change, it all changes back. How do we make sure that having those voices becomes policy and
53 process; not, just something we're doing right now? He will share the documents and articles provided to
54 him by Assistant City Manager Smith. When questioned about 1-2 actions items taken away from his
55 conversations and the materials provided to him, (1) how do we explore having a conversation about the
56 make-up of committees and feedback structures for the City; (2) how do we have conversations that include
57 everyone? We need to talk about what our goals are as a subcommittee or as, a Diversity & Inclusion Task
58 Force for Housing in general. The more important work is focusing on equitable communities;
59 communities that have a diversity of opinion; diversity of race; how do we have those conversations in a
60 way that this is the goal? Then, which of these policies help with that other than the other way around?

61
62 **Nicole Morris** shared anecdotally that yes, a gap exists; consistent with what the experts have reported. As
63 pointed out by the retired CAC Executive Director in terms of 'segregated approach' of how we do housing
64 in Sandy Springs; where, geographically affordable housing is placed in certain pockets but not an
65 integrated effort. In thinking about how to get more diverse members of the community to participate, she
66 doesn't know of any grass roots organizations that are focused specifically on the African American
67 population; this gap will be a bottle-neck for the data collected in terms of inclusivity and making sure all
68 the diverse and multi-cultural groups are represented. The CAC, along with other organizations, come to
69 mind that are focused on the Latinx.

70
71 **Jose Osorio** talked about working with the school community; the only person he knows who has lived
72 here in the Sandy Springs community and has grass roots communications with the community members
73 that lives here is the parent liaison. From that perspective, parents indicate that the affordability of housing
74 has become much tougher especially because a lot of the community members work in the type fields that
75 do not provide higher earning incomes. They see rent prices going up year-by-year; right now, they indicate
76 that rent pricing is at \$1,200 to \$1,800 per month. Even as an educator, he feels this amount of rent or
77 mortgage would be tough to sustain on a monthly basis. This affects the children because of having to not
78 move just from one apartment complex to another but from one school district to another, based on the
79 zones. Another of the tougher issues is the way they are treated by the landlords, owners of the apartment
80 complexes and/or condominium managers. They indicate that their issues (repairs, etc.) are not given
81 priority; not done in a timely manner. Rather than trying to get something taken care of in their own
82 apartment complexes, because of the way they are treated, they will seek to move to another location, even
83 though it adversely affects the children. Perhaps speaking with the apartment complex managers to get
84 their perspective could be valuable; what can they offer; how can they help the residents.

85
86 **Olivia Rocamora** said that this is a human issue; there's a lot of data and studies, terminology; these things
87 are important to understanding the root cause of things. But, if we don't pair that with human stories, it is
88 very easy to forget what we are talking about. A goal she'd like to see between now and April 9th meeting
89 is if we can collect a couple of stories from renters specifically; even a couple of constituents and lead with
90 those anecdotes. Not use their names but put the 'human' side of the story out there. One of those human
91 stories was that a woman was working with a family that had 20-year old carpet where they were living but
92 if they complained about that or other situations (the conditions they are living in are not acceptable), but
93 they were fearful of the rent increasing if an apartment complex get renovated.

94
95 **C. Discussion / Next Steps for Preparing to Present to Task Force**

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97 **Olivia Rocamora** stated she read a good portion of the 140 page study (Sandy Springs Housing Needs
98 Assessment, <https://www.sandyspringsga.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=23886>) referenced by
99 Bill Murray, and she said she got really schooled; she learned a lot about housing. Between that document
100 and 2 different people she spoke with she shared bullet points she feels really speak to the urgency of our

Diversity and Inclusion, Housing and Transportation Subcommittee Meeting
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Page 3 of 5

committee and the importance of it. There's a big wave of displacement happening of minority communities in Sandy Springs. As the task force changes on this one committee, if there's not a community to provide recreation or education or employment opportunities, why the task force? How can we first ensure that this community can be here, stay here, feel welcomed and develop that sense of belonging? Then move on to these important initiatives that help them, then thrive; not just building the structure, but the community afterward. From what she learned, there are lot of folks here in Sandy Springs who don't even have the security of the structure.

Her sources were the Sandy Springs Needs Assessment (study referenced above); interview with Pat Chesser, a Sandy Springs resident, Managing Director of Mill Creek Residential Trust and knows a lot about apartment housing and creativity of other cities; interview with Maritza Morelli, Executive Director of Los Niños Primero, about how the housing pricing is affecting the Latinx community; and, finally interview with Melanie and David Couchman, philanthropists and Founders of Sandy Springs Together, their mission is: "along with other community leaders, implement a city-wide community education effort, focused on the importance of racial and social equity and how these principles relate to housing for all income levels and the preservation of existing apartment communities. This effort includes strong representation of residents of apartment neighborhoods along with single-family residential communities, businesses, faith and civic organizations and government... Part of their Vision: ...The initial effort focuses on housing affordability for all residents in Sandy Springs since it is fundamental to almost all other areas of racial inequity."

- The majority of Sandy Springs minority communities reside in apartments. When we are talking about housing, we're talking about equitable apartment living. This reality creates challenges in ensuring diversity and inclusion because of:
 - The negative connotation of the term "affordable housing." Voters are a little bit wary about voting for something like affordable housing because they are concerned about it bring something like crime, for example. There's a need to re-education there.
 - Zoning – <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/06/18/upshot/cities-across-america-question-single-family-zoning.html> - 85% of residential land is zoned for detached single-family homes not zoned for apartments; so there are a lot of limitations. Sandy Springs was mentioned nationally as having some of the worse zoning laws for creating housing affordability; creating apartments that are more integrated and not separated.
 - Incentives to redevelop older complexes. Sandy Springs offers developers some incentives for creating new developments that are considered lower value, including apartment complexes, making minority communities vulnerable to displacement.
 - Past examples of displacement: 2015 Gateway Project, near Roswell Road and Windsor Parkway. This displaced 13% of white residents but 87% of non-white residents (comprised of 17% African American; 2% Asian; 65% Latino; 2% Other).

Action Items needed: *Identify solutions that do not disenfranchise one group of residents over another.*

1. **Educate the Public** - We need to debunk the myths that create hesitation to embrace housing affordability:

Myth #1 – Apartment residents are the source for the city's crime;

Myth #2 – Apartment residents are the source of the city's lower achievement in schools; and

Myth #3 – Apartment residents are the source of the city's traffic.

- Limited housing affordability actually causes more traffic congestion: "As more workers are forced to live elsewhere in the region, traffic congestion will likely worsen as the

number of in-commuters increases.” Sandy Springs Housing Needs Assessment, page 65.

Build the public-will to create the political will to embrace housing affordability. The Sandy Springs Needs Assessment concluded that “currently, a worker earning \$50K annually can only afford 17% of rental apartments and 8% of for-sale homes in Sandy Springs” (pg. 12) In addition to service / essential industry employees; teachers, nurses, first responders and many other crucial professions struggle to find affordable housing in the city. This is a huge problem, when the fire fighter who puts out the fire at my house, cannot afford to live in the city he is protecting; it’s not just lower income residents, it is beginning to creep into middle-class residents.

2. **Hire Experts**

Hire City staff to exclusively oversee redevelopment from an Equity / Housing Affordability perspective.

Request further studies. Request 2nd housing study; the request was suspended in January, 2021. Require a Housing Affordability Impact Study before it is developed.

3. **Request Anti-Displacement Housing Policies and Zoning** – allow for more creativity and allow for more land zoned for multifamily residential housing. Review the opportunity to expand affordable housing by allowing apartments to be built over garages in single family neighborhoods. Protect residents displaced by redevelopment / renovation.

4. **Look at what other cities have done.** As mentioned previously, Boulder CO, Austin TX and Dallas TX; how successful; how creative.

It was discussed that for engagement, there is a need to have an interpreter and to translate the information for those parents who are non-native speaking.

Chair Rocamora plans to create a document that brings all of this together, along with some anecdotal stories to bring a human face to the Task Force. She would like to bring stories from the two largest minority groups are represented, African American and Latino. She asked about questions and James Bostic and Melody Kelley were present and had questions.

Jim Bostic, Chair of the Diversity & Inclusion Task Force, talked about listening to the discussion. He stated he made lots of notes; he particularly liked what Member Osorio brought out about with Spanish speaking parents, there has to be an interpreter or translation. This is a group we need to have people understand what we’re saying; what we want to do. He went on further to say that the City needs to have more space for more affordable housing other than what is done; then you renovate it and folks cannot afford to return to their residence because the costs have increased outside their budget.

Melody Kelley stated that she, too, enjoyed the conversation; it is a conversation that many have been having for years. She is a single parent, a renter and she is a candidate for City Council in District 2. She would love to connect with this sub-committee, she has spent the last 6 months working as a community organizer in a lot of the apartments here in the North End, working with Sandy Springs Together, to get those voices heard and advocate for the moderate income, working families and renters in the community. She indicated she would be happy to tell about her personal experience and the experience she’s had as an advocate in working as a community organizer.

Jack Murphy ‘raised his hand’ in the meeting; he stated he is Chair of the North Fulton Improvement

**Diversity and Inclusion, Housing and Transportation Subcommittee Meeting
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Page 5 of 5

202 Network. He wanted to mention that they have a housing group that has been working on this same issue
203 and would love to collaborate more. They are doing some of the same research this subcommittee is going
204 to look into. Their Work Force Housing Group meets on April 19 at 3:30 p.m. He offered to send someone
205 the Zoom invite if they would like to participate. He provided his email and Chair Rocamora will connect
206 with him.

207
208 **VI. Closing Comments** – Olivia Rocamora, Chair – stated that she'll go back over the recording to
209 bring together a document; she'll reach out to Melody Kelley and Jack Murphy for their input; and,
210 come up with a conference of documents that she will then share with the sub-committee before
211 taking it to the Task Force.

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213 **VII. Adjournment**

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215 Meeting was adjourned **12:52 p.m.**

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219 **Olivia Rocamora, Chair, Subcommittee**
220 **Housing and Transportation**
221

Raquel González, Recording Secretary