

## NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERS MEETING

Thursday, December 21, 2023, 5:30 – 7PM

### QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

#### Little High Neighborhood Association

##### Affordable housing issues

One of the key factors that is making the affordable housing shortage in Charlottesville worse is that a lot of housing is being purchased by investors rather than by people seeking a place to live. People looking for a place to live are at a serious disadvantage vis a vis people or companies buying housing as a second home or as a business investment. In Little High we've seen several cases where an investor buys a house, and it stays empty and unused for years afterward. Housing investors can afford to do this in part because state and federal tax codes offer generous write-offs for business losses.

(1) What can the city do to level the playing field between these two very different types of housing buyers?

**Response:** The city is trying to balance the scales between investors and homebuyers by taking steps like providing subsidies, improving governance, and making changes to zoning laws. One way the city is doing this is by supporting affordable housing programs that offer down payment assistance through the CAHF fund and subsidy layering for rental/multi-family development. OCS Housing staff is actively leading efforts to create a tool to prevent displacement and is considering initiatives to give locals and long-term renters the first chance to buy new homes, especially those they currently live in. These efforts have been made possible by the addition of a Housing Program Manager, Housing Compliance Coordinator, and other supporting staff within the city's OCS and City departments.

(2) What can the city do to encourage people or companies to make actual use (as in offer them for rent or sell them to someone looking for a place to live) of empty and unused housing?

**Response:** The city recognizes opportunity here for sure. First across several data collection strategies, the city is working to identify where these properties are and their status. Beyond that the city's Housing Operations & Program Support Grant, is certainly responsive to applications/partnership models with local housing nonprofits, creating support for programs that turn vacant properties into affordable housing options. OCS Housing staff is actively vetting a vacancy tax incentive program of service similar to Richmond, VA, has considered. Perhaps inclusive of a policy that would direct the tax collected to seed/fund the CAHF and also the option of offer tax incentives or subsidies to property owners who rent out vacant homes, especially if they are rented at affordable rates. The city also supports employer and faith-based sponsored housing development.

(3) How is the city currently handling the issue of houses being used primarily or even exclusively as **short-term rentals**? There are at least three such properties near 13th Street NE and Meriwether Street in which the property owner is not residing on the property. Is the city concerned about situations like this?

**Response:** The Zoning Ordinance requires that operators of short-term rentals live on premises. We actively enforce these violations – these violations now represent the majority of our zoning enforcement work. Please send the addresses to our Zoning Administrator, Read Brodhead at [brodheadr@charlottesville.gov](mailto:brodheadr@charlottesville.gov). He will begin an investigation.

(4) Is the city doing anything or considering anything to encourage people who own more than one home in Charlottesville to rent these out at affordable rates? We've had situations in our neighborhood where someone rented out a house for years at a very affordable rate and then got tired of dealing with the hassles of being a landlord and turned the property over to a rental company that then raised the rent dramatically (specific example: a house on 13th Street NE was being rented for \$800/month up until August 2021. The landlord turned it over to a rental company and the rent jumped to \$1,500/month). Can the city provide incentives to small landlords who rent out one or two properties to make them available at affordable rates?

**Response:** OCS Housing Program staff is vetting the development of various incentives to encourage small landlords to offer affordable housing. These could include property tax breaks, grants for maintenance, or streamlined processes for landlords who keep rents affordable. By recognizing the challenges faced by small landlords, the city can encourage them to maintain or even lower rents, which will ultimately contribute to the affordable housing stock. One model currently under review is a framework/ approach is 'Landlord Support Initiative Trust' model. This model/hypothetical program if approved and implemented could provide financial and advisory support to small landlords committed to offering affordable housing. The trust could also serve as a resource for best practices, financial assistance, and regulatory guidance, thereby encouraging small landlords to actively participate in the city's affordable housing efforts. The City has also provided funding to CRHA to acquire such properties when the opportunity arises and retain them as affordable housing in permanently.

### **The New Zoning Code**

(5) As the new zoning code goes into effect, many individual rental properties that have been available at more or less affordable rates in recent years will be lost (e.g., a small house with two rental units on Meriwether Street will be converted into a triplex. The current renters will be obliged to move out but then will not be able to afford to rent one of the new triplex units; likewise, several low-income renters just off East Market Street will be displaced by two new luxury housing projects that will take down old housing and these residents will not be able to afford to remain the neighborhood once construction begins). Will the city keep track of the number of low-income residents obliged to move out of the city due to gentrification projects? Will anything be done to try to prevent low-income people living in our neighborhood from being displaced and pushed out of the city?

**Response:** The City will be monitoring the impact of new developments on low-income residents and will use regular data runs and reports from various sources, such as the market, NDS, and third-party providers, to track displacements and ensure that new developments include affordable units. Additionally, the Housing Program Manager, specifically is charged with supporting the City’s development of programs and policies to protect low-income residents, such as the right to return, tenant protection laws, and inclusionary zoning, to mitigate displacement.

(6) If a resident has a specific concern or grievance about a specific aspect of the new zoning code (once passed) that directly affects them, who can they contact?

**Response:** The resident could contact Neighborhood Development Services.

(7) How will the city ensure that the **affordable housing requirements** in the new zoning code are being met on a project-by-project basis?

**Response:** With the introduction of the new zoning code, Charlottesville is also implementing an Affordable Dwelling Unit Manual. This manual, pending approval by the council, outlines the responsibilities of developers in complying with the zoning code and the duties of city staff in ensuring this compliance. To bolster these efforts, the city's Office of Community Solutions has recently expanded, adding key positions like a Housing Program Manager and a Housing Compliance Coordinator. These roles, emerging from recommendations in the affordable housing plan, underscore the city's commitment to enhanced tracking and enforcement of affordable housing requirements. This structured approach—combining clear guidelines, increased staffing, and focused roles—aims to effectively monitor and ensure that developers meet their obligations in providing affordable housing, maintaining a balance between growth and housing equity in Charlottesville.

(8) As **parking** becomes less available as the city grows and parking requirements are scaled back, what will the city do to guarantee that all residents have equal access to every part of the city? Specifically, what will the city do to comply with the **Americans with Disabilities Act** to ensure that people who rely on cars for their transportation needs have the same access to the city as able-bodied residents who are able to navigate the city on foot or on a bike?

**Response:** The provision of safe and efficient access for all users is a key transportation goal of our Comprehensive Plan. The design requirements in the draft development code will improve access to new developments for bicycles and pedestrians and meet ADA requirements. While the requirements for off-street parking are eliminated in the City’s draft development code, developers will continue to supply off-street parking to the degree that the market for real estate demands it, as has been the case in other cities around the country that have eliminated minimum off-street parking requirements. To manage changes in demand for on-street parking, Neighborhood Development Services will be initiating a parking study in early 2024, which will review the existing parking permit program, particularly in residential neighborhoods, as well as the regulations governing curb spaces for loading zones, paid parking areas, timed parking

spaces, and handicap parking spaces. Currently, the City is working to complete its ADA Transition Plan, which will identify infrastructure and policy improvements that would address ADA compliance concerns throughout the City, including making our pedestrian network and public facilities more accessible to all users.

(9) Following New York City's experience with **ebikes** in just the last couple of years (the batteries in ebikes are a known fire hazard, so many buildings have banned them outright because of liability issues), is the city contemplating regulating or restricting ebikes in high density apartment / condominium buildings?

**Response:** Charlottesville Fire Department has discussed e-bikes, e-scooters, and other large lithium-ion batteries. Virginia has not allowed the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code (VFPC) or Building Code to ban the storage of these items. Localities in VA have not banned the storage yet. At some point, multi-family and mixed-use may not allow the charging of these items inside a residential area. CFD has suggested to some builders to make sure that bike storage rooms have sprinkler coverage that would suppress a large battery fire. One has even added an additional fire rating to that room off the garage for safety. As we work with property management companies and building owners, we can suggest the language in the lease not to allow them inside the residential area.

UVA has tried to educate the students not to store them inside to charge and not to allow them in the UVA dorms.

CFD and Albemarle County are working on an education campaign to have messaging on the risks with these items.

(10) The city is currently planning to increase density and pledging to reduce carbon emissions. Good **sidewalks** are key to both of these goals. What is Charlottesville doing to fix its inadequate sidewalks? (For a look at the shameful lack of sidewalks in our neighborhood, please see <https://littlehighneighborhood.org/photos/our-sidewalks/>)

(11) How will the city try to ensure the integrity and sustainability of existing neighborhoods in its rush to build higher and higher while ignoring how proposed projects fit into existing environments (e.g., 1101 East Jefferson St)?

**Response:** The city has established citywide Development Review Team (DRT) that is composed of representatives from appropriate city departments. The Team reviews proposed developments to ensure compliance with pertinent regulations. This required review process also ensures that the neighborhood character and quality of the neighborhoods for residential use is protected.

## **Other issues**

(12) What's being done to assist the homeless folks that have been sleeping on the downtown mall for years and were evicted from Market Street Park?

*Response:* The City of Charlottesville has provided support for persons experiencing homelessness in our community through philanthropic giving to our nonprofit community, which leads this work with excellence and compassion. This includes our Vibrant Community Fund [For FY24 proposed investments please see:

<https://www.charlottesville.gov/DocumentCenter/View/9325/Charlottesville-Vibrant-Community-Fund-Report-FY24-PDF?bidId=>; for funded programs in the FY24 budget please visit: <https://stories.opengov.com/charlottesvilleva/published/59hPvelkY>] that is supported by the Department of Human Services for programs that provide safety net support for members of our community in need such as public health interventions, support for youth, etc. These investments include programs such as the Charlottesville Free Clinic, The Legal Aid Justice Center (formerly known as the Charlottesville-Albemarle Legal Aid Society), Loves & Fishes Food Pantry, the Reclaimed Hope Initiative, Monticello Area Community Action Agency (MACCA), Shelter for Help in Emergency (SHE), On Our Own, Partner for Mental Health, and the Fountain Fund. The HOPS (Housing Operations Program Support) program administered by the Office of Community Solutions provides support to our direct service providers for persons experiencing homelessness, including The Haven, PACEM, Virginia Supportive Housing (who runs The Crossings - a Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) provider), and the Blue Ridge Area Coalition for the Homeless (BRACH) [For more information please see: <https://www.charlottesville.gov/1706/Housing-Operations-Program-Support-HOPS> and for FY24 investments please see: <https://stories.opengov.com/charlottesvilleva/published/y1-C4GcVv>].

*Please note that we do not fund the Salvation Army as they do not apply for funding at this time, but we are thankful for their work to provide year-round shelter for those who meet their program criteria. All of the above-mentioned programs provide support to individuals experiencing homelessness, including those who may continue to reside out-of-doors versus entering the shelter.*

Internally, our Human Services, Social Services, and Office of Human Rights may work with community members experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity through their various programs and processes, but overall, it is our nonprofit community that provides the most focused and targeted support for those community members. Our internal work includes our Pathways Fund processes, a part of the Department of Human Services' Community Resource Helpline (<https://www.charlottesville.gov/1099/Community-Resource-Hotline>), which is a means to prevent homelessness; the work of the Home to Hope program which is a part of the Office of Social Equity which provides services for formerly incarcerated persons of whom nearly 50% are experiencing homelessness (<https://www.charlottesville.gov/212/Home-to-Hope>); and the work of the Downtown Job Center (another program under the Office of Social Equity) that provides assistance to job seekers looking for work within the City of Charlottesville (<https://www.charlottesville.gov/209/Downtown-Job-Center>).

(13) Is the Police Dept. up to its authorized census, and, if not, what's being done to get it there after all the officers who've left in the past few years?

**Response:** The police department currently has 2 sworn vacancies. This is down from 30 sworn vacancies in January of 2023.

### **Belmont-Carlton Neighborhood Association**

(14) As a follow up question regarding online information regarding neighborhood associations.

A while back one Neighborhood Leader suggested that the associations use the city website as a way to communicate with their neighborhoods. This would remove the need for associations to have a website of their own. Is it possible for the Associations to maintain a website through the City's Portal?

**Response:** The city does not provide website hosting services for non-City organizations like Neighborhood Associations. However, we may place links provided by a neighborhood association on the neighborhood activity page.

### **Meeting Follow Up**

(15) Status Rugby Shared Use Path and Washington Bike Ramp?

**Response:** Rugby Shared Use Path went to bid, however, there was an issue with the bid form. The issue is being resolved before it can be re-bid.

(16) Barracks Road Right of Way Status:

**Response:** The project is still in ROW phase.

### **Fry Spring's Neighborhood Association**

(17) Status of crosswalk with flashing beacons at JPA/Cleveland/Sunset and other bike/pedestrian improvements to this intersection.

**Response:** This project was funded through planning phase, at which point it was identified that costs would be prohibitively expensive to moving forward on it. We expect to be able to examine alternative solutions for bike & pedestrian improvements at this intersection in the near future.

(18) Measures to curtail speeding cars on Stribling, Robertson and JPA

**Response:** No one has formally requested any speed studies for those roads. We would need to identify that there is in fact a speed problem as defined in the traffic calming manual before looking to implement any remediation measures.

(19) Repairs to the wall/sidewalk at JPA and Stribling

**Response:** We are finalizing the temporary construction easement process and once all the paperwork has been approved/signed off we will be able to move forward with the replacement work (pending weather etc.)

(20) Azalea Park sidewalk connection with Alb. County

***Response:*** Not a budget priority at this time.

(21) Pilot speed traffic enforcement cameras at Johnson (as well as Buford and Clark)

***Response:*** We're still in negotiation with the vendor and procurement redlining their standard contract.