

Summary of Findings

Housing and the Future of Claremont: What types of housing does Claremont need to have a thriving community for all those who live and work here?

Community Conversation held May 31, 2018

This brief report summarizes the topics most frequently discussed and resulting recommendations for action that emerged at Claremont's community conversation on Housing and the Future of Claremont held this past May. The discussion guide used by participants asked them to keep in mind the following questions:

- What do you think about the housing options and conditions in your neighborhood?
- How does housing affect you as a homeowner, landlord, renter, employer, or community investor?
- How can we assure that the quality of housing in Claremont meets the needs of our residents?
- How can we encourage developers to invest in Claremont?
- What are the needs of employers for a workforce that lives in the community?
- What should be the mix of rental and owner-occupied housing?
- Where should new housing be located?
- What are some of the barriers to improving housing in the City?

In their small groups, participants focused especially on these four questions:

- How does housing affect you as a resident, homeowner, renter, landlord, employer, or community investor?
- What do you think about the housing options and conditions in your neighborhood?
- How can we assure that the quality of housing in Claremont meets the needs of our residents?
- What are some of the barriers to improving housing in the City?

By the end of the conversation, the six small groups, consisting of about 45 participants, identified key areas for consideration relative to any efforts to expand housing availability and improve existing stock. The most common concerns centered on four overall topics:

1. Housing quality and types
2. Planning and growth management
3. Zoning and code enforcement
4. Community pride and reputation

Below, each of these topics is listed, with the “action items” identified around each one. These action items/ideas were part of at least one group’s final set of recommendations. In most cases, the ideas were mentioned in multiple groups. There seemed to be a high degree of agreement within and across groups about the most important considerations relative to housing and the future of Claremont.

Housing quality and types

The most frequently mentioned issues relative to quality and type were:

- The need for a full range of diverse housing types, especially condos and multifamily rentals
- Need to emphasize workforce housing in future development
- The need for expanded senior housing that can assure access to infrastructure and commercial activity, including a “livable, walkable downtown”
- Rehabilitate and repurpose existing stock to increase quality, including in the vicinity of the airport and in mill structures, with attention to appearance, attractiveness, and use of recovered building materials
- Address the effect of housing quality on health, and attend to lead paint abatement
- Increase the stock of mid- to upper-end rentals
- Keep open space—increase housing while managing growth
- Use existing single family stock for cohousing and shared rentals

Planning and growth management

- Bring key stakeholders together (e.g., in a “symposium”) to identify needs and opportunities; include builders, construction trades, realtors, bankers, developers, city planners city leaders
- Understand needs of employers, businesses re: housing workforce
- Develop a multigenerational standing housing committee to work with master plan and take actions that come from this conversation
- Hire a consultant to help design a plan, based on current resources and new ones; build on existing information and studies [Note: the Claremont Housing Initiative is launching in Aug 2018 to design such a plan over the coming year.]
- Create neighborhood associations to help with renovation of older stock, funded by city, county, or sponsor
- Create grassroots organizations to educate and support property owners, residents, investors
- Educate and work with state legislators to create investment incentives
- Create more flexible zoning, with attention to character and look
- Consider environmental impact of new development
- Creative solutions to downtown parking
- Research how other cities have moved forward (e.g., White River Junction)
- Need to balance high property tax rate with need to attract new residents

Zoning and code enforcement

- Hold absentee landlords accountable
- Create regulatory incentives for new construction; address zoning regulations re: condos to be sure they are not a barrier to development
- Consider creating a TIF zone; identify needed partners to develop TIF District proposal
- Attend to code enforcement, including unit-level inspections (rather than just building level)

Community pride and reputation

- Take action to build up Claremont's sense of community pride and improve its reputation; accentuate the positives through local media
- Recognize the potential value of the airport, Sugar River, and downtown parks as assets that can attract new investors and residents
- Address school upgrades to increase reputation
- City manager and entire community together should promote the value of Claremont to others especially developers

Prepared by NH Listens, July 2018