

Countywide Housing Affordability Taskforce (CHAT)

November 30, 2007

Meeting Notes

(copies of all handouts / draft reports are available at cob.org)

Members Names: Seth Fleetwood, Co-Chair; Terry Bornemann, Co-Chair; Mayor Bromley; Charlotte Eastman-Pros; Derek Long; John Shorthill; Hart Hodges; Larry West; Nancy Larsen; Gary Reid; Ted Mischaikov; Jon Soine; Paul Schissler; Ralph Black; Gail de Hoog; John Harmon; Barbara Brenner; and Stan Snapp.

Members Absent: Ted Mischaikov, Jon Soine, John Shorthill, and Barbara Brenner.

Staff Present: David Cahill, Heather Aven, and Samya Lutz.

Guests: Tom Beckwith, Bill Schenkin, and Steve Price were representing the consulting team.

Terry called meeting to order at 9:00 am

1. Approval of November 9, 2007 notes

Seth Fleetwood moved to approve the minutes as corrected – John Harmon seconded.

ALL AYES.

2. Discussion

Tom Beckwith announced that 450 households have been recruited and are expecting their surveys on Tuesday. He provided his background as it relates to doing surveys and explained why “don’t know” and “not sure” are not choices on the surveys he does. He stated that it takes the community member about 2 hours to figure out what they want to say, and about 5 to 10 minutes to read the answer when called for feedback.

Discussion on Survey questions

- 1-4 are control questions
- 5-13, 40, 41, 45, 49, 63, 72, 74, 75, 88, 95, 96, 114-116, and 132-135
Tom explained that these questions could be eliminated to help reduce the survey to approximately 100 questions
- Tom pointed out that 53-56 could be condensed into one question, 79-80 could be combined into one question; and 84-85 could also be combined.
- 83
Tom suggested removing “rural” from the question.

Tom reiterated that this was a very detailed survey, but assured the group that responses are received, and they are very typical of those community members that will vote on future financial measures. He suggested that the survey be made available on the web page, so citizens can see it even though they may not have been selected for a call back.

Paul expressed his concern that the information gathered will not be valid or reliable enough to base the recommendations on. He also reminded the group that their recommendations are NOT to be testing if it will be politically liable or publicly popular.

Terry feels the information received from the survey could be beneficial to both the City and County Councils as they make their decision based on the recommendations from the group. He shared that his expectation of the taskforce is to use their expertise, as well as other tools at their disposal, when making their recommendation.

Derek wanted to know if there is help available to the public if they need clarification on a question.

Tom stated that the “obvious” can be clarified; otherwise, those questions that are not understood are noted as “don’t know”.

John H. commented that reliability should not be a concern. He pointed out that the survey could be a tool that might help focus the group’s efforts on things that are most likely to succeed. He also pointed out that, in his opinion, the public deserves more credit.

Nancy agreed that public opinion is important to both the City and County Councils. She stated that the survey is one tool that could meet some of the criteria the Councils are looking for. She requested that definitions of terms be included in the survey.

Gary expressed his concern that the survey might be looked at as hard data if submitted to the Councils. He stated that there are ideas presented in the survey that have not been discussed among the group, and is concerned that the survey might be too specific.

Tom responded that the survey is intended to be a measure of general attitude and reaction.

Larry wanted to know why the Urban Growth Area boundaries (#36) is under market trends, if the same types of concepts (#57-58) are under measures that reduce land cost. He also wanted clarification on why one was agree / disagree answer option and the others were highest / lowest answer option.

Tom reiterated that it was set up that way because this survey is a measurement of attitudes.

Steve encouraged the taskforce to look at the survey as an informational tool to use as the group forms their recommendation. He pointed out that the survey could be compared to a “neighborhood meeting”.

Charlotte wanted to know how this approach can help make the final recommendation.

Tom replied that this survey will help the group rank the tools from those with the least to those with the greatest public support. He also pointed out the survey will help indicate if there would be public financial support. Tom also stated that based on the answers to the questions, the approach that will be supported by the public can also be formed.

JOHN HARMON MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MAIL-OUT / PHONE-BACK SURVEY WITH THE RECOMMENDED REDUCTION OF QUESTIONS. NANCY SECONDED.

Gary opposed based on the grammar errors throughout the survey

Terry suggested that any grammatical corrections be e-mailed directly to Tom so that those issues can be fixed prior to the questionnaire going out.

GARY REID SUGGESTED A FRIENDLY AMENDMENT TO ALLOW TOM TO MAKE CHANGES TO THE SURVEY AS NECESSARY, BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMITTEE.

The taskforce would like #63 to remain a part of the survey.

Samya requested that question #134 remain part of the survey. She also reminded the group that there was discussion about separating #77 and #78. She pointed out that #60 and #105 be re-worded to separate attached accessory dwelling units (which are currently allowed) from detached accessory dwelling units.

VOTE: 12-2 (HODGES, SCHISLER OPPOSED).

Discussion on Financial Implications

Tom referenced the Affordable Housing Strategies Spreadsheet, and stated that the trends were based on the 2006 annual financial report on the County's website.

Option 1 – Property Tax, General Fund Subsidy

Tom explained that the property tax being collected now is going into the General Fund to fund all governmental services. He pointed out that, at this time, no money is earmarked for affordable housing strategies. He stated that alternative 1, 2, and 3 would be 0%, 3%, and 5% respectively and that the funds used from the General Fund would need to be replaced.

Option 2 – Local Option Sales Tax

Tom stated that this option requires a vote that will allow an additional 1% to be added to retail sales. Tom pointed out that he is unsure if this optional sales tax has already been used in our County.

Option 3 – Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) 3

Tom pointed out that although REET 3 can only be used for open space and trails, REET 2 can be used on housing under certain provisions. He explained that REET 3 is the

option to present to the voters because 1 and 2 are currently being used. He stated that when using REET 2 for housing, REET 3 could be used to replace that money.

Samya read a portion of the letter written by Joan Beardslee dated 12/16/06 as it relates to what the Municipal Research Center says about using REET. She read that “Whatcom County and all other counties, other than San Juan County, are prevented from using a REET for housing.”

Option 4 – Local Option Vehicle License Fee and Option 5 – Local Option Fuel Tax

Tom stated that these fees have to be used for transportation funding. He explained that all these two options would allow if for is the replacement of the money used from the General Fund (option 1).

Option 6 – Property Tax Levy

Tom explained that this would be a supplemental levy. He stated that the levy has to be written to show exactly what the money will be used for. He pointed out that this option produces the most money and the least amount of complications on how the money can be used.

Gary liked the Tax Levy option because the public will know exactly what the money they are being asked to contribute is going to be used for.

Paul commented that the process that was used for the Greenways levy was successful. He acknowledged his support for the levy option.

Discussion on CHAT Action Plan Checklist

Tom suggested that this action plan be used to validate why some of the options were chosen to be included in the recommendation. He went through and talked about each section and stated that he could add more questions to illustrate where the items from the toolkit fits, and asked the group to add any information they felt was missing.

3. Next Meeting’s Agenda (12/14/07)

- Format of the report
- Hart’s discussion question
- Decision on what is agreed on and what is majority / minority.

Adjourned: 11:00 am