



Prioritizing Diverse & Affordable Housing Workshop Summary

#WeNeedAffordableHousing #YesInMyBackyard #SustainableCommunities #ChapelHill
#Carrboro #OrangeCounty #affordablehousing

On Friday, May 17th, NEXT held the second of three workshops in the Sustainable Community Series, Prioritizing Diverse & Affordable Housing, at the CURRENT ArtSpace and Studio in Carolina Square. We started with Sue Hunter talking about NEXT's values of addressing climate change and advancing equity. She explained that our goal is to look at where we have been and where we are going, with a focus on the relationship between affordable housing, climate justice, and equity. We have an affordable housing crisis in our community. Area Median Income (AMI) is \$75,900 in Chapel Hill for a household of 4. A household making 80% AMI is qualified for most income-based housing. Only 57% of our community make 80% AMI while 43% make less than 80% AMI. At 50% AMI a person is eligible for a Housing Choice Voucher (suggesting we have a high need for help with affordable housing in our community). A whole 20% of our community makes less than 30% AMI, allowing them less than \$600 per month to spend on housing and utilities.

Our shelters run by Inter-Faith Council (IFC) are continuously full as folks don't have affordable housing to move to, leading to others living unsheltered. There are 150 people homeless each night and 40 of them go unsheltered. 46% of our homeless population are African Americans, a disproportionate number. We have a lot of tools to create affordable housing, but we need community commitment and political will to make. Delores Bailey, Executive Director of EmPOWERment, Inc., presented the history of housing policy in Chapel Hill & Carrboro, along with Bernice Hackney, a longtime Northside resident. Bailey provided us with a history of the African American community in where they owned their own homes, which many have lost due to gentrification.

Corey Root, Orange County Homeless Programs Coordinator/Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness, and Cain Twyman, Carrboro Affordable Housing Advisory Commission and Orange County Affordable Housing Advisory Board, spoke at the workshop about the range of options in our toolkit and what exists or is planned for affordable housing in Chapel Hill and Carrboro. They shared information on the types of affordable housing that exist in our county and also examined the racial disparities in who is experiencing homelessness in Orange County. This IS NOT an accident, but developed because of the intentional systemic racism in how policies have been carried out. We are also seeing that the Latinx community is not seeking the affordable housing services they are eligible for, which is likely due to fear of predatory immigration policies. We CAN solve this issue in our community and we must because affordable housing is heavily interconnected with many issues.

Melissa McCullough with the Sierra Club Orange-Chatham Group came to speak about the connection between climate justice and affordable housing. McCullough talked about how

the U.S. housing is historically discriminatory, citing the example of redlining that systematically excluded People of Color from certain neighborhoods. U.S. transportation policy has also affected affordable housing with highway construction destroying affordable housing and African American communities, causing white flight. Equity is necessary for sustainability.

Income is the greatest indicator of a person's carbon footprint. Those with higher incomes have larger carbon footprints, BUT the poor face the most impacts from climate change. To address climate change via affordable housing, we must make sure homes are energy efficient and location efficient (near to transportation, services and jobs). As transportation is the number one contributor of GHG, we need to plan land use that allows people to not drive. We must create a place where people want to be! This includes social inclusion, a diverse workforce, vibrancy, and an extensive transit system.

A recent graduate of UNC School of Law and the Department of City and Regional Planning, Matt Norchi, presented on innovations in affordable housing policy. He shared an example of how Durham is adding density to address affordable housing (and climate change!). Norchi addresses the 'Missing Middle' which are more affordable types of housing that are often missing in our communities and many others. The "Missing Middle" are the types of housing between single family homes and large apartment buildings, like duplexes, multiplexes, and town houses. They have been eliminated from zoning plans, but many cities are currently attempting to remove barriers to these types of housing.

His student team studied four cities: Asheville, Durham, Boulder, and Olympia. A learning outcome from this research is that Asheville and Durham are both working on zoning and density issues to address affordable housing and climate change (to increase housing by increasing density). These Housing Choice Initiatives are designed to increase density to increase housing stock to increase affordability, but require political will power to succeed. There are many organizations working on this issue including Casa, Community Home Trust, Community Empowerment Fund, EmPOWERment, and the Affordable Housing Coalition.

We ended the workshop with a discussion on affordable housing in our community. There are Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) like the PeeWee Homes here that are one way to address affordable housing, though many Neighborhood Conversation Districts disallow them and we have quite a number of NCDs. We do not have housing for folks at or below 30% AMI and more units are being lost than gained. We can address these issues by using political will to gain more units in Chapel Hill and Carrboro. The Greene Tract is one potential local resource for affordable housing, already owned by Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and Orange County, along with a nature preserve.

The present and future of affordable housing in our community is deeply intertwined with issues of equity and climate change. We have to understand how the system works as a whole in order to meet the needs of our community and its future.

Here's an excellent podcast that discusses our nationwide affordable housing crisis if you wish to keep the conversation going: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/voxs-the-weeds/id1042433083?i=1000438319900>

A huge thank you to all of our presenters as well as our caterer, PIRI Durham, our venue - The CURRENT ArtSpace and Studio, and our audience! We hope to see you all at the next workshop in the Sustainable Communities Series: Designing for Vibrant Communities on June 6th in the same location. <http://nextnc.org/events/>