Town of Windsor Housing Element Update

Community Workshop Summary

On July 8, 2014, the Town of Windsor held a Housing Element Community Workshop from 6:00pm to 8:00pm at Town Hall. At the meeting, attendees heard a presentation about the Town's Housing Element Update and then participated in two exercises to discuss and provide input on housing challenges and solutions in Windsor. The exercises were carried out in two groups of participants. The following summarizes key housing-related topics discussed during the meeting.

Exercise 1: Major Housing Issues
During the first exercise, workshop participants discussed and identified the most significant housing issues facing Windsor. Based on the identified issues, the two groups identified their top three issues (see Exercise 2). The following list provides a summary of all the identified issues.

- The balancing act. How can the Town generate sufficient funding to support the development of affordable housing while also encouraging market rate housing? The loss of redevelopment means we need to find new revenue sources for affordable housing. A regional approach to housing issues would make more sense.
- There are a lot of hoops to jump through if you want to build affordable housing. It can actually be more expensive to build affordable housing because you need a grant writer to find all the different sources for funding (up to 20 percent more expensive).
- Affordability to purchase or rent homes. Affordability is a growing challenge, especially for senior citizens living on fixed incomes and low wage workers. There is a growing sector of jobs do not support the ability of lower wage workers to purchase a home. Working class families need to be able to afford to live here. Need housing to retain people who like to live in Windsor and who grew up here.
- Overcrowded Housing. There is a growing issue of having too many families in one home.
- Market paralysis due to low inventory and high prices (tight housing market). People are stuck in their homes because there aren't housing options available to meet their needs. Growing families can't move into larger homes. Seniors conversely cannot downsize.
- There is a lack of mixed-income housing/neighborhoods. Windsor needs a variety of housing types that allow people to move fluidly from rental housing to ownership.
- Dealing with Housing as an isolated issue. Housing issues need to be looked at within the context of all the other factors impacting quality of life (living wage, demographics, types of jobs, etc.). The Town needs to ask the question, "what kind of community do we want to be?" The Town needs to evaluate community priorities, not just check boxes.
- Need to focus on Windsor's future and orient development toward Town center growth and transit oriented growth and address issues of climate protection, water capacity, and traffic.

Exercise 2: Solutions to Housing Issues

During the second exercise, workshop participants discussed and identified potential solutions to the three most significant housing issues from Exercise 1. The following list identifies the top three housing issues identified by each group and provides a summary of all the suggested solutions.

Group 1, Issue #1: Market Paralysis

- Provide opportunities for a greater diversity of housing inventory. Need to identify the current mix of housing types in Windsor and the demand.
- Annex areas within the urban growth boundary so the boundary coincides with the Town Limits. Designate/zone annexed areas to provide a greater diversity of housing options.
- Change State and other requirements so the Town can spend money on things that are worthwhile, not just exercises that don't really amount to anything, but cost a lot of money and time (e.g., the Housing Element).
- Provide programs that assist people who are "stuck" in a home they have outgrown or is too large for them. Help people find housing that is more suitable to their needs.

Group 1, Issue #2: Dealing With Housing as an Isolated Issue

- Understand that consequences/impact of specific types of housing/land use issues and the effect on quality of life.
- Conduct a fiscal impact analysis on certain types of housing development to evaluate the impact on Town revenues and services.
- Consider the walkability of new development; what are the health issues associated with new housing development?
- Consider changing demographics and how that affects the need for different housing types.

Group 1, Issue #3: Determine our Priorities

- Make a plan for diversity and inclusion, and then implement the plan. Base it on our values, place matters.
- Understand our current mix of development. Identify what works and what doesn't (e.g., pockets of low income housing). Identify best practices.

Group 2, Issue #1: Housing Inventory

- Redevelop the civic center (i.e., Town Hall, Policy Station, Library) into mixed-use/mixed-income development that includes a range of housing affordability, commercial/office uses, and civic uses (e.g., library).

Group 2, Issue #2: Working Class Affordability

- Create a Silent 2nd program that provides housing for essential personnel (e.g., firefighters, police officers, medics, doctors/nurses, teachers).
- Do not use inclusionary in-lieu fees to create pods of affordable housing. Integrate affordable units with market rate units so there is no difference.
- Encourage use of the Town's Density Bonus program.
- Encourage the development of secondary units.
- Consider units that are 1,200 square feet or less affordable by definition.
- Preserve and expand mobile homes. They provide affordable housing stock.

Group 2, Issue #3: Smarter Housing Growth

- Require greater diversity in the size of housing units in new developments and mix the different size units so that unit types aren't segregated.
- Remove minimum parking requirements in new housing (unbundle parking). Use parking maximums instead of parking minimums.
- Encourage the use of Planned Development (PD) zoning.