

CAHSA Meeting Minutes

Forum held at Miami Beach Regional Library, Thursday, November 16, 2006
Compiled by Javier Morejon and June Randall

Meeting called to order at 6:33 p.m.

Below are the summaries of the public comments only.

Public Housing, Section 8, Homeless, and Special Housing Needs: No public comment.

Maintenance of Affordability:

Janet Grant - Being able to provide the rent from month to month is the biggest problem that most of the poor and the homeless face, yet they have to look at other issues as well. What happens if the taxes increase or if the insurance continues to increase? What happens if the plumbing needs work? How can one possibly focus on these issues if they are worried about making the rent?

She also wanted to know how the forums were advertised to get input from the population. Advised that the meetings were advertised through the newspaper and that additional promotional work would be done through the use of radio advertisements and information packets that would be available at Team Metro offices. She had only found out about the meeting on the previous day.

Her third point talked about the problems with condo conversion. Overnight, people are getting thrown out of their apartments so that they can be converted to condos which in some cases (like the Cameo Apartments) are not even built afterwards. This results in squatters getting into the units and non-payment of fees, etc. What is being done to help solve this problem because people are being displaced in large numbers?

Grant also mentioned that buildings for the elderly were being constructed that did not provide for meeting rooms, facilities, and areas for lunch and recreation.

Roberto Datorre – of the Miami Beach Community Development Corporation: His agency provides affordable housing and has produced 300 units on the beach with another 108 units about to become available. He believes that perhaps the forum has not reached out to the community as much as is needed; recommended placing ads in paper and information on website.

Datorre suggested that the County look at financing impact fees in order to help very-low income residents who need housing assistance. He also wanted to know if it was possible to create parcels that could be used to develop affordable housing and suggested the creation of a funding source that could be used to provide affordable and workforce housing.

Terry Foble – of the Miami Coalition for the Homeless: Added her comments to one of the prior speakers (Ms. Grant). We all saw several articles in the Miami Herald about the situation with the Cameo Apartments. This is one example of the destruction of affordable housing within the community.

She wanted to find out if it was possible to grant permits to developers unless it was clear that funding was available for such projects to go forward. "Owners need to sell units in order to have a high-rise and unfortunately they are not able to sell these units." The property was being fenced off to keep the homeless from occupying the building.

Foble mentioned that the article followed people who had been evicted and said some of them would probably become homeless. She asked the committee to study the issue and ask the question "Should development proceed without construction if it meant that affordable housing is being destroyed."

Commissioner Barreiro was acknowledged for his presence on the stand. He communicated that these forums are here for the public to provide input to making a difference. He referenced the upcoming affordable housing summit and mentioned the need to start acting on the recommendations through various ordinances, etc.

Rental, Homeownership, and Rehabilitation (including Workforce Housing):

Karl Kennedy – of the Miami Beach Community Development Corporation: Has lived in the community for over 25 years and built 300 units of affordable housing within the City of Miami Beach which is one of the most expensive areas in the County.

He mentioned that it takes several months for a person to close mostly because the different agencies are not working together. Sometimes it takes up to five mortgages to close. It is clear that the multiple agencies don't always work well together. Others don't want to be involved when MDHA gets involved because it takes too long for the homes to close. MDHA adds additional underwriting, which adds an additional 30 days, a step he believes is unnecessary. If the bank for example needs six items and MDHA needs four items, why not wait to draft until all the items have been given. He believes the second underwriting could be done by a bank, a step that could reduce the amount of time it takes to close.

Kennedy also mentioned the poor attitude by MDHA staff and described the case of one of his clients who was ready to move, but the division staff won't look at the file and give it the attention they needs. He said they were apathetic and acted as if they had no sympathy for their clients and proceeded at their own pace because they were low-income. Applications disappear into a "black hole." MDHA seems to work in a vacuum and it's not doing anyone any good.

He believes that the agencies involved need to learn to work with others, present and be ready with the paperwork when needed and have to have a commitment and suggested the committee look at what could be done to streamline and reduce red tape. Organizations like his have to respond quickly but the County takes up to one year.

Janet Grant: She wanted to know if the committee was strictly looking at homeownership or were they also looking at rentals. She expressed a concern about a three-day lineup for some openings with Miami Beach public housing.

She went to a HUD meeting afterwards and they said they lined people up. No one was helping the elderly or disabled. Forms were being handed out in the line to sign up for help and a blind man was unable to be processed because he could not fill out his application without assistance. A police officer had to help this individual fill out his paperwork.

It seems to her that the committee is overlooking people who have disabilities and believes they need to do more outreach to help them because by the time that people find out something is available; it's often too late to apply.

Commissioner Bruno Barriero (Speaking from the presenter's table): Said that Grant raised a good point, mentioned the Scantron application that younger individuals had no problem filling out but many people who are elderly or disabled or who have language barriers were not housed because their forms were rejected for not being properly filled out. He especially stressed these problems among those individuals who could not complete the applications because they could not read/understand the language. He also mentioned the rental programs funded by private developers were not addressing this particular segment of the population.

Janet Grant: We also need to be sure that the elderly and those with disabilities are not left stuck in buildings without access to the community.

Pedro Martinez – Harbor House director: His organization is a 501c3 which services clients who earn less than \$7,000 per year. He mentioned that there are organizations, such as his, which are willing to house very low-income people; however, there are no incentives for the private sector to do so. He mentioned that tax rates have tripled (on one of his buildings taxes jumped from \$25,000 to \$45,000 in one year) and recommended that tax incentives be provided to property owners who would like to house these individuals.

Mayor's Land Use Workgroup:

Terry Foble – Miami Coalition for the Homeless: There are a lot of incentives to build for low-income workforce but no incentives to build for very-low and extremely low-income families, mostly because they look at land use and consider "workforce" housing.

She believes that it is important to focus on all income groups, especially those who earn minimum wage to include all of the workforce not just teachers, firefighters, etc but also people such as landscapers and childcare workers, etc. Many people in the workforce earn very little money and if they are being paid minimum wage, they would not be in the income group eligible for workforce housing. She is concerned that the term "workforce" is misleading.

Robert Datorre – Since his organization serves very-low income residents he has noticed that the process for those who do not have a high enough income is often more complicated. This puts such clients at a disadvantage. He recommended that the committee provides an organization that would support developments which target this community.

Janet Grant - Believes that the County should enforce impact fees on the developers of luxury condominium units whom he claims receive a "break" by getting away with not paying what they should be paying. The luxury developers seem to be getting breaks they don't really need.

Public/Private Employer Housing Incentive Program: No Public Comment

Tax Relief, Incentives, Abatement, and Property Insurance Issues: No Public Comment

Public Education and Information Committee:

Local resident (Hispanic male) - I think these things we are discussing are substantial and important. They add focus and improve the understanding of the affordable housing industry.

I believe that we need to create an entity or organization that can create affordable housing in an organized manner, independently. Such a group would improve the collaboration in this field which is currently non-existent. He mentioned other area such as Chicago, Richmond, Va., and New York where they had gotten together to provide services for residents and reference other fields where all the entities worked together as a team to deliver services to their clients.

He believes that proper training and service delivery are crucial and the various roles need to be performed but in a collaborative setting not currently seen in this industry.

The gentleman made mention of the fact that all the various providers tend to point fingers at each other when things were not done correctly and the government need to take over the role as mentor and teacher and make sure that housing gets built because this is what elevates people.

Doris Williams -There is a crisis here. Housing is a place for people to live and more people should be at meetings like this.

She mentioned that there is nothing new with these recommendations other that they are simple and easy to read.

The majority of people (22,000), regardless of where they live, don't have access to affordable housing yet all the elected officials and housing people do is get together to meet and talk about solutions without anything getting done. If a person earns minimum wage, how are they going to afford the \$100,000 for a house or the \$1,000 for an apartment – who has a big enough salary that they can afford that?

She wanted to know how many more years would it take for people to understand that you have to have education so that people could take care of all the issues that come with homeownership.

Where is the housing? Where are the rentals and the affordable housing for seniors? She has lived in the community since the 1940s's and on the beach since the 1970's and remembers when such housing existed. Now, nothing is there. If people are earning minimum wage, is there really affordable housing? She believes that there should be affordable housing for everyone regardless of age or income.

Is the community really being practical in determine affordability? Even when they enter an apartment, they still need all the other amenities such as furniture, water, light, etc.

Roberto Datorre - It's funny, a few years ago no one wanted to talk about affordable housing and now we need to do something about it. We need to be sure that there is a long-term commitment because there is always a need for affordable housing.

Ray Malvez– 11-year resident of the area, was a realtor in California for over 40 years and has seen similar situations nationwide.

He believes that runaway housing has been created without disregard for the elderly or disabled and wants to know why there was no master plan. He also wanted to know how people could be removed from existing housing without the creation of replacement housing for them to live in. Malvez agrees with an earlier speaker in that he does not feel the need for more planning, more meetings, etc. we've given money to faith-based organization but very little is getting done. We need to act, perhaps by purchasing and building on land ourselves so that affordable housing can be constructed. We need action and execution.

Judy Feinman –She believes that affordable housing is very important and wondered if the county could set up a one-stop shop that could provide housing information on the web. Dale replied by explaining about the soft launch of the new housing central portal.

Another resident reminded that not everyone has a computer, but Dale pointed out the library system has internet access. Or they could call 311 for information.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:20 p.m.

Location: New Shared Folder/CAHSA Meeting Comments 11-16-06