

Habitat Strategic Plan Breakfast & Community Workshop

Meeting Report

November 17, 2017



Overview

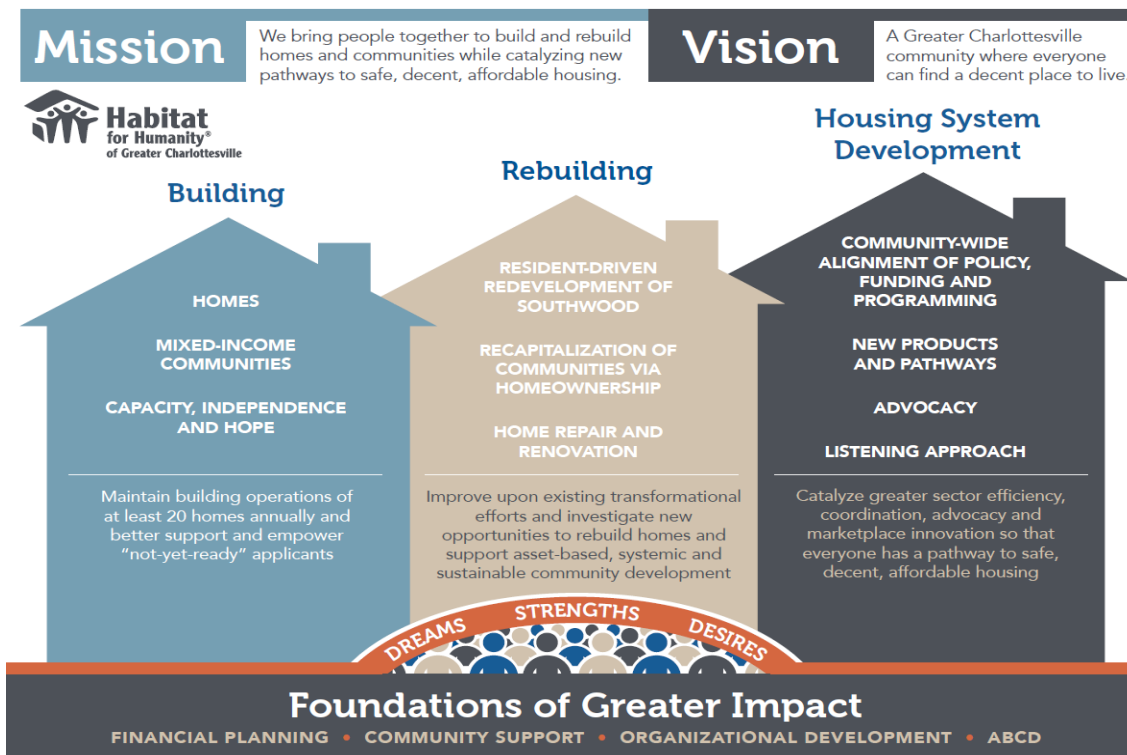
On September 25th, 2017 *Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville* hosted a Strategic Plan Breakfast and Community Workshop to achieve the following goals:

- Share and elicit feedback on Habitat’s new 2017 – 2022 strategic plan and thank the community for its input throughout the plan’s development;
- Facilitate a broad dialogue and visioning session among community members from diverse backgrounds on the issue of affordable housing in Charlottesville;
- Catalyze further community conversations around achieving greater collaboration and collective action around affordable housing.

“The need for a community collaboration, a community commitment around affordable housing is key”

- Meeting Participant

Habitat welcomed a diverse group of more than 170 community members to the conversation including advocates, non-profit service providers, elected officials, city/county staff, housing developers, bankers and other local citizens interested in the issue of affordable housing. The meeting began with a [presentation](#) on the new [strategic plan](#) by Habitat’s president and CEO, Dan Rosensweig, followed by a brief Q&A with participants. For the remaining 45 minutes of the meeting, participants engaged in intense small group conversations. In these discussions, individuals shared their hopes and dreams of a future Charlottesville where everyone has a



Habitat’s Strategic Plan graphic. Related questions and answers included in Appendix B

commitments necessary to achieve that vision. Questions for the small group exercise are included in Appendix A.

Several key themes emerged throughout the table conversations that reflect both an aspirational vision around affordable housing as well as strategic opportunities and challenges confronting this community. This report provides a high-level summary of these key themes and identifies areas of consensus and opportunity. It then concludes with some proposed next steps to continue this collective work and conversation.



This synthesis was produced by Habitat based on the feedback and scribe forms filled out by meeting participants. All handwritten forms were digitally scanned and are available for public review [here](#).

Key Themes

1) Authentic Community Engagement

Participants emphasized the critical importance of authentic listening and meaningful engagement with those most affected by the affordable housing crisis – low-income individuals and families. To create sustainable solutions that are responsive to the needs of those we seek to serve, we need to ensure that they are empowered to drive the conversation.

Several conversations called attention to the deep history of racial injustice and disparities in the housing sector and the importance of proactively engaging local African-American voices in these conversations. Discussions around the room acknowledged that without a strong grassroots component, any common plan or vision we create is not likely to address the root causes of the issue or gain the community-wide trust and buy-in necessary to drive a sustainable community change process.

While the importance of community engagement was universally acknowledged, there was some tension in the responses around how engagement should happen and for how long.



Residents of Southwood participating in a planning meeting with Habitat and the planning team

On the one hand, there were some who expressed frustration with the “slow” pace of change, advocating for a kind of “just do it” ethos. On the other hand, there were those who felt overwhelmed by the current pace of change overall in Charlottesville and threatened by what they perceive as plans to alter their neighborhoods in a way that gentrifies and displaces. Almost all agreed that change is inevitable and that reinvestment is not necessarily zero sum – that is, we need to build trust between all stakeholders and gain commitments to engage in reinvestment without erasing the culture and the human ties of existing communities, even as the physical form and demographics change.

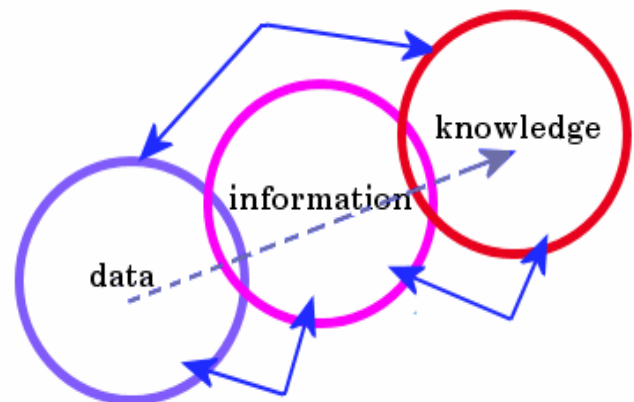
Key areas of consensus and opportunity:

- Meaningfully **incorporating the voices** of residents in community conversations about affordable housing will require proactive, creative and thoughtful engagement strategies and a mix of approaches;
- City, County and nonprofits should invest in more effective outreach strategies to reach residents in historically neglected neighborhoods and offer services that “**meet people where they are**” literally and figuratively;
- Adopt a true **asset-based approach** to engaging low income communities - center the conversations on their strengths and dreams , while recognizing needs and barriers;
- Engage and support more low-income residents to participate in and lead **public education and advocacy efforts** around affordable housing.

2) Building Collective Knowledge

As participants worked to envision a better future, several important questions emerged around the current housing “ecosystem” and the depth and nature of housing needs across the community:

- What kinds of partnerships currently exist between housing agencies?
- What kinds of housing programs exist for seniors and other subpopulations?
- What is considered “affordable” housing?
- What are the key strengths and assets of our system?
- What are the key gaps and weaknesses of our system?



Several participants called for greater investments in research and dissemination efforts and more opportunities for cross-agency information sharing to enhance collective knowledge of existing resources, providers, services, partnerships, community needs and strengths. Many stressed the importance of collecting and analyzing various sources of local data to more accurately understand the nature and depth of housing need in the region. This includes

aggregating quantitative datasets as well as qualitative “grassroots” data collection conversations with people who identify as in need of better housing solutions. In addition to better knowledge of local resources, participants expressed a desire to understand the current state of research on various issues ranging from best practices in urban planning to the effectiveness of mixed-income communities and how this can be applied to Charlottesville/Albermarle.

Key areas of consensus and opportunity:

- Perform a **comprehensive analysis** of local data sources to accurately capture the depth and scope of housing needs in the population;
- Create a local **“asset map”** of existing housing sector strengths and assets to identify potential areas of intervention and collaboration and a basis for developing a comprehensive affordable housing strategy;
- Conduct **grassroots conversations** to understand people’s real world experiences and housing goals; translate this information into a “dataset” organized around real and perceived barriers to finding better housing;
- Build a knowable **“housing ladder of opportunity”** so that anyone – from neighbors seeking better housing to funders interested in helping – can understand the pathways toward better housing.

3) Collaboration and Partnerships

Another predominant theme that emerged was the need for stronger partnerships and collaboration across the board – among jurisdictions, communities, sectors, agencies, interest groups, funders/investors, etc. There was a clear recognition that the affordable housing problem in our community is bigger than any single agency or sector alone and its resolution will require “radical collaboration” both within and across sectors.



Also, it was brought up several times that there needs to be some sort of “backbone structure,” supported by a key facilitator/honest broker keeping forward momentum going around the issue and allowing the community to make choices and speak as one. Although several respondents thanked Habitat for catalyzing conversation around this need, the majority felt that Habitat and other service providers should not ultimately assume this backbone role.

Key areas of consensus and opportunity:

- City and county governments need to work together in more intentional and strategic ways to create **regional solutions** to the affordable housing crisis;

- Form a **housing coalition** capable of bringing different voices to the table, building political will, driving a common vision and action plan, and informing system-level decisions;
- Leveraging **private donations** to build an infrastructure supporting a consistent and strategic effort to improve the local housing system;
- Aggressively engage **private sector** partners in the effort - particularly commercial banks and other potential investors ;
- Involve **the University of Virginia**, to identify how it contributes to the local housing crisis and what it can do to be part of the solution ;
- More deliberate, strategic collaboration between agencies in the housing sector to create a flexible and dynamic **continuum of housing options** that promote choice and accommodate changing life situations over time.

4) Workforce Development and Self- Sufficiency

Participants recognized that the ongoing affordable housing crisis in the region is interrelated with dismal employment prospects for many local residents (unemployment, under-employment, low wages). In order to achieve the vision of a Charlottesville where everyone has a path to safe decent housing, both housing and employment must be addressed aggressively and simultaneously.

Participants passionately argued that the conversation around affordable housing needs to move beyond shelter and physical units to encompass the notion that *housing is a critical foundation for enhancing self-sufficiency, community integration, and family well-being*. Broadening the conversation requires that we think holistically about the aspirations and assets of low-income residents and necessitates cross-sector partnerships.

Key areas of consensus and opportunity:

- Integrate effective **wrap-around self-sufficiency services** (job training/development, financial literacy training, life skills training, etc.) into public housing and other low-income housing programs;
- Promote better **collaboration** between housing and workforce development agencies in ways that create structured pathways to self-sufficiency and movement up a “housing ladder”.



5) Smart, Holistic Urban Planning and Redevelopment

Several conversations underscored the critical role of urban design strategies and planning policies for promoting healthy, egalitarian, and well-integrated “communities of opportunity.” The conversations encompassed a variety of topics from embracing a more inclusive design culture that actively invites residents to the planning table to adopting city design principles and zoning policies that foster greater integration and walkability between neighborhoods. Transportation was a central topic, with many calling for better infrastructure and more innovative transit solutions, particularly between the city and outlying county areas.



The conversations also reflected the common density-versus-preservation debate that often affects cities undergoing rapid growth and transformation. Many participants strongly voiced the need for policies and practices that allow the city to aggressively “go vertical” in order to meet the growing demand for (affordable and market-rate) housing and commercial development. Others stressed the need to balance density with healthy community development and preservation that uphold “livability” features like privacy, green space, natural light and historical structures and spaces.



Many conversations expressed a strong desire to move beyond this unproductive and longstanding binary dialogue. To make measurable progress on affordable housing, we must engage in solution-oriented conversations that involve thoughtful consideration of tradeoffs and compromise and a rethinking of community priorities. Many expressed

gratitude for the opportunity that morning to speak to people from different agencies, sectors and backgrounds and recognized the significance of this type of dialogue for promoting better connection, understanding, and compromise.

Key areas of consensus and opportunity:

- **Redevelopment plans within the Strategic Investment Area and form-based code development** should meaningfully incorporate the voices of low-income residents that will be directly affected by these actions;
- **City and county planning bodies** should collaborate more strategically and create a joint vision for development across the region;
- Design communities and zoning policies that **promote better integration and walkability** within and between neighborhoods ;
- Promote **zoning and land use policies** that aggressively incentivize the development of more affordable housing in the region.

6) Mixed-Income Communities

Another prevailing theme throughout the conversations was mixed-income communities. Participants voiced varied opinions both for and against the expansion of these types of developments. Some embraced the idea of adopting mixed-income communities as a core redevelopment strategy to deconcentrate poverty and promote greater racial integration and equality of opportunity in the area. Others voiced concerns around mixed-income communities as a gentrifying force in the city and focused instead on the need to preserve existing low-income, particularly African-American, communities and the rich cultural and familial bonds that underlie them. Several participants noted the need to gain a better collective understanding of the current research around mixed-income communities and fostering a local dialogue around this issue, particularly with those that live in these neighborhoods.



Angel Turner and her son Zechariah in front of their Habitat home at Burnet Commons, a mixed-income community in Charlottesville

Again, as with the growth vs. preservation tension, several in the room recognized the crippling nature of binary discourses that present only two alternatives – reinvestment/gentrification vs. disinvestment/cultural preservation. In order to move forward we need to come together around a middle ground, a balanced vision and strategy that can only emerge from a place of mutual understanding and compromise.

Key areas of consensus and opportunity:

- **Synthesize and disseminate existing research** and case studies on the effectiveness of mixed income developments and best practices;
- Hold a series of **community conversations** that bring together an array of local stakeholders including developers, housing providers, public officials, and local

residents, to gather community input about local successes and challenges around **mixed-income developments;**

- Approach **community reinvestment** with a commitment to not displacing and replacing the culture and people that live in communities;
- Make redevelopment more a product of **invitation rather than coercion.**

- Hold a **community-wide convening and/or series of community forums** to continue these conversations and work toward building a collective vision for affordable housing;
- Fundraise and engage academic partners to create a housing “**asset map**” and conduct an analysis of key opportunities for expanding affordable housing in the area;
- Create, appoint, and fund a **backbone entity** to coordinate partnerships in the sector and keep momentum around solutions.

Habitat’s Next Steps

The ideas generated in the meeting will inform how Habitat will work in partnership with the community to achieve the vision put forth in our new strategic plan. Specifically, Habitat has already begun work toward a few key recommendations that emerged from the conversations:

- **Authentic Community Engagement:** Conduct 150 interviews over the next two years with low-income individuals who have been denied from the Habitat homeownership program as well as others in need of better housing solutions
 - To date, Habitat has conducted 15 interviews with residents
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** work collaboratively with other community partners and residents to:
 - Identify a **third-party convener** to facilitate community-wide conversations on affordable housing
 - Create an engagement plan and process for building a strategic **community-wide housing coalition**
- **Building Collective Knowledge:** Engage partners and funders around the creation of a housing “**asset map**” and a comprehensive analysis of housing needs in the community

Let’s keep the momentum going. Please click [here](#) to be part of this movement and sign up for future updates, events and activities.

If you have any questions or comments about this report, please call (434-293-9066) or send an email (jkawachi@cvillehabitat.org) to Janette Kawachi, Chief Partnership Officer at Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville.

APPENDIX A

During the small table conversations, meeting participants were asked to reflect and share their responses to the following scenario and questions:

Imagine our community in 10 years, its 2027, and we have been extraordinarily successful in improving the affordable housing situation in Charlottesville. Take a moment to visualize this scenario - what do you see? What do you sense? What is happening? After taking a couple of minutes to reflect on this scenario, share your thoughts with others at the table and work together to respond to the following questions:

- 1) What did we accomplish? Write down a list of 4–5 specific achievements*
 - 2) How did we get there? What were the critical building blocks for achieving these outcomes and what challenges did we overcome to get there?*
 - 3) What personal strengths, skills, experiences, or resources do you (and your table partners) have that can be used to make this vision a reality? How do you plan to use those strengths and assets to move this work forward?*
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APPENDIX B

Responses to frequently asked questions about Habitat's Strategic Plan

What does ABCD mean?

Asset Based Community Development

Can you please clarify the numbers on onion graph?

The onion graph was developed by Habitat International as a tool to estimate the relative opportunity costs of various levels of housing intervention. Within this framework, the overall cost of one home, for example, could produce 3,000 policy impacts. It is important to note that homebuilding has the most profound and long-term impact on the beneficiary and will remain the core of our operations. Also, without building, there is no platform from which you can leverage the other outcomes, therefore, any graph like this needs to recognize the synergistic nature of layers of intervention.

Where is UVA in this process/Discussion? What is their role?

UVA participates on, among other boards, the City and County Planning Commissions and the City's Housing Advisory Council. It is clear from the breakfast conversation that the community would like more of a partnership.

How do we engage the local developer community more intensely into this conversation?

The Charlottesville Area Development Roundtable, a subset of the Chamber of Commerce, is particularly interested in how the development community can take a role in creating more affordable housing. CADRE is probably the best place to start the conversation.

Third House - "Housing System Development" – who is responsible for leading this? Is Habitat going to lead this? Do you have the capacity?

The third house represents Habitat's strategic investment in building stronger community partnerships – with agencies, businesses, residents, government officials, etc. - and working together to create the systemic change needed to improve affordable housing in Charlottesville. Habitat recognizes that this is an inherently collective effort and therefore cannot lead this charge on its own

Does Habitat plan to become the convener or lead the coalition for affordable housing?

Habitat would like to work with partners to identify an appropriate third-party convener and develop the most appropriate leadership structure for a community-wide coalition

What new products/services will you be providing?

Habitat is continually listening to residents and community partners to learn what new products and services we can offer to improve access to affordable, quality housing in Charlottesville. The following are some ideas we are exploring or currently piloting: Home repair program, micro-loans, pathways to self-sufficiency and homeownership pilot, diversification of housing typologies within Habitat's homeownership program, expanded financial coaching program.

What are your strategies for improving housing outcomes for those at the lowest end of the AMI scale? How will you support the 8/10 denied or "Not-Yet-Ready" applicants?

We do not yet have a clear answer to this challenge. Our first goal is to interview 150 denied applicants and other low-income individuals and families in need of better housing to understand their experiences and perspectives on accessing decent, affordable housing in the area and the hopes and dreams they hold for better housing. We will use this qualitative data to explore and formulate new Habitat products and services as well as advocate for systemic solutions to this issue. We hope to inspire other agencies to undertake a similar process so that we can aggregate the data and produce a more robust picture of needs.

What is on your advocacy agenda? What does that involve? Do you have the capacity? Do you need to partner with other advocacy groups?

Habitat is working to increase our capacity and investment in advocacy efforts and initiatives. Each month, our board votes on an advocacy agenda that, along with ways to advocate, is posted on our website at www.cvillehabitat.org.

We hope to work with community partners and residents to develop and drive a local policy agenda around affordable housing. In addition to policy advocacy, we seek to provide more and better public education around homeownership and affordable housing in Charlottesville. We are also working to establish a plan to support and advocate for state and national initiatives.

An important part of this work is also to elevate the voice of Habitat homeowners in local advocacy efforts around affordable housing. Toward this end, we are currently working on a plan for a community leadership and advocacy training program for Habitat homeowners interested in this kind of effort.

Are you moving away from core competency of building?

No, we are building on 25 years of success in this core competency to increase our impact in the community.

Will Southwood take away from home building efforts in other areas of the community?

Southwood, from the time that Habitat purchased it, has been a separate business entity apart from Habitat's core. It is currently self-sustaining and we will be launching a capital campaign for redevelopment next year. At some point, as Sunrise did previously, Southwood will provide a portion of Habitat's core building lots. However, Habitat's strategic plan calls for us to build across the region even while actively building at Southwood in order to ensure affordable housing opportunities more broadly.

Is there evidence that mixed income communities work? Is there any evidence in Habitat's experience that people are happy in mixed income communities? What do they say?

The existing national research on the effectiveness of mixed income communities is mixed but also very limited due to the relatively recent nature of these types of developments across the country. We believe it is too early to make any clear judgments based on current evidence but believe that a collective effort should be made locally to synthesize and disseminate this information to the community.

Habitat has thus far developed or been part of developing six mixed-income communities, including Paton Street, Sunrise, Belmont Cottages, Burnett Commons I and II and Wickham Pond (Crozet), with several more in the active planning phase (Lochlyn Hill, Harmony Ridge and Southwood). While Habitat homeowners living in these neighborhoods report both successes and challenges to this model, we believe there is anecdotal evidence that there is a net positive impact of mixed income neighborhoods on family well-being and success. We hope to engage academic partners to explore the possibility of conducting a more formal study of this issue in the near future.

Has Habitat ever accomplished its goal of 20 homes per year?

Yes. Given the fact that home completion trips the fiscal year, we tend to track production over the course of a few years. For example, last year we completed 12 homes so we have geared up to complete 28 this year.

What are your metrics/key outcomes for the plan? How will you know that you've been successful?

Habitat is currently in the process of developing several internal and external metrics under each "house" to drive our organizational investments and efforts and monitor our progress toward meeting identified short and long-term goals.

Because one of the key elements of this Strategic Plan is that it is intended as a tool to spark innovation via a listening approach, setting specific metrics for products, pathways, partnerships, etc. that have yet to be established would be constraining and unproductive. Our metrics allow us to track and monitor measurable progress of existing and easily quantifiable work while at the same time teeing up programs and services that are in development for future measurement once they move toward implementation.

How will your rehab partnerships work? Are you duplicating work of AHIP?

There is a significant need for home repair and home rehabilitation services in the city and across Albermarle County. Currently, AHIP has a waitlist of 500 households in need of critical home repair assistance. We are in discussions with AHIP and others to see how we can be of assistance in this space. Our hope is to think creatively about how Habitat can strategically deploy its resources toward home repair services to supplement what currently exists. We are in the midst of launching a small home repair pilot for homeowners in need of minor external maintenance

supports and are engaged in a partnership with the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority and the Public Housing Association of Residents to rehabilitate 22 vacant public housing units in need of critical repair while training four public housing residents in residential rehabilitation via a new internship program.