

**DURHAM CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
Friday, September 9, 2022 @ 9 AM
In-Person & Virtual Zoom Meeting**

The Durham City Council held a virtual Special Meeting on the above time and date consisting of a Council Retreat at the Water Management Facility located at 1600 Mist Lake Drive, Conference Room 2002D in Durham, NC. The following members were in attendance: Mayor Elaine O'Neal, Mayor Pro Tempore Mark-Anthony Middleton and Council Members Javiera Caballero, DeDreana Freeman, Monique Holsey-Hyman, Jillian Johnson and Leonardo Williams. Absent: None.

Also present: City Manager Wanda Page, Assistant to the Mayor Amber Wade, Chief of Staff Karmisha Wallace and Deputy Clerk Ashley Wyatt.

Mayor O'Neal called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance at the Retreat and introduced facilitator, Mayme Webb-Bledsoe. Ms. Bledsoe presented a program titled, Wall of Wonder. The wall was to represent a visual representation of the events, innovations, people, policies, codes and creative actions shaped Durham's history, progress and local housing development. Rational Aim: To enable a group to reflect on their journey over a specific period of time, what has shaped that journey and what has brought them to their current position. Experiential Aim: To empower the group by creating ownership of their history and generate excitement about their current reality. Co-facilitator: Barbara Lau.

SUBJECT: SETTING THE STAGE

**EVENTS, INNOVATIONS, PEOPLE, CREATIVE ACTIONS SHAPED
OUR HISTORY, PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

Brainstorming housing examples of persons, events, books, paradigms, inventions, milestones, codes, policies, campaign, etc.

The facilitator requested the participants to describe five aspects of their own stories and how their history was shaped related to issues of events, innovations, people and actions.

The facilitator placed the cards on the wall to create a basic understanding and map of the process.

**SUBJECT: REFLECTIONS ON WHAT IS ON THE WALL
YEARS 1990-2030**

The wall was divided into distinct periods of time and were focused on events & policies occurring at federal and state levels. Concepts brought forward related to federal and state policies from 1900s to current. Some cards contained information that required clarification by the participants and attendees.

Council discussed the impacts and longevity of the impacts of policy decisions were noted; lack of control over federal policy in that decisions made over the local level;

Council could not solve problems created by federal policy but local government needed to resolve the harm caused; did not foresee the federal government being able to solve the local housing crisis; policies created to correct or to create a policy for someone using federal housing as an example; hoped for funding support for individuals on public assistance; it appeared that most of the housing funds were sourced with federal funding and very little was sourced by state programs. Inclusionary zoning, NCDOT projects and eminent domain were methods for local government to impact housing development by local governments.

Additional cards were posted on the wall reflecting local priorities, policies and initiatives by year(s).

Council reviewed the cards posted to the wall and offered feedback. As an overview, the cards reflected very few state related programs.

Deputy City Attorney O'Toole spoke to the former protest petition process, comparing it to the current process.

The subsequent discussion related to the housing industry with another set of cards. These cards were posted on the wall under the corresponding decade.

Discussion focused on policies that related to local housing market, state regulations and various stakeholders- advocates, lobbyists, developers, local and state leaders.

Ms. Bledsoe asked for Council's feedback on their impressions on the housing industry. Banking and government set the context for the housing industry. Housing sandwiched between banking and government. There was a lack of power to implement solutions due to living in a capitalistic economy and existing in North Carolina. Highlighted black home ownership and legacy neighborhoods, when factories disappeared there was a void in ability to generate income for home purchases. Housing market has responded to workforce strengths/weaknesses.

Processes/programs impacting housing were listed on another set of cards- gentrification, displacement, development locations and priority areas, federal, state and local policies, tax credit programs, affordable housing, creating residential spaces for high wealth residents, the housing market was responding to the industry, concerns were expressed about increasing tax evaluations on those residing in historically minority areas such as East Durham; was there a housing crisis or an affordability crisis; lack of stable housing options for formerly-justice involved individuals; discussed the impact of growth, how growth influenced different parts of Durham and noted that Council should not pick winners/losers with policy-making; and encouraged figuring out how to create sustainability related to air quality, land, water, housing and supporting the needs of the community.

Ms. Bledsoe requested Council conduct a working lunch to dig deeper into Durham's history after studying the wall.

Council returned at 12:30 p.m. and additional cards were placed on the wall.

Ms. Bledsoe read 'who is that' cards and asked Council to identify their colleagues.

SUBJECT: NAMING THE ERA

Reflections across time.

What are the major shifts and trends driving our current reality?

Name major trends: What title would we give to this?

Ms. Bledsoe asked Council to look for similarities/clustering, gaps/slow periods or other periods; and encouraged Council to identify trends and notice shifts from decade to decade.

Council identified the trends to their time periods:

- Expansion of tech industry
- Investment in Downtown Durham- ebb/flow
- Perception of Durham shifted related to criminal elements/marketing
- Age of the housing stock/inventory
- Closing of commercial entities triggered impacts on public housing residents, causing displacement and emergence of gang violence
- Instituting bonds/ordinances/policies related to affordable housing
- Demographic shift from 1995 onward
- Demise of tobacco industry, loss of economic standing in early 1990s
- Education programming adjusted to workforce demands (STEM)
- Federal and state trends: extremism, poverty, expansion of wealth gap, financial legacy of slavery and economic exclusion, lack of housing stabilization, red-lining, qualifying home buyers and credit availability, overwhelming student debt, insufficiency of wage parity, MWBE capacity building, vocational training and financial literacy programs

Ms. Bledsoe encouraged Council to consider trends and the map on the wall, what implications does it have as it pertained to housing.

It was necessary to include housing in general into the conversation of affordable housing with focus on ways to get folks out of transitional/public housing; create housing programs that promote creating equity for ownership; families will always need either government regulation/subsidies to assist them in affording housing or public housing; public assistance is a necessary public good for a healthy, stable society; housing is a human right and can only be accomplished with governmental support. Individuals working minimum wage jobs cannot afford to purchase homes without governmental support.

SUBJECT: REFLECTION ON THE EXERCISE

Council discussed the implications of what the wall was “saying” to them as individuals and as a group. Some of the things that stood out were the need for government intervention; limited budgetary restrictions; housing as a human right; and increased wages to combat the inflated housing costs.

Ms. Bledsoe asked Council to theorize a name for the work they conducted at the Retreat.

Some of those names included:

- Hot Mess
- Systems Barriers
- Unproductive tug of war- Our Housing Story
- Our Housing Story
- New Beginnings for Housing as a Human Right
- Massive Societal Failures
- Struggle for human dignity
- Mitigating Harm

SUBJECT: CLOSING REMARKS

Council Member Williams expressed that the conversation only touched the surface on the housing problems in Durham and encouraged another conversation in the future.

Mayor Pro Tempore Middleton stated that the housing conversation was what democracy looked like and that everyone had different perspectives on certain subjects. He acknowledged that every Council represented thousands of people that also agreed with them and was feeling optimistic about where the conversation was going.

Council Member Freeman stated that she took the conversations on housing personally and wanted to plan for seven generations into the future.

Council Member Johnson questioned how the conversation was going to directly impact their decision making policies, but appreciated the dialogue among her colleagues.

Council Member Holsey-Hyman thanked the Mayor for putting the Housing Retreat together.

Council Member Caballero thanked Council and staff for participating in the retreat and was hopeful that the root of the housing issue would be addressed.

Mayor O'Neal concluded the retreat by thanking the facilitator, staff and her colleagues. She also expressed the need to determine root causes as it pertained to housing issues, and echoed the call for future conversations on the subject.

Ms. Bledsoe advised that she would be sending detailed notes to the Mayor on the takeaways from the day.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Ashley Wyatt
Deputy Clerk

Diana Schreiber
City Clerk