

FRAMING QUESTIONS FOR PLANNING DIRECTORS 2020 WORK PLAN

February 13, 2020

During the November 2019 meeting, Committee members identified 6 major 'buckets' of issues related to achieving the regional housing targets.

Co-Chairs Wright and Moritz have suggested several potential framing questions for each of them and, for future meetings, Committee members may be asked to share local experience with / solutions for a specific question or topic.

(1) Transportation

- Can we move past regulating housing based on auto congestion measures and move towards measures that prioritize transit, accessibility to many modes, and people (not just car) movement?
- Are we fully maximizing our investments in non-auto modes of travel?
 - Locations proximate to high capacity transit: density maxed? Ped/bike network complete?
 - Second tier activity centers/corridors: good bus service, access to services for daily living (grocery, etc).
 - Consider new transit ideas, such "on-demand" public bus shuttles (<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-transit/flex/>)
 - Also: recent work recalibrating bus service to be a reasonable alternative to owning a car
- Parking: how low can we go (parking ratios) and under what circumstances? Above ground parking is an urban design problem, but underground parking is expensive and may be a poor investment assuming parking demand continues to decline. What are the best models?
- We have a model of allocating new density to high capacity transit corridors, which leaves some neighborhoods untouched by density. We are now discussing how/if to increase density in neighborhoods that are not well served by transit, for equity, supply, missing middle reasons. Do "last mile" transportation options (scooters, uber, etc) address that issue?

(2) Schools

- There appears to be regional agreement among planners about the relationship of new development and school enrollment, but the public is skeptical. Could a regional document help?
- Less land for schools and high cost of new construction has suggested we need to look at urban models, office building conversions, co-location with other uses, including housing. Public is skeptical. Are there models of it working well and how concerns were addressed?
- How can local jurisdictions partner with and build relationships with their Boards of Education (generally independent agencies) to be more nimble in addressing school capacity issues?

(3) Regulatory Planning/Zoning Framework

- Under-development: we noted that some lower-density housing types are more profitable than higher density (townhouses instead of stick multifamily; stick multifamily instead of high rise). Consequently, the market is not always maximizing planned densities in activity centers. What tools/models are available to solve this – i.e. zoning minimums?
- Planned, zoned and entitled, but still undeveloped: we discussed the phenomenon of sites that have been planned and zoned for density, and projects have gone through the entitlement process, but not moved to construction. Are there illustrative cases studies around the region that could provide insight of why this is happening and what incentives can be used to move these projects forward?

- Continuing the ULI conversation, possibly also at the local level: would it be useful to put our heads together about how the January ULI conversation can continue, acknowledging that some elements are regional and others are local. Perhaps planning directors would be interested in collective thinking about how they plan to structure a local conversation about examining barriers to housing production to yield useful information.
- Missing middle housing types: examples of historic or innovative housing types that challenge conventional zoning and “what it takes” to allow them; what were the issues?
- While the entitlement process for market rate projects can be complicated, expensive and uncertain, it was posited that it is even more complicated, expensive and uncertain for affordable housing projects. Are there specific models for addressing this?
- Is there any value to a “by right” model for certain housing projects, i.e. with high levels of affordability?

(4) Tax Structure

- Regional or national examples of using tax tools (varying tax on land versus improvements, tax increment financing, tax abatements, special tax districts): how have these been employed to support housing production or preservation?

(5) Capital markets, other financing

- What information do we and other decisionmakers need to know about capital/funding sources and requirements? Are there models of localities doing a good job of evaluating planning/zoning/requirements from the perspective of financial feasibility?
- Apart from better understanding of financial realities, what potential role would planning directors play in this area? Are there explorations of new or expanded financing models that the planning directors think could involve us?

(6) Unique views and issues

- What are the top 3 issues that your jurisdiction is grappling with or exploring? What are ones that you have already grappled with and have a “solution” to share?
- Has your jurisdiction evolved a unique approach or position on issues/policies related to housing production?