

City of Cambridge

Department of Public Works
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Housing Task Force Minutes April 14, 2021

The City of Cambridge Division of Planning and Zoning, Historic Preservation, and Housing held a Housing Task Force meeting for the City of Cambridge at 5:30pm on Wednesday, April 14, 2021 via video conference. Due to COVID, **Pat Escher**, Division Planning Manager; and **Jeannie Bellina**, Housing Specialist, were the only full-time City staff present at City Council Chambers, 305 Gay Street, Cambridge, MD 21613. Others in attendance are noted below:

Housing Task Force members:

Ward 1: Jim Sicks (audio issues)

Ward 2: Nancy Jackson

Ward 3: ***No one present***

Ward 4: Dormaim Greene

Ward 5: ***No one present***

Mayoral Selection: Davion Batson and Linda Henry

Guest speaker:

Patrick Thomas, Esq., Attorney at MacLeod Law Group

City staff and Council members:

Patrick Comiskey – City Manager

Sputty Cephas – City Council Commissioner, Ward 4

Members of public:

Barbara Knepp

Lynette Wongus

Housing Task Force members who were absent:

Ward 1: Candy Callaway

Ward 2: Portia Johnson-Ennels

Ward 3: Duane Farrow and Gary Gordy

Ward 4: Mike Edgar

Ward 5: Jason Bierley (absence notification) and Don Parks

Housing Specialist Jeannie Bellina started the Housing Task Force Meeting at 5:40pm to allow sufficient time for people to enter into the meeting.

Business

Welcome and Introductions

- Housing Task Force members, Attorney, City staff, and members of public

Charge to the Task Force

- Recommend any changes to Ordinance 995
- Recommend any changes to Land Bank presentation, to be presented to City Council in May 2021 or later

Key Issues

- For the past several months, Todd Parks has been the **only** staff person in Division of Building Safety Services, the division responsible for code enforcement
 - Department has formerly had 3 staff persons
 - Frank has left this department
 - 2 staff persons were hired and are expected to start doing code enforcement within next 2 weeks, but they first need to be trained in City protocols
 - As a team, this Division will better be able to address the various issues in the respective neighborhoods throughout the City
 - Major issues will have priority first over more minor issues
 - Todd has been working 10-11 hours on weekdays and time on weekends to keep up with heavy workload
 - Mainly focused on permits, since there are so many
 - Hasn't had much time to do code enforcement field work on a regular basis
 - **Reported all homes not meeting minimum code requirements have already been issued citations, but these citations have been held up in court for almost 2 years due to postponements as a result of COVID and other issues**
 - **This is the furthest that the City can do legally**
 - **Code violations are not priorities in court compared to some larger issues (per City Attorney Patrick Thomas's statement)**
- 2016 Salisbury University GIS Housing Quality Study
 - Students reported only exterior code violations
 - No interior violations were reported, as not part of GIS study
 - Ordinance 995 states rental concerns re: sub-standard conditions, but what about rental properties that were reported at risk by GIS study (rated 3-5.5 points)
- Protect health, safety, and general welfare of public as well as prevent deterioration and blight conditions
 - Exterior housing concerns
 - Rental properties, public housing, and single-family homes not meeting minimum code requirements have been issued citations and are currently in court
 - Crusader Road – several inspections need to be completed on this road
 - Interior housing concerns – most concerns
 - Structural and other conditions

- Lead-based paint exposure
 - Asbestos
 - Fair Housing Act concerns
 - Tenant rights
 - Are tenants being educated on their rights?
 - If so, has there been enforcement of those tenant rights?
 - House fire concerns in neighborhood
 - Resident concerns
 - Tenant occupancy limits per rental
 - Is this part of the rental licensing agreement?
 - Sex offenders on streets with children
- How are registered complaints of outstanding violations being handled?
- Can Housing Task Force member(s) learn from Code Enforcement officials and conduct housing inspections?

Key Deliverables

What documents have been previously created that can help with this process?

- Ordinance 995
 - Developed February 2011
 - Repealed to create Ordinance 1006, which is now 4-42 of City Code)
 - Ordinance 995 good starting point for review purposes
- List of blighted homes that have been issued citations and are tied up in court
 - Since this is public record, this is possible
- List of all homes that have been issued citations
 - Patrick Thomas will see if this list is allowable due to public records access

What are the critical documents or outputs that the Housing Task Force must create or revise to meet its charge?

- City Code of Laws – Ordinance 995 revision
 - Is this the latest document we should be looking at?
- Any others?

Proposed Work Progress

What are the key activities that must be done to address the issues, create deliverables, and meet the charge?

- Annual registration and re-registration of all rental properties
 - Not limited to but including, multi-family, single-family, private, public housing units, etc.
 - Report any unregistered rental properties, as required by City protocol
 - For each day landlord goes unregistered, fined each day
 - Rental housing registration denial or revocation

- Are Building Safety Services and Municipal Utilities Commission records cross-referenced for water and sewer bills?
- Reinststate mandatory rental inspections
 - Conduct property inspections before property owner registers property and before any changes in tenant occupancy
 - Inspections apply to all private and public sector multi- and single-housing and all other applicable housing units
 - Certificate of Compliance needs to be issued – document issued by qualified code enforcement officer and submitted to relevant City department(s), property owner, and landlord that certifies rental housing units that were inspected by the qualified rental housing inspector comply with the requirements of the City code
 - Once provided this Certificate of Compliance, re-inspections will be done within 3-year timeframe
 - Notice of inspections to property owners, landlords and/or tenants, the latter only if occupied
 - Is Ordinance best place to list fees and/or fine costs since these may increase over time?
- Resident agent for all rental properties
 - Applicable to all rental properties whether via rent, sub-rent, lease, sub-lease, let or sub-let (latter added for more detail)
- Approved permits for all rental properties
- Housing Official title on Ordinance 995 needs to be changed to Code Enforcement Official

A proposed list of steps is presented below to use as a starting point for the next meeting of the task force.

- Acquire list of blighted homes currently in court due to public records access
 - See if list of blighted homes that were issued citations, but not yet in court, is available via public records
- Review Model Proactive Rental Inspection Ordinance by ChangeLab Solutions – need to get written approval if use this format
 - Proactive in that rental inspections are not complaint-based
 - As has been done in past when more than 1 person in Building Safety Services Division, City staff doesn't wait until complaints in order to conduct code enforcement field work
- Review Rental Registration and/or Inspection Permit Ordinances of Cities of Baltimore, MD; Kalamazoo, MI; and Seattle, WA
- If see another high quality City example, please recommend
- Anything else?

Communications Plan

To whom should we provide updates on our status as we are going through the work process? How often should we communicate? What form should the communication take? Consider City policies too.

What should our policy be concerning task force members communicating with others outside the task force, including the press, concerning our status? Consider City policies too.

Operating Logistics

- **Virtual meetings will be held monthly until COVID pandemic is over**
 - Monthly meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of every month from 5:30-7pm
- **Meeting format**
 - Similar to other City Board meetings
 - Working group, therefore public participation will be limited
 - Public comments will start after Housing Task Force members have had their meeting and all comments by members have been made
 - Allow minimum of ~10-15 minutes for public comments
- **Meeting documentation**
 - Agenda
 - Meeting minutes
 - Meeting recording
 - Necessary documentation
- **Attendance requirements**
 - Recommending second Wednesday each month from 5:30-7pm
 - To be determined in finality by Housing Task Force member consensus
- **State mandated open meetings regulations**
 - Sub-committees permissible, but formal group leadership is not as Housing Task Force will disband at some point in the future
 - Housing Task Force members are limited in communications amongst themselves due to limit in how many can gather together without this it being considered a public meeting (e.g. in person, via e-mail, or telephone)
 - Public meetings are advertised and are open to the public
 - Example: With Council, it is no more than 2 members; with Planning Commission, it is no more than 3 members
 - Pat Escher will inquire with City attorney re: number of members for Housing Task Force meeting
 - E-mails cannot be conversational in style
 - If e-mail sent for comment, can respond directly to sender, but not comment on each other's responses
 - If any questions, please contact Pat Escher at (410) 228-1955 or pescher@choosecambridge.com

What will be our mode of decision-making? Voting? Consensus? Consider City policies too.

How will information about each meeting be distributed, internally and externally? Social media? Consider City policies too.

Next Steps

What are the tasks that need to happen between now and next meeting?

- **Everyone** – Please read City Code of Laws – Ordinance 995 – provide suggested revisions to Jeannie Bellina at jbellina@chooscambridge.com by COB on Monday, April 26 - <http://www.chooscambridge.com/Search?searchPhrase=995>
 - Review alongside Model and other City Rental Registration and Inspection Permit Ordinances listed above
 - **Model Proactive Rental Inspection Ordinance** (download) - <https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/model-proactive-rental-inspection-ordinance>
 - **City Rental Registration and/or Inspection Permit Ordinances**
 - **Baltimore, MD** – <https://dhcd.baltimorecity.gov/pi/rental-property-registration-and-licensing>
 - **Kalamazoo, MI** – <https://www.kalamazoocity.org/code>
 - **Seattle, WA** - [http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-\(a-z\)/rental-registration%C2%A0and-inspection-code](http://www.seattle.gov/sdci/codes/codes-we-enforce-(a-z)/rental-registration%C2%A0and-inspection-code)
 - Please provide input on revisions of current Ordinance 995 *or select from other City Ordinances you've researched as best better model for the Ordinance 995 revisions*
 - **April 14 Housing Task Force Meeting Recording:** <https://townhallstreams.com/>
- **Everyone** – Please review the attached Land Bank presentation, and provide any feedback comments by COB on Monday, May 3.
- **Jeannie** – Jeannie will ask Todd Parks for list of blighted homes where issued citations are sitting in court, and to see if list of blighted homes with citations, but not in court, are publicly accessible

Meeting adjourned at 7:05pm. Dormaim Green made the first motion to adjourn the meeting. Davion Batson made the second motion.

NOTE: Task Force format source: [Facilitating the First Meeting of a Task Force | Leadership Strategies \(leadstrat.com\)](#)