

## **35 Cherry Street Community Meeting**

**June 3, 2021**

### **Meeting Notes**

The City of Cambridge is leading a public process to decide the future use of 35 Cherry Street, an approximately 11,000 sf vacant property in The Port. 35 Cherry Street will be acquired by the City as part of a real estate development agreement with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). This transfer includes the stipulation that the parcel be used in perpetuity in a way that directly benefit residents in the Port neighborhood (formerly Area Four) and surrounding communities.

The City Council identified the site for affordable housing. The City presented background on the site and identified different affordable housing options. The goal of the meeting was to understand the community's affordable housing priorities to guide the development process.

The following is a summary of the discussions held during breakout sessions at the community meeting held on Thursday, June 3 via Zoom. The groups were asked to discuss what type of affordable housing is most appropriate for 35 Cherry Street. A recording of the meeting can be found [here](#) (passcode: &g7sJdpz). The presentation slides can be found [here](#). The meeting was attended by approximately 55 community members.

### **General comments**

- There was interest in a comprehensive plan for the neighborhood, not a site-by-site approach. Reference to other vacant lots or projects included the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House parking lot, Main Street lot, CHA renovations on Norfolk Street, and 105 Windsor Street.
- Others stressed the importance of completing the affordable housing development quickly as the site has been available for redevelopment since 2013
- Acknowledgement that there is already a lot of affordable housing in the Port. Not to say that affordable housing is not needed here, but that there are other neighborhoods where affordable housing needs to be pursued as well.

### **Breakout Group Discussion #1**

- The area around Cherry Street doesn't feel like a community because of the number of rental units. There are very few long-term residents. There are far too many parking lots and transitional housing.
- There are very few families in the area. Children and families create a sense of community. Children create a neighborhood that is both rich and diverse.
- Most in the group felt strongly that the housing needed to be homeownership with units sized for families (2-3 bedrooms). One group member noted that rental would be fine but also agreed that the units should primarily be family sized.
- Homeownership would help create a neighborhood and provide opportunities for generational wealth.
- Homeownership that creates opportunities for lower-pay professionals like teachers is needed. All agreed that opportunities for moderate- and middle-income persons would help encourage diversity.

- There should be opportunities for multi-generational housing.
- Area is poorly lit at night.
- Accessible housing should be provided.
- School Street is not well populated and has too many parking lots.
- Housing alone will not create community. There needs to be other projects that complement the housing (open space, community centers, etc.) Plan should be holistic and connect residents with other non-housing projects.
- Area is close to transit, and demand for cars is decreasing.

### **Breakout Group Discussion #2**

- Affordable home ownership is lacking in the Port compared to affordable rental. City needs to provide for a diversity of household types and ages.
- There seems to be a lot of displacement occurring in the Port. Homeownership can provide more stability.
- Extremely low income should be the focus, including housing for people experiencing homelessness.
- Both rental and homeownership opportunities are important at a range of income levels.
- Youth feel penalized for going to college. They cannot afford to live in Cambridge after they finish college.
- People often get stuck when transitioning from shelters to stable housing. This project can create access pathways for upward mobility.
- Housing must be accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Senior, transitional, and housing for persons with disabilities is important.
- Some felt transitional housing was the most important. Others felt the site might not be the best place for transitional housing. They preferred homeownership to encourage less turnover.

### **Breakout Group Discussion #3**

- Affordable housing typically targets people at 60% area median income (AMI). People that service providers are working with are often not eligible. City should help people who make less than 50%. Trend toward 80% to 120% AMI is discouraging.
- Family composition can vary—e.g., family of four could be single mother with three children, or two professionals with two kids, or two professionals w/ one not working and two kids—so things like childcare costs, etc. look very different and should be considered
- Resident who has lived 40+ years next to the lot feels the space is very appropriate for affordable housing. Would like to see trees and green space. Would like to see at least a 10-foot setback from fence to housing (driveway or trees).
- Extensive tree planting is important. Need to create a pleasant environment for lower income families – equity issue.
- Would like to see mixed income housing, if possible.
- Would be nice to prioritize LGBTQ+ senior-friendly housing to the extent possible.
- Middle class has disappeared in the neighborhood. Some mentioned that they like the project at Main St. and Cherry Street.
- Support idea of neighborhood planning and identifying other sites for open space/community services.

- Would like to prioritize rental housing for low income communities.
- Most want to prioritize family size units (3-bedroom). It is very difficult for families to find housing.
- The neighborhood is great for kids (e.g., one-way streets), and we should allow for more families and children.
- One participant shared information on a renter equity program (link shared to chat: <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/when-renters-can-earn-equity>) and wondered if different forms of homeownership could be considered (i.e. recent college graduates could buy a room and then sell it and accumulate wealth, or use as rental property to build equity).

#### **Breakout Group Discussion #4**

- Strong desire from group for homeownership. Homeownership would be great since neighborhood is very walkable and near public transportation; parking is not needed because of the accessibility to transit.
- Support for family size units for ownership who are looking to start families and stay in the area.
- Some would like to focus on homeownership for lower income people (less than 50%AMI). City spoke about difficulty with ownership for lower income groups due to maintenance and costs over time. Person did not think this was a reason to not pursue homeownership for lower income groups.
- Issue of storage space raised. Wondered if city would subsidize storage space for affordable housing tenants and homeowners.
- One person mentioned using this or other lot for community uses, like community music space.
- Desire for a neighborhood plan for all lots. Even if process is longer, a comprehensive plan for all community needs versus a piecemeal and repetitive effort would be better.
- Desire for 2-3-bedroom units.
- Liked idea of intergenerational housing.
- One resident stated that he'd like the site to be developed for affordable housing quickly and is fine with increased height and density citing the demand for affordable units in Cambridge. Lives across from SquirrelWood and thrilled with that development.

#### **Breakout Group Discussion #5**

- Mix of opinions as to whether the site should be rental or homeownership.
- People who wanted homeownership cited the benefit of using asset to build wealth, especially important for people of color who experience ongoing impact of structural racism
- Preference for family sized units (both rental and homeownership) with some people wanting to target young adults to keep Cambridge kids in Cambridge.
- Desire to limit height to three stories and provide other amenities like outdoor green space, balconies, rooftop terrace or garden, etc.
- Some wanted to focus on middle-income.
- One person asked if the City could restrict the purchase of units to people in the neighborhood (i.e. CHA Washington elms/Newtowne Ct).
- One person liked the idea of using the site for transitional housing or foster care
- Discussion by group that the parking lot at Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House be used as open space.