

35 Cherry Street

CET Focus Group | American-Born Black Outreach Team (ABBOT) | 1st Meeting |
September 13, 2021

Project Summary & Community Engagement Process

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.

On September 13, 2021, staff from the Community Development Department led a focus group with Cambridge residents who identify as American-born Black. This group discussed the results of the preceding engagement events and provided additional feedback. This focus group was attended by six community members and one outreach worker from the Department of Human Service Programs' (DHSP) Community Engagement Team (CET).

Meeting Notes

On-Site Amenities

- One participant said there is a need for bathtubs, not only showers. This participant shared an anecdote of a senior affordable housing resident who struggles in a unit that only has a shower.
- The participants' opinions were mixed on whether there should be on-site parking.

Unit Size, Bedrooms

- Participant asked that the project team consider including 3-bedroom or 4-bedroom units since they are currently scarce, and people are on long waitlists.
- One participant stated her family is on the waitlist for a unit with more bedrooms, but her priority decreases as her children age, extending her time on the waitlist.

Level of Affordability

- A participant stated that the new housing should be available to those with low income.
- One participant expressed concern that the proposed affordable housing doesn't serve everyone. How can this housing help families get out of poverty?
- A participant noted a lot of people make under \$40K/year, which is below %50 of Area Median Income (AMI). They are concern that those people are not being served.

Rental or Homeownership

- Participants described mixed opinions on whether 35 Cherry St should have affordable rental or homeownership units.

- Participants expressed concern that the existing affordable housing ownership programs do not allow residents to gain sufficient value when they sell, and they do not have the ability to pass down the home to their children.
- One participant who utilized a homeownership program said she felt misled and did not fully understand the housing program before she joined. She spoke about her own experience having an expensive unexpected cost. Her affordable condo is in a building with market-rate units. The building's condo association decided to replace a broken hot water heater with an expensive model and she had to pay her unit's share of the costs.
- Among the participants homeownership is preferred, because residents can save up some money, rather than affordable units where rent increases when income increases.
- One participant stated that Just-A-Start has a small loan program that can help pay for repairs, but questioned whether it's worthwhile to take out loans for repairs when the resident does not earn the full value of resale.
- A participant suggested that the affordable rental programs be revised so the rent is adjusted to income every 2-3 years instead of the current annual revision.

Other Comments

- Several participants spoke about how friends who they grew up with in Cambridge moved out of the city to find homes they could afford to buy.
- Participants stated concern that their children would not be able to afford to stay in Cambridge.
- Several forum participants agreed that the housing at 35 Cherry St should not be targeted to particular groups (LGBTQ+, seniors, people with disabilities, etc.). The housing can serve all these groups if the units are large enough and are accessible.
- Multiple participants stated they felt parks in Cambridge are not safe for their children, so using this site for a park would not be useful for them.