

The Easton Affordable Housing Taskforce Findings and Recommendations

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- Tina Smith, Northampton County DCED
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- Steven Norowski, City of Easton
- Becky Bradley, LV Planning Commission
- Easton Choice Neighborhood Project
- Easton Housing Authority
- Easton Redevelopment Authority
- Shiloh Baptist Church



The primary focus of the Easton Affordable Housing Taskforce (AHT) is to address housing affordability for citizens earning up to 120% median household income (MHI).





Remit from Mayor Panto;
Discussions on scope, research process



Data Gathering

- Census track data
- Greater LV Realtor's Ass'n
- Local Resources



Case Studies

- State College, PA
- Reading, PA
- Trenton, NJ
- Greensboro, NC
- Kalamazoo, MI



Brainstorming;
Proposals and concepts

- Neal's banking plan presentation



Return from hiatus;
Discussions with local and regional resources



Rough ideas;
Mayor's update;
Working groups;
Finding real solutions

How did we get here?



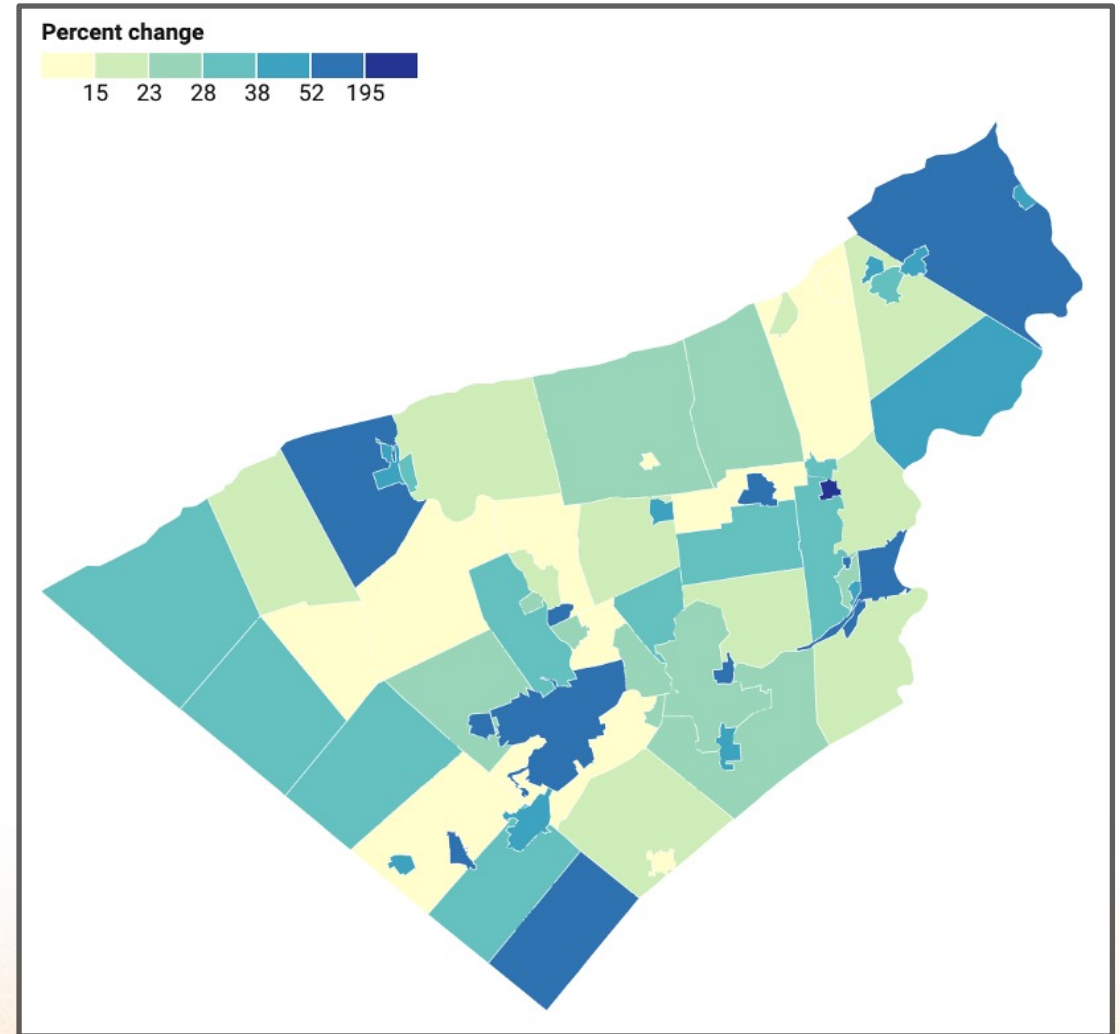
Defining Questions

- How do we help fund public sector and non-profit housing efforts aimed at our target demographic, support individual and neighborhood needs, and empower community-conscious developers and landlords?
- How do we partner with developers, housing authorities, and area non-profits to maximize efficiency and offer support?
- What kinds of programs and policies will empower our target demographic, incentivize developers, and provide a platform of stability and investment for decades to come?



The Housing Crisis is Here

- Accelerated by pandemic
- 90% rise in the last ten years
- Homes selling an average of 103% asking price in 2021
- Rents up 11% in 2021
- Warehouse displacement
- Housing stock down 20% in Q3 2021



Source: Greater Lehigh Valley Realtor's Association



Housing Stability for Community and Personal “Wellness”

- Ludwig et al (*Science*, 2012)
 - Stability can lead to physical and mental health benefits over time.
- Chetty et al (*Am. Econ. Review*, 2016)
 - Stability can lead to a snowball effect of better education, wealth generation, and permanence of the family unit.
- Our colleagues attest, housing improvements can lead to an increased quality of life!



Alignment with Existing Plans: Easton Comprehensive Plan (2017)

Objective 1.3: Manage and reduce vacancy, underutilization and blight throughout the city

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|-------------|--|
| 1.3a | Prioritize development of vacant lots and rehabilitation/revitalization of vacant buildings throughout the City, and establish policies for neighborhood sustainability. |
| 1.3b | Increase capacity to accelerate transformation of blighted properties. |
| 1.3c | Conduct assessment and rehabilitation of the six housing projects in Easton and create more opportunities for affordable housing. |

Objective 1.4: Discourage irresponsible development and renovation, and prevent deterioration of historic buildings

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|-------------|--|
| 1.4b | Explore City, State and Federal incentives for preservation of historic architectural character. |
|-------------|--|

Objective 2.4: Improve access to and create new parks and open spaces

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|-------------|--|
| 2.4c | Revive and protect pocket parks within West Ward |
|-------------|--|



Alignment with Existing Plans: West Ward Neighborhood Plan (2019)

Celebrate History + Diversity

The AHT recommendations do not specifically address actionable items under this heading but, rather, aligns with its guiding principles of fostering neighborhood identity and the promotion of local architecture to maintain the distinctive character of the West Ward's well-kept housing stock.

Expand Economic Prosperity

The AHT recommendations address two actionable items under this heading: **3) Establishment & Promotion of Live-Work Spaces** and **4) Vacant & Commercial Locations Map**.

Foster Strong Neighborhoods

The AHT recommendations do not specifically address actionable items under this heading but, rather, aligns with its guiding principles of addressing issues such as an aging and homogeneous housing stock, housing revitalization, and the development of new housing options. The AHT is also in agreement with the WWNP to improve safety, maintain affordability and build stronger social connections within its blocks through various housing initiatives.

Advance Equal Opportunity

The AHT recommendations do not specifically address actionable items in under this heading but, rather, they do align in their aim to empower local residents from historically disenfranchised backgrounds by providing financial and homeownership education, as well as business and real estate guidance through partnerships and original programming.

Additional Considerations

- Pennsylvania DCED Block Grant and HOME programs
- Easton Choice Neighborhood Project
- Need for a strategic plan for the South Side comparable to that of the West Ward Neighborhood Plan



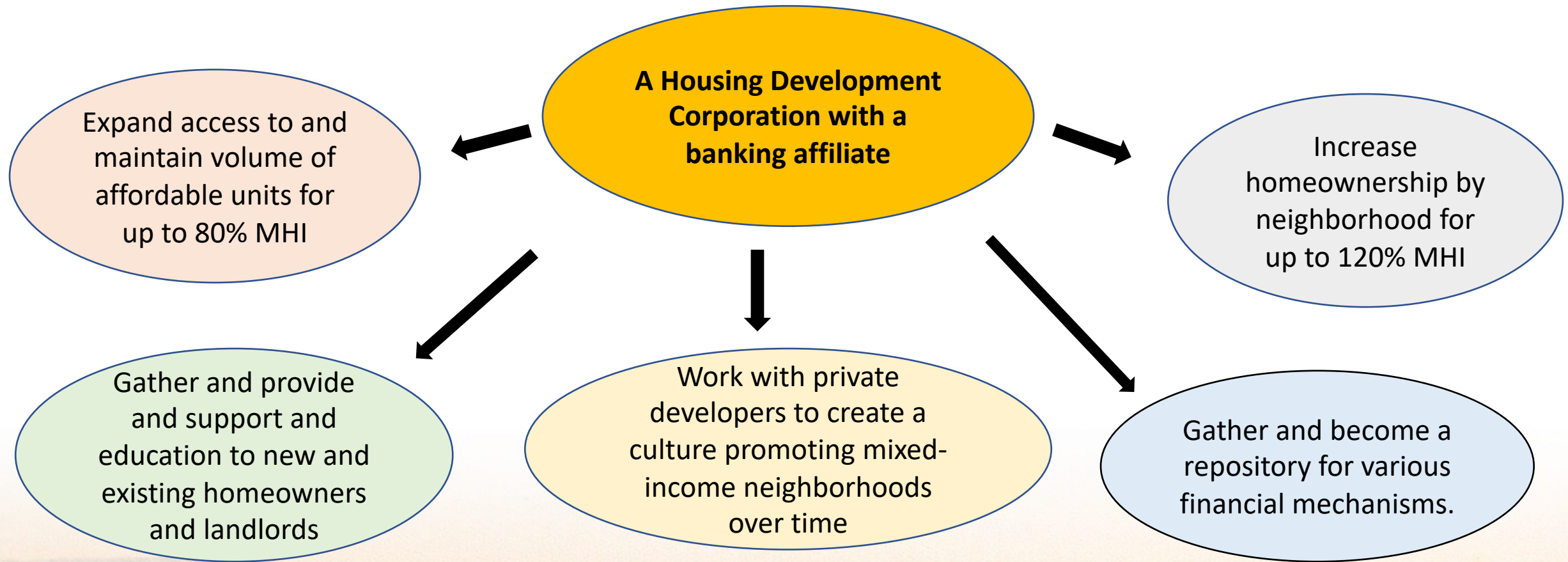
Intended Outcomes

Create:

- Greater opportunities for homeownership
- Financial and practical guidance
- A hub for funding and collaboration
- Transformative landlord relationships
- Incentives for community-conscious developers



Recommendations



Increase the rate of homeownership by neighborhood over time for families making up to 120% MHI.

- Eliminate obstacles
- Create a land bank with RDA
- Work with landlords on RTO
- Use innovative financing tools through hybrid community bank
- Meet people where they are with advertising and assistance tools



Expand access to and maintain the volume of affordable housing opportunities for families at or below 80% MHI.

- Prioritize multi-bedroom options
- Meet people where they are with advertising and assistance tools
- Work with the city to create ongoing blight strategies
- Expand upon existing grant/loan programs
- Engage property management firms
- Work with community bank and corporate partners to develop & retain affordable units



Gather and provide education and support to new and existing homeowners and landlords.

- Provide financial literacy programs
- Provide home maintenance programs
- Develop a detailed map of target sites, with neighborhood partners
- Support landlords with relief packages
- Create a detailed map of goods and services with neighborhood partners, to help developers be more successful long-term



Gather and become a repository for various financial mechanisms

- Help create and work with hybrid community bank to offer innovative financial tools.
- Create a hub for grant/loan opportunities from the public sector.
- Create strategies to capture “unconventional” grant funding



Work with area private developers to create a culture promoting mixed-income neighborhoods over time.

- Work with the city to create a policy-based, complex set of in-lieu payments to an affordability fund related to the outlay of LERTA.
- Develop close relationships with private sector partners to help them plan alongside neighborhood stakeholders for max success.
- Funnel private sector partners towards our funding mechanisms to help them understand neighborhood needs and the profits of affordable options.



Actionable Items

- Establish the HDC
 - \$200,000 from ARPA with matching contributions from partner banks and employers
- Form a land bank at the RDA
 - \$1,000,000 from ARPA
- Create a renovation fund
 - \$1,000,000 from ARPA
- Start a remediation and deconversion fund
 - \$500,000 in total from ARPA, to be overseen by the HDC
- Take on the first project
 - \$209,000 from ARPA towards the remediation of the Porter School property
- Grow Capacity
 - \$1,000,000 from ARPA with matching contributions to develop a larger property



Conclusion

- We have an opportunity to help our residents begin to build generational wealth and feel secure about their future.
- By working together to be agile, resourceful, and communicative, we can create a support structure for upward economic mobility that will endure.

