

Housing Element Report
Community Meeting on Cupertino Housing Element: Perspective of Students and Older Adults
July 20th, 2022, 6:30-8 pm, Zoom
West Valley Community Services, City of Cupertino, and EMC Planning Group

Overview

On Wednesday, July 20th, 2022, West Valley Community Services (WVCS) partnered with the City of Cupertino and EMC Planning Group to hold a Community Meeting. WVCS is a nonprofit organization that has been providing safety net services to low-income and homeless individuals and families in the west valley region of Santa Clara County, including Cupertino, for more than 48 years. Because of WVCS' connection to the underserved, underrepresented, and most in-need communities of Cupertino, the organization hosted this meeting to amplify the perspectives of students and older adults on housing those facing barriers, bring community members together, and facilitate dialogue between individuals with different levels of privilege in Cupertino.

The Community Meeting for Inclusive Housing featured two breakout sessions during which community members joined one another for dialogue, a panel of three De Anza students and two WVCS clients who shared their experiences with barriers and housing. The panelists spoke of the unique barriers facing students and older adults in finding affordable housing, such as the issues that arise in trying to find resources in the community to help students, issues with Below Market Rate housing, and how income and employment can shape struggles in finding affordable housing.

Agenda

6:30 pm - Welcome
6:35 pm - Breakout rooms #1
6:45 pm - Panel
7:30 pm - Breakout rooms #2
7:55 pm - Thank you and good night

Panelists

The panel featured De Anza students and WVCS clients.
Parisha Ranabhat - De Anza student
Edwyn Castillo - De Anza student and intern for CYLC De Anza
Erika Flores - Program Coordinator II, Student Success and Support Program at De Anza
Komala Rangachari - Older adult, WVCS client, BMR resident

Leslie Butlar - Older adult, WVCS client

Event Outreach

Extensive and comprehensive outreach was done in preparation for this event, with the goal of attracting as many community members as possible to ensure the meeting was inclusive, effective, and diverse. Work was done to ensure there was attendance from both the community at-large and those whose experiences were being discussed, namely students and older adults.

The WVCS mobile food market, known as the Park It Market, goes to De Anza College every other week to provide free food to its students. Multiple hours of outreach were conducted at the market in order to garner student interest and attendance. Additionally, emails publicizing the event were sent out by the De Anza basic needs center, various school districts, and De Anza clubs and groups. A large portion of WVCS clients are older adults, so outreach was done to WVCS clients encouraging event attendance.

Panelists were asked to reach out to their networks, and over twenty unique community groups were reached out to about the event by WVCS and the City. Additionally, the City sent out several emails to an email list of over 1,000 individuals with information about the event and registration.

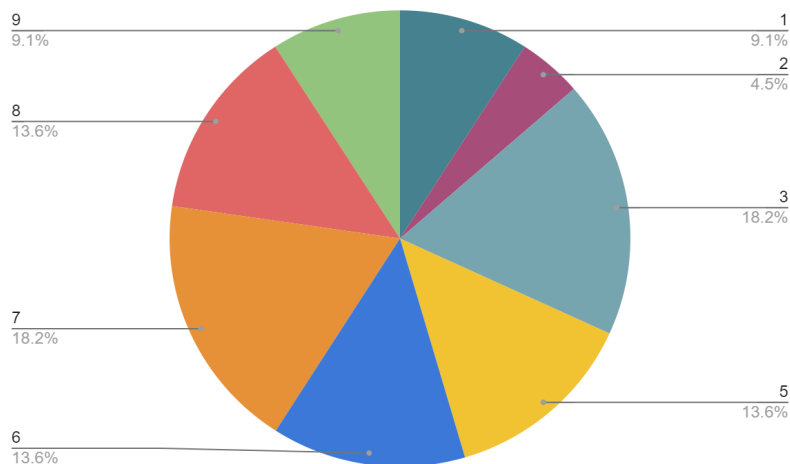
Attendees

The event took place on Zoom, with 65 individuals attending this meeting.

Event Content

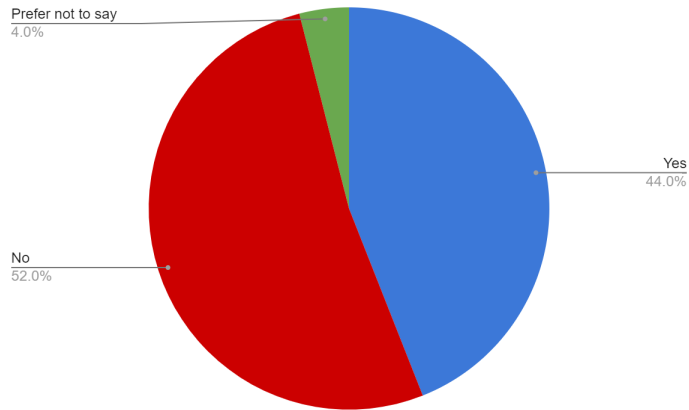
Beginning Poll Question #1

How often have you joined this kind of public meeting about planning policy? (22 Responses)



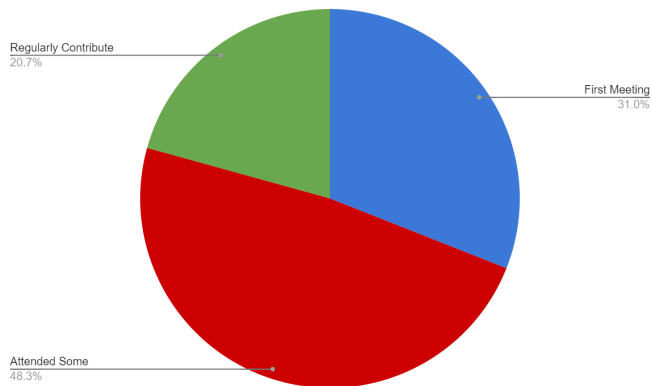
Beginning Poll Question #2

Have you ever experienced housing-related challenges, such as housing insecurity, trouble paying rent, eviction, or homelessness? (25 Responses)



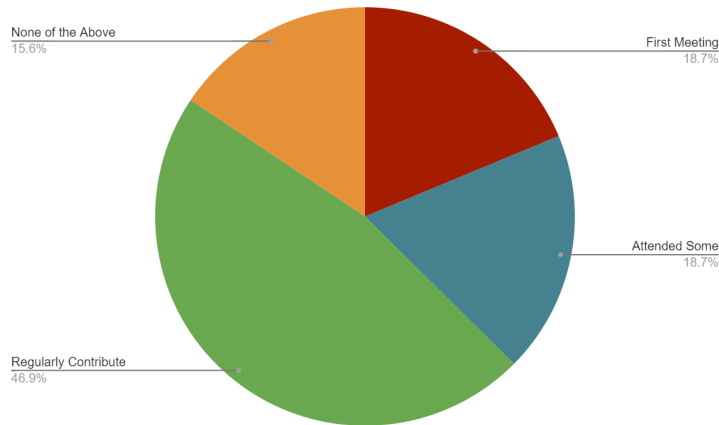
Beginning Poll Question #3

How often have you joined this kind of public meeting about planning policy? (29 Responses)



Beginning Poll Question #4

Which, if any, of the following groups would you consider yourself to be a part of? (32 Responses)



Presentation

After the poll was complete, Ande Flower from the EMC Planning Group team gave a brief presentation on the Housing Element updates and how to get involved in the housing element.

Breakout Session 1

Following the presentation, attendees entered breakout sessions. On Zoom, these took the form of breakout rooms, and in person, the form of breakout tables. Each breakout group had one moderator who took notes, facilitated the conversation, and ensured everyone had the equal chance to speak. Attendees were asked to answer the following questions in their breakout groups:

What is your name and why did you choose to come to this meeting tonight?

How much do you feel like you know about affordable housing?

How would you like to be more involved in the Cupertino community?

Panel

ALL: Tell us a little about yourself, one or two things you would like the participants to know about you, and why you agreed to take part in tonight's panel.

ALL: What is one thing you want tonight's attendees to know about you going into this panel?

Parisha, Edwyn, and Erika: What unique barriers do you think students and young people face when it comes to housing?

Komala and Leslie: What unique barriers do you think older adults face when it comes to housing?

Erika: Through your work supporting students, what have been some of the biggest needs you've observed?

Parisha: What has it been like navigating the job market, and how has this impacted your housing situation and options?

Komala: What has it been like to live in Below Market Rate housing in Cupertino for the past 14 years?

Komala: What problems and fears are you facing with your housing situation as retirement approaches?

Edwyn: Tell us about your experience living in an apartment complex. And how has it changed as prices have increased over the past decade or so?

Leslie: In your 15 years living in Cupertino, have you seen changes in rental pricing? How has this impacted you?

ALL: What has been your biggest takeaway from this panel? Why do you think it is important for the community to support students and older adults with their housing needs?

ALL: What is one thing you want tonight's attendees to take away from this panel?

Each panelist participated fully, giving valuable insights about the experiences people face in trying to find housing. Some notable words from the panelists are below, though the full recording is the best way to understand the power of the panel.

“Up and down the ladder you see tons of lack of resources, but I think it's particularly concentrated for younger people and students...you lose tons of privacy, safety, and security... I have to see tons of young students having to park in dangerous areas cause that's where people don't check. And they have to live with a bad roommate because rent is cheap...you have to have heavy planning and accommodations to make things work, you have to have tight budgets.”
- Edwyn Castillo

“There are a lot of barriers that students face...the tuition fees are really expensive, we have our FAFSA, everything covered up, we have a lot of things to take care of like books...being a full time student, even if I work at a place part-time, they're not paying enough. If I work at university, they just pay the minimum. Twenty hours per week is really not enough to pay for the inflation in the market. There should be affordable student housing...if we could get a housing place or maybe some resources, that would be really beneficial so that we could focus more on our studies than taking on stress or the burden that we don't have enough.” - Parisha Ranabhat

“I think some things that became clear to me in this work is the challenge of even finding and accessing the resources that are available, and obviously there aren't enough resources available—but you know what I find with students of any age, or young people, is really issues in navigating the maze that are all of the resources, the agencies, the requirements, the guidelines, the forms, It's a really daunting task for someone who is new to this circumstance. I've had students that were nervous enough to talk to me on their campus asking for support, so when the support is outside of the campus, it's really difficult... It's a lot of teaching how to navigate these systems

which are so confusing and so detailed and so intertwined with each other, so that makes it really difficult. Other barriers might come up depending on the type of house that the student is looking for...some students need emergency shelter, and that could be completely across town making it difficult to get to school or to work so it impacts their status as a student. If they have a pet or a partner some resources aren't available to them. Sometimes there's financial grants that have really strict requirements that students just don't fit into... like credit scores or renter's history or things like that that make it really difficult..." - Erika Flores

"A lot of athletes come out of state or out of the area so when their housing falls through, it's a really difficult position that they're in. For international students it's the same thing.... A lot of the students that I've seen sometimes or that have come to me - becoming housing insecure was something that happened very suddenly. There was no time to plan or to save or to seek out resources immediately and that makes it really difficult because that kind of resources are very limited..." - Erika Flores

"The older adult faces numerous housing challenges, and each adult has their own unique scenario... We all want to feel safe, have economic security, and we want to feel comfortable within our means. But the difficulty is that they may have a social security benefit that has been predetermined that they cannot afford, even if [older adults] had an additional part-time job...I did have an accident and now I applied for the disability benefits but because I took on a part-time job at Target 3 days a week to meet my payments, insurance, car payment, my Verizon, they said "well, you're now not eligible for social security, you're not yet sixty-seven."" - Leslie

"My challenge is, as we are getting older, we have to work to sustain ourselves. To get food, shelter, housing, everything else. If it comes to a stage where we are not able to work, where do we turn to? Where do we get our housing? I am almost 80 years old, and I am still working to sustain myself, because I have to provide for my housing, for my food, my clothing, my living, everything else. But I save nothing because the rents are high, even with BMR, my rent is high, inflation is so high, and so it's just making ends meet. That's all I can do. If a stage comes when I'm not able to work, and I have to retire. Where am I going? What will happen to me? That's a big question mark I have on my mind all the time. The inflation has gone so much, but the income limit for BMR has not changed. Why is it that? It has been static for so long, I have been under BMR for 14 years, and I know it has not changed. When inflation has gone up so much, everything is 30-40% higher, why isn't the income limit going up? ...the same income limit that was decided about a decade ago... I also want information on senior housing, and how we can get resources from there...how are seniors going to be helped by the city for housing and other resources?" - Komala

"Before moving to Cupertino, I was moving here exactly three years ago...I did fill out forms at different places where they said there is an open application for low income housing, but right

now if I reach out to them, they will be like “your turn is going to come in eight or seven years”...I filled out an application right now... I really need help right now...there is affordable housing in the area, people are staying there and using it, that’s really great...but we need more space...there are new people who are joining in the community.” - Parishia

“The rental market in Cupertino does not really provide for affordable housing. That would pertain to an older adult as well as to the younger students ... shared housing with three or four students living in a two or three bedroom apartment, which means they would each have to pay between \$1200 to \$1500 per student. As Parishia said, you still have to study, there is no time to go out and do something part-time. I am doing a three-day part-time job at Target, but that’s about a paycheck of \$600 to \$700 dollars every other week, and personally, that’s not enough to sustain even the additional rent you need in order to continue to have an affordable business...The hardships are real, somebody then has to downsize in a very short amount of time - taking care of their belongings, finding a place, seeing if you need help if you have a mobility challenge. Getting someone to help you pack up, and then you have the move costs, you have new utilities, the new internet, changing your business license, and then the emotional stress...it is hard times, but we have to continue on. If we have our community and we know the resources, then we can help others.” - Leslie

“In my apartment complexes...before rent got so high, it was kind of like a cultural hotspot, like a docking point. For any communities that would come in, they would have families that could also speak Spanish...when you hear someone speaking your language, there’s automatically a connection. We would have that here, but slowly our community kind of lost that where people would just have to move out from the complex...you see the interlocking aspect that rent has on immigrant issues.... If we lose these communities because of rent ...you lose a huge docking point for any other communities that want to join here... Day to day favors like daycare, general tips on which schools to register your kids in...you get it through information circulation...for immigrant communities and these hotspots, it is one of the ways which through other means, you can facilitate this type of access...this impacts job acquisition, language acquisition...saving money by [sharing] spare food... we would have things like rent parties, when rent was starting to get very high, people who couldn’t make that difference, as a community would raise money so they could pay it. I think my community is not really a Mexican community anymore as it used to be, it’s kind of indifferent neighbors, closed doors...you vaguely know each other...Mine is lost but there’s still other hotspots with people helping each other, we can keep those intact. And we know the issues that are causing it - like rent increases and inflation.” - Edwyn

“I coordinate the food pantry and one of the things that we ask is how many people are in your household. I have students coming in and saying that they are in a household of 10 or 18 people, and it’s all students. And I don’t believe it’s a five or six bedroom home. They’re sharing a two or

three bedroom home or apartment...the rental market in Cupertino is wildly underestimated. I don't think people understand how people are living in Cupertino.” - Erika

“I believe in collective resources - if you are a community member, it is very important to share the resources that you have gained with another human being... if you're at your church, you're volunteering, talk about your experience to somebody else. Because they might have a connection, and you may be able to offer something” - Leslie

“Until and unless we speak, we don't know what's happening around...once we start communicating and being in touch with people around us, then we would know exactly what they need.”

“I want people to take away from this: pay attention to your community, like why is that apartment complex no longer there, why are you [not] seeing these demographics...all of a sudden you don't see as many people anymore. So just pay attention to the changes in your community.” - Edwyn Castillo

“Community resources are very important...reach out to people.” - Komala

“There's so many different situations and scenarios that I think go unknown or unperceived. It's just a greater understanding that housing in your community, if you're living in cupertino, looks different than most people would assume. There are a lot of people that are struggling. I think the takeaway in these meetings...people that are working on solving or impacting the housing pricing market...have more of these types of sessions where people can come and really talk about what their housing situation is, what they're struggling with, in the hopes of rallying the community to solve these issues together. Sometimes the community itself could be the barrier, and maybe it's because they don't know what their neighbors are struggling with.”

Breakout Session 2

When the panel concluded, attendees were sent into a second breakout session, responding to a new set of questions prompting them to reflect on the panel and what they learned. Before entering the breakout room, attendees were led in a brief exercise to reflect on the panel and ponder the questions. Moderators took notes in the breakout sessions to capture community feedback while maintaining privacy and anonymity. The questions for the second breakout session were as follows:

1. How did hearing from the panelists change your perspective on housing and student and older adult needs?

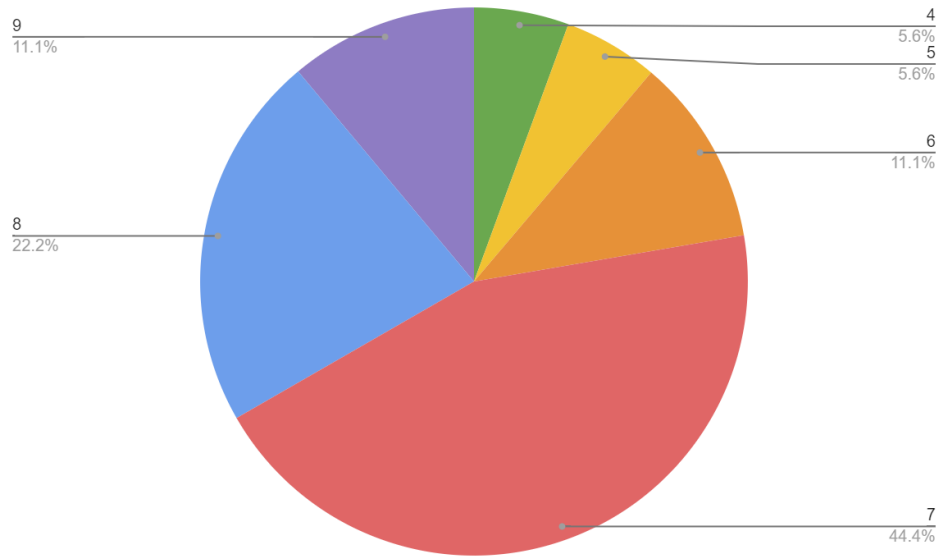
2. Why do you think it's important to hear from people with lived experience? (*Lived experience = people who have experienced the things we are talking about, such as actually being a student and actually living in affordable housing*)
3. What can we as a community do to better support our neighbors in need?

Some of the themes that emerged from the notes gathered by moderators *during both Breakout Sessions #1 and #2* are summarized below:

- Participants appreciated the opportunity to hear panelists speak about their lived experiences with housing insecurity. Hearing about the effects of housing insecurity on the panelists' work or school life and mental health allowed participants to better understand panelists' situations and strengthened their sense of urgency to act.
- Participants felt that hearing about the experiences of the panelists made them more inspired to act.
- After the panel, participants observed/felt that the system can trap people into staying within a certain income limitation in order to afford housing.
- Participants who also had lived experiences in struggling to get housing resonated with a lot of the issues panelists spoke about, especially regarding how housing insecurity happened very suddenly.
- A few community members resonated with panelists who spoke about the lack of access to resources.
- A community member who was a BMR and disability individual appreciated hearing younger folks speak about their struggles with housing.
- A community member expressed concerns about the detrimental effects of inflation and wished for a coordinated effort by the Bay Area to address this. He suggested a regional analysis to study the impact of inflation.
- A community member wanted to see more of an effort to spread awareness about the resources available and the importance of voting and volunteering to learn about rights.
- Participants expressed the need for these kinds of meetings in order to hear directly from community members rather than seeing harmful generalizations in the news.
- A few senior participants were interested in the application processes for affordable senior housing. One senior wanted to hear an update on the planning and construction of housing. Another senior wanted the income limit for BMR housing to account for inflation.
- Participants expressed a realization about the complexity of homelessness and housing insecurity after the panelists spoke. They were eager to participate in more conversations concerning how homelessness affects different groups.
- Participants felt that such conversations about housing can inspire more compassion and an understanding of the bigger picture in how access to housing shapes our community.

Ending Poll Question #1

On a scale from 1 to 10, how strong of a sense do you think you have of students' and older adults' experiences related to housing? (18 Responses)



Ending Poll Question #2

What is one thing you will do to get involved with the Cupertino Housing Element? (23 Responses)

