

Mayor's Task Force on Preserving Dynamic and Diverse Neighborhoods Public Meetings Questions and Commentary

Wednesday, March 26, 2015

Central Library, 600 Soledad St, San Antonio, TX 78205

Attendance: 54

Signed in to speak: 13

Spoke at the meeting: 13

Number of Comment Cards: 10

Did this meeting help you understand the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force on preserving Dynamic and Diverse Neighborhoods?

YES: 2

NO: 5

Did not answer: 3

Comment Cards (as written, no corrections)

Is the Task Force in communication with the people planning the consolidated plan? If the city is receiving \$80 million dollars over the next 5 years- why can't some of those funds be allotted to the Task Force recommendations? Perhaps to get a fund started that the bond \$ will only replenish. Also- if the consolidated plan is planning for housing for the next 5 yrs+ and the new "1 million people" that are expected to be in SA, is the Task Force working with that in mind. Both are coming out of the same office (planning) it should reflect that.

-to ignore people is wrong- silence kills...

-each neighborhood should be represented by a representative

-each university should survey all neighborhoods to assess needs

-business leaders should come to the table with sustainable resources to revitalize neighborhood

-college students, professors and business people should discuss sustainable projects to better improve community

-businesses, loans, innovative projects to raise funding for families should be a priority

-tearing down homes w/o replacement should be eliminated. Moving expenses alone is unacceptable

-need more input, time, planning & active participation from mental health, clergy, state reps should be included city wide

Translation much improved. Still no opportunity for real interaction with the community & Task Force. Obviously need more Task Force mtgs before releasing a report.[sic]

Only "Jesus" can help us, Blessed be "God" From a truly knowledgeable concerned citizen. It appears to me and other concerned citizens that they (the powers that be) has [sic] already made their decisions and recommendations [sic] and all these public meetings are for the concerned citizens to vent their frustrations, when everything has already been done and completed. They are going to move forward on what they have already agreed upon. These meetings are just pretend, as if their voices are still being heard, when in reality everything has already been done and completed.

What I do understand is that the Mayor's Task Force is moving too fast to finalize these recommendations. It feels like the "results" are being railroaded. Please postpone the recommendations and take meaningful measures to address some of the concerns raised by both citizens who spoke up & some of the Task Force members. We need immediate action to prevent land speculation & property flipping; we need prioritization of protecting viable communities as communities. COSA needs to be required to give just as much (or more) attention & service to residents & ordinary citizens as it gives to the developers who profit from destroying our communities.

Meeting was informative to the present public. I believe the presence of officers was unnecessary [sic]. Also, some of the the [sic] present task force members lacked their listening skills and there was not enough time for public to voice their thoughts. Three minutes is not enough and that is not helping community voice themselves as the meeting was for that purpose. LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND!!

I understand that the Task Force didn't write them!

–especially that the Task Force didn't even write the recommendations!!

-how can public meetings

- Without translation (in the Westside)
- With overly rigid time restrictions on speaking
- With police officers in presence, alienating people of color, hardly helping the community feel welcome & valued
- Which no one in San Antonio knows about or have ever heard of constitute a serious attempt to engage the citizens of this city in a dialogue about the displacement of vibrant communities?

The draft report does not discuss the issue of homeowners struggling to upkeep their homes, who then may be targeted by realtors for code compliance violations. How does the Task Force plan to address this issue?

Online Comment

The city needs to enact rent stabilization/rent control to protect tenants, especially seniors, fixed income and disabled tenants. I realize that Texas law overrides this, but with some creative thinking, we should be able to push back against greedy apartment owners. Can zoning laws be used? Can incentives and tax rebates be used to twist their arms? Can Texas laws be changed (Diego Bernal should be on the case.) We need to think of the rights of tenants as civil rights and come up with some good ideas. San Antonio is growing fast and we need to protect owners and tenants

Facilitator and Audio Recording Notes

- Displacement of businesses and seniors because of higher rents including Bank of America--which citizens in the area used
- Examine the health effects of gentrification--take these into consideration, check the CDC's report or article about the topic
- There is not accountability for monies being spent on development
- New business seems more important than people--the most vulnerable are being ignored

- There is no consideration of the preservation of the neighborhoods we have now--to preserve the flavor of what we have now
- By the time information gets to the working people it is all a "done deal"--it is exhausting and demoralizing. The Zoning process needs amending.
- Establish a mediation process for developers and residents with an outside, unbiased 3rd party--the city cannot mediate
- People cannot afford to move back to their old neighborhoods and their old family homes
- Mitigate the cost of displacement, but know that some things cannot be mitigated no matter what the amount of money or help.
- Preserve families and save the flavor of the neighborhoods.
- Large security deposits are being used as a way to discriminate and discourage some renters
- Need more opportunities for ongoing input to the process
- There are many renters on the North side as well as other parts of the city
- The representative for the councilperson (in the speaker's district) said the scope of the Task Force should be extended to include renters--so they are also protected
- Three uniformed policemen at the meeting was viewed as excessive and unnecessary
- District 2 has had over 250 calls demolitions/compliance issues, District 5 has had 180 calls, District 1 has had many calls--these areas in the inner city are being targeted
- The Vacant Building Ordinance talks about giving land and buildings to developers.
- The Comprehensive Plan document refers to the "creative class" as living on the Northwest side of town and the other parts of town as where service and other workers live.
- Drainage problems at Five Points, Warren and Flores St., handicapped access is a problem Marshall St. has big potholes --repave the street and make it better--bus stops and sidewalks get flooded
- Is the document the work of the Task Force or the staff? (the speaker implied to audience it is the staff's work)
- The Task Force exists to protect people who do not have a voice and cannot be here today
- The gatherings (public meetings) are all reactive not proactive. We are acting as though the fight has been lost and that gentrification is unavoidable.
- 78202 and 78208 are below the poverty line Homelessness and poverty are still huge issues in this community
- Look at Salt lake City as an example --they have eliminated homelessness
- Glad for downtown revitalization, SA 2020 and all that is happening, but the city needs rent control--here is a huge impact on seniors, the impact is massive
- There is no protection for renters--some have seen a 25% increase in 3 years.
- Long term renters have given stability to downtown
- Revitalization needs to be affordable for people who already live in the area--so they don't get displaced
- Neighborhood Associations are organizations that should get more involved in the process
- There is too much poverty, neglect and discrimination. No one cares about humanity or the recognition of the West side of the city and what the people need
- Disagrees with the language of the policy goals-- to increase the number of mixed income areas throughout the city-- the language is discriminatory and is asking that it be changed

- Do not just consider permanent housing as the main focus, apartment dwellers are in need of affordable rents. The downtown market hot and rents are not affordable.

Task Force Responses From Audio Recording

- Include Maria Berriozabal recommendations in the report for discussion. The report is a work in progress and the Task Force will discuss all comments. Berriozabal expressed that she feels they need at least a couple of more meetings to discuss the community input. Asked that the public hold the Task Force accountable
- Nettie Hinton expressed that she believes that if Castro and Bernal had remained involved the focus of the discussions would be on displacement and not economic development and the development of mixed use communities. Feels the Task Force has lost focus. What San Antonio needs is not affordable housing, but "work force housing" for service industry workers
- Christine Drennon-The idea of using bond money and making it available for rehab, to help stabilize existing neighborhoods in need--the idea of preservation
- Susan Sheeran--Task Force should have provided for input at every single meeting
- Councilman Trevino--feels the frustration with the process, but it is not an easy task, the tasks are complex and nuanced. Transparency is the key to his process. Public meetings are part of the process. Supports the idea of more meetings.
- Jackie Gorman-- Impressed by the passion of the people who have spoken. How can renters be accommodated without taking away the rights of property owners? Asked for examples of how this can be accomplished and still maintain the rights of people who own the property.
- Rod Radle--This is a draft report no vote has been taken on anything. The Task Force is looking forward to the feedback from the community. Unless we have a concerted effort by community leadership and a broad spectrum of individuals from across the city. Unless we have a concerted effort the bond will not pass, we have to be involved and we need to vote.
- Preservation is the key--preserve the physical and social fabric of the neighborhoods

Questions From Participants

Disaster accommodations--tornadoes, earthquakes. What is the housing policy for residents who are affected by a disaster?

What is the city's plan of action for families on public assistance, or Section 8? Is it to transition a home or subsistence housing? [sic]

How can diversifying neighborhoods not displace people?
Diversifying sounds like displacement.

What is the plan of action to prevent homelessness? What is going to be done to prevent homelessness?

Wednesday, April 1, 2015

South San Antonio High School
535 Barlite Blvd, San Antonio, TX 78224

Attendance: 27

Signed in to speak: 15 carried over from previous meetings

9 Wednesday, April 1

Spoke at the meeting: 4 carried over from previous meetings

7 Wednesday, April 1 (2 people ceded their time to 1 speaker)

Number of Comment Cards: 5 cards filled out by 3 individuals

Did this meeting help you understand the recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force on preserving Dynamic and Diverse Neighborhoods?

YES: 2

NO: 1

Did not answer: 0

Comment Cards (as written, no corrections)

The objective of this Task Force is to eliminate revitalization in the future; it should never be required again if addressing the charge of the Task Force.

Displacement policy is not only short-term; it must be seen as the very last possible band aid. And it must be seen as a failure when we turn to it. And we must commit to making policy that doesn't even consider a fair displacement process acceptable as a permanent policy.

Increasing the number of mixed income neighborhoods does not mean re-making existing neighborhoods. Not by fiat- but naturally. Emphasis should move from corporate-centered when pursuing economic development. It should be neighborhood centered, so neighborhoods can benefit from the multiplier benefit of keeping economic transaction dollars in the neighborhoods, letting markets lift the economic well-being and evolve into mixed income neighborhoods naturally.

City staff erred in portraying the purchase of mailing lists of renters within 200 feet of a zoning change as prohibitively expensive. As a direct marketer I know this is not too expensive. Besides, it could be incorporated into developer's fees.

The previous comment leads to this comment: the Task Force must be given the opportunity to scrutinize staff reports in detail and question they're [sic] presentations. (Marianne Kestenbaum, 493-9654)

Issue of health concerns? Most use one of the best hospital systems known: UTHS world known doctors.

The demographic study for the Westside needs to recalculate and remove the affordable housing, SAAHC, SAHA properties etc. that give the area as a whole percentage wise an image with need. Because it is beginning to look like non-profits create such areas for their own benefit. This in turn overwhelms the existing citizens that own homes and are higher income levels. We are mixed income but because most projects are placed in our area the demographic is skewed. City

of San Antonio checks and balances process is flawed at many levels. Our area has mixed income but the demographic study is flawed.

Preservation or gentrification?

Regarding small lots, it was realized that the courts system of housing is not conducive to a healthy & safe environment. High density went to single homes. High density areas elsewhere once prosperous are no [sic] slums. Stop the abuse of empowerment zones. One reached the Castroville HEB, but bypassed La Fiesta.

Review and ask why the Securities and Exchange Commission Recommendations for Accountability of Economic Development Corporations and others not wanted. [sic] We need foresight and time to learn from the errors of others and the past.

Yes this is such an important topic. The Task Force & guests had a lot of good ideas to share.

Facilitator and Audio Recording Notes

- Gentrification is happening across the country and is affecting low and moderate income families. How can there be a balance for people when they must compete with wealthy corporations, developers and contractors? Suggests there needs to be a rule that city council persons cannot accept any donation from any proposed developers or construction companies --then there will be some balance.
- Gentrification is a symptom--Mission Trails and poverty are a symptom. There is a bigger thing; it goes back to education and the education system. As a community we should be focusing on how to get people out of low income housing. How do we get people to an income level where they can afford the developments that are being developed? I agree we need to implement affordable housing-- at the same time don't blame the city. When it comes down to it we can't build our own communities. As a person from the Eastside who moved back to the Eastside, it is annoying to hear the city being blamed for conspiring against people. Go to your school board meetings and tell them what is needed.
- Want to remind the Task Force and the community that the discussion needs to be extended and we need to continue to talk about the matter. The report is underdeveloped and it focuses on displacement as the only effect of gentrification, but it is only one aspect. Gentrification has different faces, stages and effects-- we have discussed education, higher wages, privatization and public spaces. This report is our future; forget the politics--think about the effects on people.
- Thank you for doing the meeting at South San --it should have been one of the meetings from the beginning. Thank you for doing the meeting.
- From watching the process the Task Force is driven by an artificial deadline. It will take longer than a 2 hour meeting to discuss all the comments and questions. Two things need to happen--- a context needs to be created for why there is a Task Force, and as the Task Force or Commission continues to do its work, the original Task Force members should be able to continue or select their own replacements.
- The elderly lose their will to live when they are displaced. There should be a system of checks and balances for the city to weigh options and consequences. Commissioners are the first link between people and government. People make a lifetime commitment to a place and then they are forced to start over.

- People want to make the money to be able to afford nice homes in our communities.
- Feel an obligation to speak --the Task Force speaks to gentrification and the policies speak to profit. Economic growth is not a solution to poverty. What we do in the US impacts the world (refers to a book ---*Confessions of An Economic Hit Man* by John Perkins).
- Councilman Saldaña's opening remarks were not translated--the equipment did not work.
- Community members have been blindsided by change. La Gloria was the speaker's first experience with racism. People have been coded out of their homes. Push the deadline forward (further out) for the recommendations--we need more time to discuss.
- (Graciela Sanchez and Antonia Castaneda ceded their time to Amy Kastely)
- The Vacant Building Ordinance is about speeding up gentrification. The Vacant Building Ordinance and the Building Standards Board and code compliance allow demolitions to be speeded up. HDRC's mission is not just about historic and architectural preservation. They don't understand their charge--it is about preservation of places and culture.
- Economic policies of COSA Empowerment Zone ---dollars from the federal government went to build the Grand Hyatt. Cities are supposed to use federal money to help the zones in need---small businesses for upgrades etc.-- when the company was asked for a commitment to pay a living wage, they did not want to do it.
- One model is--make money and materials available to families and people to allow them to improve their houses. COSA does not follow through on policies in low income neighborhoods, so this opens the areas up for gentrification. The city enforces code compliance in low income neighborhoods, but does not maintain parks or city services in low income neighborhoods
- The report lacks focus on economic inequality-- the perspective is that economic integration will help create economic integration. It is like busing rich people to poor neighborhoods and then there is integration.
- Nothing in the federal or state constitutions requires you alter the master plan for a developer.
- City attorneys are not always right, you need to consult an independent counsel to try to help keep people in their homes. It is OK to ask for another opinion.
- Make our dynamic and diverse traditional neighborhoods strong and stop those city policies that make life in those neighborhoods difficult. Give a little support to homeowners and businesses. Businesses are going to want to be in those neighborhoods as long as there are people in the neighborhoods. It is a huge mistake to tear down the old and put in subsidized housing.
- The result of term limits is that council people will not be in their positions very long and that city staff will then make the decisions.
- We need to think of the conceptualization of the issues of gentrification. You are working with an artificial deadline. Don't let developers and other wealthy interests be the privileged force that influences the process. The inequalities are on the table; recognize them.

Task Force Responses

- Maria Berriozabal: Not enough effort is going into reaching the target audiences who are directly being affected. Need to fix how public meetings are announced and how we provide services for limited English understanding. Bob Comeaux's letter, Maria's recommendations and the Right to the City statement need to go to the Task Force to be part of the discussion. The city needs to let people know that there are incentives

available to them. The Task Force never discussed gentrification. Need a report to go to the Task Force on the results of the Reprogramming Hearing on April 16 -- what will the \$1.5 million will be used for and what income levels will qualify. Please attend the meeting with your questions. People getting requests/notices to buy their houses--city has to find a way to let people know there are changes, programs and incentives that are happening inside Loop 410 that are changing the character of the city. Need to change the perception that the city only listens to developers. Change happens when people outside make it happen.

- David Adelman: People move into older neighborhoods because they want to move into interesting neighborhoods. We need to make decisions and choices about how we are going to grow as a city. The cost of sprawl is very high. Mixed income neighborhoods are the most sustainable.
- Susan Sheeran: A special request of Amy Kastely --please send in the bullet point comments of your presentation. The SAFFE Officers at the last meeting were appreciated.
- Nettie Hinton: The city does not do a good job of getting the word out to those most affected. Someone has to take the time to talk to the affected people. The process is moving too fast. Whoever/whatever is forcing the short timeframe needs to let the Task Force meet for longer to do more thinking about the draft, the comments and the situation. People who want to move into the inner city will displace long-term residents. We need to help the service industry workers.
- Richard Milk: This is the second time hearing that mixed income neighborhoods should not be the goal. What are the mechanisms and the outcomes that will be a logical to get San Antonio off the most segregated list?. Heard from the speakers that there is a desire to get at the root causes of the problem in San Antonio--don't limit the conversations to this Task Force, the issues are much broader. A permanent commission is a good vehicle for working on the problem.
- Councilman Treviño: Coincidentally, the map that tracks obesity is almost the same as the areas we are talking about--there are other issues to consider in these areas--these issues can be correlated and need to be addressed. Regarding what has been referred to as the artificial timeframe--we want to get to the point of establishing the permanent commission. We need to establish better polices and strategies for communication on the issues.
- Rod Radle: The complexity of the issues is incredible. There are many cases where owner occupied homes are owned outright, but people don't have the capital to fix their homes. They are paying more than 30% of their income to have insurance and for maintenance. There would need to be hundreds of millions of dollars of capital available to bring these homes up to standards. There is a 50/50 chance the house will need to be torn down and rebuilt to meet minimum standards. Then will the owner be able to maintain the house? These are complex issues with big needs.
- Councilman Saldaña: The idea that we want to reverse a trend that investment goes into certain parts of the city-- there are 2 sides to the coin. People get caught when projects happen in historically underserved communities and attract investment and development. What does it do to people who live in the area? We don't want to have a public investment and then have the people who have lived there for many years not benefit from it. People get caught after staying in place and sticking it out--then the improvement happens and things change. The people who have lived there all this time need to benefit from the investment. This is a policy question we have here we are trying to answer.

Questions From Participants

How can there be a balance for people when they must compete with wealthy corporations, developers and contractors?

How do we get people to an income level where they can afford the developments that are being developed (built)?

Online Comment (received 4/2/15)

Yesterday, at the Town Hall at South San High School, many comments were made that those of us who spoke at this particular meeting “elevated the discourse,” were “clear and concise,” and “got to the point.” In a respectful and appreciative tone, you thanked Amy Kastely and me by name. With each of these comments, I nodded and said thank you, but each time I thought my stomach would fall to the floor. To be honest, your attitudes were very blatant. Did anyone notice that Amy and I are both white, college-educated women? Did anyone notice that the majority of residents affected by displacement and gentrification are poor and working class people of color? Yes, everyone noticed. These attitudes are the crux of the issues you are called to address, and they should be called out for what they are. Quite simply, this is racism. I will remind you that racism is not so much something that we intend, but something that we inherit – all of us – as a society. It is insidious and pervasive. It is a set of attitudes and assumptions that inform our opinions and actions, sometimes in subtle, unconscious ways. The only defense against it is self-examination, and from what I have seen at these four meetings, we need to go much deeper with our self-examination, and hold one another and ourselves much more accountable. It is also a matter of systems and institutions, like the policies that you have been tasked with examining. If we cannot question policies and practices that we think of as “the way things are” or “the way things have to be,” then we cannot challenge racism. Though surely unintentional, your comments made it quite clear that you prefer the voices of white, college educated people over the voices of the residents who attended the previous three meetings to tell you how these issues **DIRECTLY IMPACT THEIR LIVES**. Those of you who made these comments must call your attitudes into question. You didn’t mean to be hurtful, but you were. Additionally, many people of color have brought up the same issues, again and again, without this level of respect and acknowledgement. Those who have spoken in ways you found pleasing were told, “You’re so articulate!,” which I’m sure you can see is quite patronizing! No matter the situation, it is always rude to respond with surprise to another person’s intelligence.

This particular meeting at South San High School, due to poor community outreach, was the **ONLY** meeting **NOT** attended en masse by residents from neighborhoods affected by gentrification and displacement. As we’ve seen on the maps, these are neighborhoods of high poverty, comprised mostly of black and brown residents. We are really elevating the discourse!” you exclaimed. “A breath of fresh air!”

There is more to “access” and “inclusion” than translation between Spanish and English. You also need respect. You need to listen. And you must respond, with your work and not just your words, to the actual issues that community residents have raised. You cannot serve a community that you are inconvenienced to hear. Your gratefulness last night implied a gross lack of respect for the voices of those “OTHER” people... the ones you have deemed too angry, emotional, uneducated, ignorant, or inarticulate. The ones who are too brown, too black, too poor to matter.

I stand by my statements from yesterday, that the problem is a local and a global one, a problem of empire, colonialism and profit, couched in the discourse of development, investment and growth. I would like to add one more big word to my “analysis,” though, and that word is RACISM.

There’s no need to thank me... plenty of people have said it before. But it is something I couldn’t live without saying. You are tasked with representing ALL OF US. You cannot pick and choose the voices that “matter.”

Thank you for reading.

Amanda Haas, (210)667-5695