



Date: February 13, 2015
To: Council Member Sally Clark, Chair, Housing Affordability, Human Services and Economic Resiliency Committee
From: Steve Walker, Director, Office of Housing
Subject: Director's Report: Recent and Upcoming Activities

High-Cost Cities Housing Forum

The Office of Housing is one of nine cities nationwide that convene periodically to discuss issues unique to localities with very high – or very fast-growing – housing costs. (The other cities are Boston, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles; recently Miami, Washington DC, and Denver were added as well.) The group, known as the High-Cost Cities Housing Forum, is convened and staffed by Enterprise Community Partners.

Last week I went to Denver for the Forum's semi-annual meeting, which this time was coupled with regional housing forum hosted by the City of Denver. A few takeaways:

- HALA. Several of the cities have recently completed housing plans. Some of the cities (Boston, New York, San Francisco) rely heavily on development incentives, and few have the benefit of a dedicated Housing Levy.
- Race and Social Justice. When we mentioned Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative in connection to the HALA, it captured a lot of people's attention. It appears that we are unique in explicitly incorporating an equity lens into our development of a housing agenda. (Representatives from other cities were also interested in Seattle's initiative in general, as well as the growing application of the RSJI toolkit to programs citywide.) We promised to send materials from Seattle to housing directors from several other cities, and will connect with SOCR to ensure that everybody is in the know.
- Seattle Housing Levy. Several cities are attempting to establish local housing trust funds to ensure a dedicated funding source for affordable housing development. Seattle's levy is a true object of envy! As if we needed any other reminder, renewal of the levy, which expires just next year, must be a top priority.

Personnel

Thanks to your actions in 2014, the Office of Housing gained authority to establish two critical positions: (i) a strategic advisor focused on equitable development policy and programs, and (ii) a community development specialist dedicated to compliance monitoring for units produced through OH's incentive-based programs.

Both hiring processes are underway! We are hopeful that we can announce these two new staff members to you as part of our next Director's report.

Housing Affordability Agenda

We have heard many calls for bold ideas, and members from each of the subject-specific work groups have stepped up with some new ideas. The next Advisory Committee meeting will take up specific strategies and begin advancing toward recommendations.

MFTE Audit Report

In late 2012, the City Auditor's Office published an audit of the Multifamily Tax Exemption Program based on project records from 2010. The Auditor shared multiple recommendations, and Office of Housing staff subsequently presented to the housing committee at four separate meetings during 2013. We have provided feedback to the Auditor's Office on latest implementation activities taken during 2014 and look forward to continuing discussions on the program's objectives and design as this committee takes up MFTE following conclusion of the HALA.