

Housing Report for March/April 2019.

Background

In 2018 the City of Cambridge engaged the State of Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in to assist in addressing challenges of the housing conditions highlighted in the “Substandard Housing Study” conducted by Planning and Zoning in coordination with GIS and the Salisbury University. This engagement led to a partnership with DHCD, Habitat for Humanity and the City of Cambridge. After careful evaluation of the neighborhood conditions along with the City and Habitat for Humanity allocating funds for improvements and increased staffing, DHCD awarded the City CDBG funding for the Pine Street Historic District for housing revitalization. The combined efforts of these three organizations yielded \$1.2 million for housing for Pine Street Neighborhood.

The City of Cambridge contracted a housing specialist to work with the partners in advancing the housing initiative. The Housing Specialist started in June 2018 and began by evaluation the project, reports and key data to best understand the challenges and opportunities in the Pine Street Neighborhood and establish a strategic plan of action in accordance. Through this process the Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Program was established.

Program Summary

The Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Plan (CNRP) is a targeted plan focusing on select neighborhoods to stabilize, redevelop and grow neighborhoods through strategic programs, partnerships and community engagement.

The mission of the Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Plan is to improve the land use and quality of life through comprehensive strategies and partnerships; including engagement of residents and businesses around permanent and temporary repurposing of vacant land, beautification and blight mitigation, improvement and marketing of new & existing housing, social cohesion strategies, and enhanced human services.

The **Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Program** is comprised of key partners that will be instrumental in the redevelopment plans in target neighborhoods throughout the city. This partnership includes Habitat for Humanity Choptank, Dorchester County, City of Cambridge, 1880 Bank, Salisbury University, State of Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), and members of the community.

The Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Program (CNRP) is a neighborhood scaled, targeted plan focusing on one neighborhood at a time to stabilize, redevelop and grow neighborhoods through strategic programs, partnerships and community engagement.

The Historic Pine Street District was chosen as the 1st target neighborhood to dove tail with work started by Dr. Dale Glenwood Green with Morgan State University. As the plans progress, the City will strategically incorporate these practices to additional neighborhoods throughout the City. The Historic Pine Street District was selected as indicated above and because of the following findings:

- ✓ Citywide survey indicated the highest number of homes with critical repair issues
- ✓ State expressed interest in this targeted neighborhood

- ✓ High concentration of Vacancy
- ✓ The most severely impacted neighborhood with sub-standard housing units
- ✓ Historic Significance
- ✓ Gateway to adjacent neighborhoods
- ✓ Enhancement of existing programs
- ✓ Connection to downtown
- ✓ Greatest potential to spark growth into adjacent neighborhoods

Progress to Date

Below is a brief highlight of program accomplishments to date:

- ✓ 1st Community Engagement was held August 2018: Community Block Party, several residents signed up, expressing interest in the housing rehab program. There were more than 80 residents to attend the block party, who also received resources from additional vendors.
- ✓ Key to the implementation of the CNRP is having a clear understanding of the current market, community needs and the vision the residents have for their neighborhood. With the awarded TAG grant, the City posted an RFP for the service of a firm to provide a housing market study and to work with the team to create the official Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Plan. In December 2018, Lisa Sturtevant & Associates was selected as the firm to perform these services. Completed Activities to date:
 - 2 Core Group Meetings: January & April 2019
 - 3 Community Visioning Sessions: November 2018, February & April 2019
 - Communication Strategy Policy: January 2019
 - Housing Market Needs & Assessment Study: February 2019
 - Tool Kit Draft Recommendation Plan: March 2019
 - City Council Work Session: April 2019
 - 3 Television Media, 1 Radio Interview, social media outlet mentions
- ✓ Established a partnership with 1880 Bank to serve as the financial institution partner. We are continuing our relationship development with 1880 Bank. Currently they are exploring the possibilities for the creation of Cambridge specific financial programming. We are exploring the development of a targeted housing mortgage program for critical skill workers such as police, fire, healthcare, teachers, veterans, etc. The goal of this program would be to develop an incentive beneficial program for home ownership for this targeted population. More information to come.
- ✓ Habitat for Humanity has been actively working on new construction on 3 single family, new homes. The addresses of the homes are: 507 High Street, 519 High Street and 603 High Street in the area designated as the Pine Street Historic District. approximately \$145,000 has been committed as of April 2019. One home has a qualifying homeowner working toward purchase of the home.
- ✓ We have identified 2 homes on Pine Street for acquisition. We have given the owner an offer, with the approval of DHCD, and currently waiting on a response. This activity will allow us to move forward on new construction on Pine Street.

- ✓ The housing rehab program has been delayed due to the unforeseen absence and departure of key project management staff within DHCD. The review process was first stalled in September 2018 due to medical leave by key personnel within DHCD, this and other personnel changes placed an approved notice to proceed with the program back 7 months. DHCD has since assigned new staff to serve as our project manager. During the month of March, we were able to meet with DHCD and receive feedback on our Housing Rehabilitation policy and after several reviews and meeting, we were able to submit the final version for approval. If approved, we will have a notice to proceed on the Housing Rehab portion of the program this Spring. This will allow us to begin assisting residents in the neighborhood with critical repairs to their homes. We have preliminary inquiries from 16 homeowners in the Pine Street Historic District. 6 of these homes are on Pine Street. The remaining homes are in the Historic District on Fairmount, Wells, High, Douglas and Noble streets, among others. Formal applications and project review will begin as soon as the Housing Rehab Policy and Procedure manual for the Rehab program has been approved by the State.
- ✓ Dorchester County has been a key partner in the Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization initiative by working closely with the City in prioritizing County owned properties for acquisition in the Pine Street Historic District. On Thursday April 4th, the team conducted a strategic working meeting to review, plan and prioritize property disposition in critical areas. This plan will serve as the program implementation plan, provide the County with direction on their property decisions as well setting a foundation for seeking additional funding to continue and expand the work in the District.
- ✓ Salisbury University Students assisted in facilitating the two of the community engagement meetings in February & April. They provided valuable feedback on the February meeting and their comments are attached.
- ✓ The City was awarded \$75 thousand through the Community Legacy grant for Street Improvements on Pine Street. There was discussion regarding the original proposed improvements submitted in the grant with concern that the plans would not be feasible for Pine Street. For this reason, the implementation of this work on Pine Street was halted and staff worked with members of Council to review practical, impactful use for the funding. As a result, we have identified a phased street lighting program as a use for the funding. We are in the initial phase to request from the State an amendment to the grant for street lighting on the 1st block of Pine St. at Washington St. The goal is to begin work in the summer, contingent upon approval from the State. If/When the State approves the grant amendment, the project will require key steps for implementation including, conducting a procurement process, engineering, planning and the like.
- ✓ We are still working on final plans to host Work Camp, which is a Faith base group, to come in the summer of 2020 to Cambridge for a home repair volunteer program. There are logics that are being discussed for the feasibility of the program.

- ✓ The “One porch-at-a-time” program has identified its first resident to assist with their home. The logistics are currently being finalized and we are scheduled to start and complete this first project sometime in April. As this will be the first project under this program, we are looking to invite the press to highlight the work and partnership with the School District. “One porch-at-a time” is a program designed to enhance the curb appeal of properties’ front porches, conducted by the city with the help of the Cambridge High School vocational carpentry shop students
- ✓ Members of the Housing Team will be meeting with members of the Board of Education on April 8th to discuss the Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Plan and ways that the City and School District can partner in this initiative.

Goal & Next Steps

- ✍ May 2019, Adopt the Cambridge Neighborhood Revitalization Plan and begin working with partners on implementation
- ✍ Continue to secure additional funding for program implementation.
- ✍ Seek out capacity building funding for an organization to assist residents in becoming home-buyer ready in areas such as financial planning, credit repair, home-buyers education classes etc.
- ✍ Identify key projects that can include the community for implementation through creative place making.
- ✍ Develop a marketing strategy to begin seeking developers to partner with the city in implementing key projects as found in the neighborhood Revitalization plan once it is completed

Request

In alignment with the CNRP goals, we have identified the AARP Challenge Grant for 2019 (attached) as a potential funding resource for program implementation. We request Council approval staff to submit a proposal for walkability enhancement on Pine Street. Specifically, we will request installation of ADA compliant crosswalks on Pine Street to enhance the street lighting work and response to Community Input provided during the community meetings. We would expand to neighboring Streets if the funding allows.

Fiscal Impact

Requesting \$15,000 in grant funding