

35 Cherry Street

CET Focus Group | American-Born Black Outreach Team (ABBOT) | 2nd Meeting | November 3, 2021

Project Summary & Community Engagement Process

The City of Cambridge is leading a public process to decide the future use of 35 Cherry Street, an approximately 11,000 sf vacant property in The Port. 35 Cherry Street will be acquired by the City as part of a real estate development agreement with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). This transfer includes the stipulation that the parcel be used in perpetuity in a way that directly benefit residents in the Port neighborhood (formerly Area Four) and surrounding communities. The City Council identified the site for affordable housing.

On November 3, 2021, staff from the Community Development Department led a focus group with Cambridge residents who identify as American-born Black. This group discussed the results of the preceding engagement events and provided additional feedback. This focus group was attended by five community members and one outreach worker from the Department of Human Service Programs' (DHSP) Community Engagement Team (CET).

Meeting Notes

Project Massing and Height

- Three participants stated they would prefer townhomes to flats. They explained that townhomes help prevent noise from stacked vertical apartments.

Unit Size, Bedrooms

- Several participants agree that larger units with 3-4 bedrooms are what's most needed.
- Participants stated that having larger units is more important than having more units. Larger units accommodate people who want to grow their families in Cambridge.
- Two participants stated they and most the people they know need more than a 1-2 bedroom unit.

Rental or Homeownership

- One participant stated the available affordable homeownership programs need to be revised, and if not, then the priority should be for new 3-4 bedroom affordable rental units.
- Focus group participants expressed that the current affordable homeownership programs do not allow for financial advancement or progression. They explained that current affordable homeownership programs limit the equity available to the residents, and residents are unable to pass on affordable homes to children or other family.

Other Comments

- Participants described some ways that Cambridge has changed. People who grew up in the city don't recognize the community anymore and are being priced out of the housing market

by people moving into the city. One participant noted it is especially difficult for people with families to afford to stay in Cambridge.

- One participant stated the 30 percent of income charged for rent in affordable rental units does not account for the number of children in the household. The participant continued, saying that residents want to save money, but it is difficult when rent goes up so soon after income goes up.
 - One participant proposes that they re-calculate rent every 5 years instead of every year, so people have a chance to establish savings.
 - Another participant stated they earned a Masters' degree last year, but it almost doesn't seem worthwhile because her rent will go up if her income goes up.