

Together Lexington
Courageous Conversations
Gentrification
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FUNNELING IDEAS INTO ACTION

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Purpose and Outcomes

Overall Purpose: To encourage meaningful discussion and awareness among all members of our community.

Meeting Purpose: To identify community concerns regarding gentrification in Lexington and share ideas on how to address them.

Outcomes:

- Prioritized list of key gentrification issues in Lexington
- List of ideas for how the community might address these issues
- Recommendations for next steps

Introductory Activity and Opening Conversation

Participants were asked to introduce themselves at their tables, share what brought them to the event, and what gentrification means to them. Volunteers were asked to share their definitions of gentrification with the larger group. This conversation led to further discussion on current, local events related to gentrification, causes, who is impacted and differences between successful and unsuccessful efforts. Key points from some of those conversations are captured below.

What are the causes or drivers of gentrification?

- Beautifully packaged, but don't care about the people
 - What is the true cost?
- City unwilling to hold absentee property owners accountable
- Complaint driven – creates tension
- Greed for money and property
- Not a lot of low cost property available outside of downtown
- Opportunity to preserve
- Population growth
- Privilege – I have access to money, so I can do it
- Revitalization, often without neighborhood input
- Shifting demographics and trends, such as young adults desire to live in downtown and walkable neighborhoods

Who are the groups or population segments involved in or impacted by gentrification?

- Business owners
- Court system and laws
- Development corporations
- Elderly and relatives of the elderly
- Hipsters
- Local government
 - Codes Enforcement
 - Council members
 - Economic Development
 - Planning and Zoning
 - Property Valuation Administrator
 - Vacant Property Review Commission
- Major landlords and slumlords
- Neighborhood associations
- Renters
- Universities

What makes the difference between successful and unsuccessful efforts?

Participants identified negative impacts of gentrification, such as less affordable housing, redlining, racial and class discriminations, displacement and loss of connectivity and history. The group also identified positive impacts, such as improved living conditions and infrastructure, knowing neighbors, generational living, less crime and more walkable neighborhoods. After discussing both perspectives, the group generated the following list of what makes the difference between successful and unsuccessful efforts.

- Be neighborly
- Do benefits solve the problem or just move it?
- Engaged
- Intentional
- Keep in mind who the changes are for and who will be impacted
- Protecting the history
- Respecting people

What are the key gentrification issues in Lexington?

Participants were asked to answer the key question within their small groups and encouraged to think broadly, including multiple community aspects and the numerous people impacted, who may not have been identified in the earlier conversation. Once all of their issues and concerns were listed, each small group was asked to identify the two most critical issues for the community to address. Their prioritized responses are presented below.

Critical Issues and Concerns

- Affordable housing
- Better mechanisms for affordable housing
- Code enforcement weaponization
- Community involvement – meet your neighbors and know them
- Dignity of all people
- Displacement
- Identification of those affected
- Micro-aggression
- Race and class
- Use of existing (or new) laws to protect vulnerable properties
 - Purchase Development Rights program

Additional Issues and Concerns

- Absentee landlords
- Addressing racial stereotypes
- Broken relationships – people with power versus the powerless
- Capping tax hikes
 - Example: Rent control preservation
- Changing the perception of gentrification as only a negative
- Communication
- Connectivity – learning about others and knowing them as human beings
- Decline of areas targeted – both physical and mental
- Economic and social exclusion
- Homeowner populism
 - Social issues involved; Owning your own home is not the only solution
- How to strengthen what already exists (preservation)
- Intentional engagement – coming from an awareness

- Property tax deferment
- Property tax increase
- Protect and acknowledge neighborhood history
- Uncaring landlords
- Upheaval and relocation of original residents

How can the community address this challenge?

Using their prioritized critical issues and concerns, each small group was asked to answer the key question. Listed beneath each critical issue or concern are their ideas on how they can be addressed.

Affordable Housing/Better Mechanisms for Affordable Housing

- A developer/landlord tax, like a business tax that goes into affordable housing
- A living wage
- Fair market rent in an area
- Increase of housing choice vouchers
- More money in the funds to help homeowners fix up their properties
- Property tax freezes for existing and elderly homeowners
- Protections for immigrants
- Rent control (Proposition 13 from California? Maybe not?)
- Require landlords to accept housing vouchers
- Some other mechanisms for determining renters (think about the problem of running background checks, etc.)
- Tax incentives for renting to low income

Community Involvement – Getting To Know Your Neighbors

- Include renters in neighborhood associations and other organizations
- Individuals take initiative to meet neighbors, help each other, empower each other
- Other groups and organizations should work harder to include neighborhood residents, such as fish fry, flea markets – unconventional organizations
- Provide incentives for participating in neighborhood associations (funded by the City?)
- Strengthen and expand neighborhood associations
- Work alongside neighbors to address code infractions

Micro-Aggression

- Engage neighborhood and incorporate community input into process of development and change

Use of Existing or New Laws to Protect Vulnerable Properties/Neighborhoods

- Audit existing programs
- Create guiding principles with attention to inclusion
- Create new position to solely work on new program including use of Small Area Plans
- Reallocation of local funds
- Research grant monies
- Research other cities for programs to institute locally

Key Next Steps

Participants were asked to provide recommendations for next steps based on the conversations.

- Bring reports to key city leaders to act on ideas and issues
- Coordinate and collaborate with other conversations in the community
- Gathering at the end to develop guiding principles for inclusion
- Individually
 1. Become aware of the history;
 2. Listen to the narrative of those impacted; and
 3. Ask what is needed
- Involve renters, elderly and others impacted
- Keep those involved in tonight aware of what's happening
 - Use our emails from registrations
- More organized conversations
- One common space to look for information
- Take conversation to community

Meeting Debrief

To bring the session to a close, participants were asked to complete an evaluation. The complete evaluation results will be tabulated at the conclusion of the 12 conversations, but the closing three questions are included below to inform the remaining conversations. Duplicate responses are denoted with an asterisk.

1. What worked for you during tonight's session?

- Opportunity to share individually in a closed group and then expand outward to larger group*****
 - Ability to talk to multiple well-informed people, mix of small-group and large-group discussion
 - Group discussion with report out; sharing at the table; small to big group report out
 - The group-wide discussion where folks could share their ideas with the entire group and spark conversation among everybody
- The diversity of attendees/opinions*****
 - Cross section of community at each table
 - Diversity of ideas shared
 - The presence of council members. Openness of comments.
- The format encouraged discussion*
- Blunt conversation!
- Different voices heard, most of which I disagree with
- Everything!
- Facilitator was great. Make-up of participants at table was great.
- Good group and facilitator
- Hearing/Listening to others' concerns
- I liked the pace of the questions, kept the conversation going
- Location
- Started needed conversations

2. What would have made tonight's session better?

- Work harder to include “regular” people, residents of neighborhoods affected by gentrification. At this meeting I felt the conversation was dominated by people who are civic/community leaders, non-profit employees and leaders, and media people – this meant that they were very well informed and passionate, but they often spoke from the high-level perspective of their “agenda” or position, rather than from the perspective of their lived experience as residents or landlords.**
 - More involvement from neighbors in affected areas
 - Next time use a neighborhood church; may have more neighborhood folks present
- Advertise these conversations better! Also, people who are directly impacted have been having these “intro to gentrification” conversations a lot. They need to be involved in the subsequent conversations about organizing actions.**
 - Better promotion/intentional outreach; Broader advertising
- Hard to hear folks coming from far away tables**
 - Microphone at each table and for facilitator
- Encourage more strategic troubleshooting
- Group was a little larger
- It just feels kind of empty. I mean, what's actually going to change? This is not the first or the fiftieth time that folks have been talking about this stuff. There should also be more drinks. You ran out of bottled water.
- More involvement from people who could affect change
- None
- Please make sure certain people aren't taking up too much space by talking a lot
- Some printed material to share about this with people who don't have access to the internet

3. Do you have any lingering comments and/or questions?

- Great discussion!**
- Maybe providing some data resources or reports for people to read before attending so everyone has a general equal basis of understanding
- Thank you for doing
- The most important take-away for me was that since we live in a free market economy, there must be governmental protections in place to protect renters and owners. Rent control is a conversation that needs to happen in Lexington.
- Very little publicity done at community level. These communities that are at risk of being gentrified do not use social media, often cannot afford daily newspaper. Those residents are not in the room – this is not a diverse representation of the people being impacted most by most of these issues – they have not been reached. If sponsoring community conversations, you need to engage the community at every level and meet them where they are.
 1. Contact local neighborhood associations, community development corporation, churches, schools, community centers
 2. Invite them specifically to participate. Can also put notices in their newsletters, or on their Facebook sites or websites
 3. Set up resource table for those community groups to promote