

Housing and Community Development Steering Committee Meeting

March 13, 2025

2:00pm-4:00pm

Department of Public Works, 150 S Kendall, Battle Creek, MI 49037, Multipurpose Room 214

Attendance

Committee Members:

Amanda Lankerdt, Battle Creek Association of Realtors (BCAAR) | Mike King, Battle Creek Area Habitat for Humanity | Elizabeth Schultheiss, Battle Creek Community Foundation | County Commissioner Al Morehart, Coldwell Banker – Morehart Realty | Krista Trout-Edwards and Quinton Hay, Calhoun County Land Bank | Sonja Dean, LISC – Kalamazoo and Calhoun Counties | Whitney Wardell, Neighborhoods of Battle Creek | Jim Moreno, Chair of NPC #1 | County Commissioner Monique French, Chair of NPC #2/Pastor, Washington Height United Methodist Church | Kathy Antaya, Chair of NPC #5 | Elizabeth Garcia, Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT)

Staff:

Helen Guzzo, City of Battle Creek, Community Development Supervisor | Darcy Schmitt, City of Battle Creek, Planning Supervisor | Vanessa Hernandez, City of Battle Creek, Community Development Specialist | Tiyan Williams, City of Battle Creek, CEDAM Fellow | Melody Carlsen, City of Battle Creek, Planning and Zoning Administrative Assistant.

Meeting Overview

Committee members were briefed on the purpose and flow of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to establish priority statements for the 2025-29 Consolidated Plan. The priority statements would be developed from the group activity later in the meeting.

Data Presentation - The presentation (previously shared in meeting packet) focused covered:

- 2025-2029 Consolidated Plan Methodology
- Survey Distribution Strategy.

The 2025 outreach and distribution strategy followed the previous approach from 2015 and 2020. This year's responses were noticeably lower than the previous. Staff have received suggestions such as "make a video to raise awareness," or "revise the engagement strategy." As planning unfolds for the next plan, staff plan to explore avenues to increase participation. While many factors can serve as a catalyst as to why there were few response, feedback received from our Burmese community advises that there is strong distrust between government and the community. There weren't enough survey responses to analyzing subgroups by race, employment status, age, income or rental/homeowner as was done in previous Consolidated Plan cycles.

- Demographics Review (All Responses)
 - City/Township
 - NPCs associated with areas respondents reside
 - Respondent's Gender
 - Respondent's Age
 - Race and Ethnic makeup of respondent's

- Employment Status
- Household Income

Committee members took note of the high response rate of respondents who selected \$100,000 or more for household income. There were speculations as to the reasons those with income outside the range of CDBG funding heavily participated in the survey. One speculation inferred that households with relatively high incomes may have less constraints that hinder them from participating in completing community surveys.

- General Housing Response Questions
 - Number of Respondents Who Own Their Home
 - Years of Homeownership
 - Respondents Who Rent and the Type of Rental Dwelling.
 - Cost of Rent Payments
 - Respondents Reason for Renting

Discussion relating to the respondents reasons for renting ensued with an emphasis on the 27% “Other” response. Concerns for investigating further as to the “other” reason arose with a belief that it would be difficult to establish priorities without more knowledge as to what respondents meant by “other.” Of the 323 survey responses, there were 90 renters.

Group Discussion (Activity) - Breakout Groups

- Using the 1,2,3,4 counting method, members and staff were randomly assigned into four groups.
- Task: Assess the community’s needs based on the respondent comments for each theme. Record any observations, patterns or trends. Form headlines from the grouped comments based on your observations and summarize their meaning. Then develop a priority statement based on your summary of needs.
- Themes
 - Lack of Safe and Affordable Housing
 - Impact of Rental Housing
 - Neighborhood Safety
 - Property Maintenance
 - Strengthen Neighborhoods
 - Increase Public Awareness and Civic Engagement
 - City Service Concerns

At the start of the activity, all four groups were assigned themes, as time progressed, teams were assigned only certain themes to ensure there was enough time to address/review each theme.

- Group Exploration
 - During a discussion with one of the breakout groups, members pointed out that, through an equity lens, none of the needs statements mentioned the importance of bus transportation for low-income people and others who do not own cars. Members also highlighted a need for greater mental health services and substance abuse recovery treatment programs. They believe that with the weakening of newspapers and lack of coverage of the Battle Creek issues on the radio and television, there is no central voice for public information. Another point of emphasis

made during group work was the need for a safe, low-barrier shelter for unhoused people in Battle Creek.

- After compiling summary statements, groups displayed their work on the communal wall. Members discussed similarities and differences, noting the tension between new development and the challenge to keep expenses such as taxes and rents affordable for current residents.

What's next?

- Community Development Staff will take the responses and develop the final priority statements.
- The Steering Committee will continue to meet to work on the Housing update the Master Plan led by Planning Supervisor, Darcy.
- In April: W.K. Kellogg Foundation Housing Collaboration Quarterly meeting, Jamie Shriner and Sonja Dean organizing. **Thursday, April 10, 2:30pm at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation**
- **City Commission Housing and Community Development Needs Public Hearing, Tuesday, April 15 at 7pm.** Respondents can provide up to 3 minutes of testimony on needs in the community. Citizens giving comments can leave after the public hearing portion of the meeting. Please invite residents and participation to attend.
- In May: **City Commission Public Hearing on the 2025-2029 Consolidated Plan and PY 2025 Annual Action Plan, Tuesday, May 6, 7pm.**
- Kick-Off Planning the Housing Update to the City's Master Plan with consultant team, **Thursday, May 8, from 2pm-4pm, City of Battle Creek Department of Public Works Conference Room.**

Priority Statements from the Steering Committee

Theme: Lack of Safe and Affordable Housing

- Develop policies and programs to expand housing affordability, preservation and attainability.
- Promote educational services for home buying, rental, and home maintenance while prioritizing increased housing choice and affordability
- Develop more affordable housing for older adults and families
- Provide education sessions for homeowners, landlords and renters
- Unlocking Homes: Innovative solutions for achieving Affordable Housing for All
- Building Bridges: Embracing multigenerational housing for stronger neighborhoods, families and civic connections
- Empowering Futures: Transformative Housing, education and training for sustainable living
- Safe, Dignified and Inclusive: Expand Housing Access for all in Battle Creek
- Zoning and Equity: Understand history, impact and future of land use in Battle Creek

Theme: Increase Public Awareness and Civic Engagement

- Promote & strengthen Neighborhood Planning Councils to improve communication, information sharing and engagement; use diversity communication mechanisms to improve reach
- Create better understanding of code compliance regulations: Proactively engagement to increase public awareness and collaboration
- Transforming spaces and strengthening community: Beautifying spaces for a thriving Battle Creek

Theme: Rental Housing

- Enforce uniform minimum standards for safety and a basic level of maintenance
- Provide greater accountability for landlords to provide safe rental housing
- Increase housing choices for older adults and workforce housing

Theme: Neighborhood Safety

- Designated spaces for safer streets: Keep off road vehicles off roads and in their own spaces
- A pathway to inclusive communities: Ensure safe and accessible neighborhoods

Theme: Property Maintenance

- Ensure consistency and efficacy in Code Compliance and resident access to City maintenance programs
- Strengthen Code Compliance while ensuring integrity in the program

Theme: Strengthen Neighborhoods

- Improve neighborhood infrastructure, amenities, and services for city residents
- Contribute to the vitality of core city neighborhoods by strengthening essential city services through walkability, transportation, and infrastructure improvements
- Bolster housing development to create a stronger workforce and more housing choice
- Encourage housing development and increase more choice in housing across the spectrum of income
- Lack of access to standard amenities in some neighborhoods, such as grocery stores, gas stations, sidewalks and laundromats

Theme: City Service Concerns

- Continue and increase the Minor Home Repair Program while ensuring equitable access to the funding
- Increase frequency and consistency of street cleaning and other neighborhood services
- Stronger together: Fostering housing collaboration for innovative solutions to promote community growth
- Building a stronger Battle Creek: Advancing clean streets, reliable infrastructure and essential city services
- Comprehensive housing repairs and stabilization for lasting health and safety