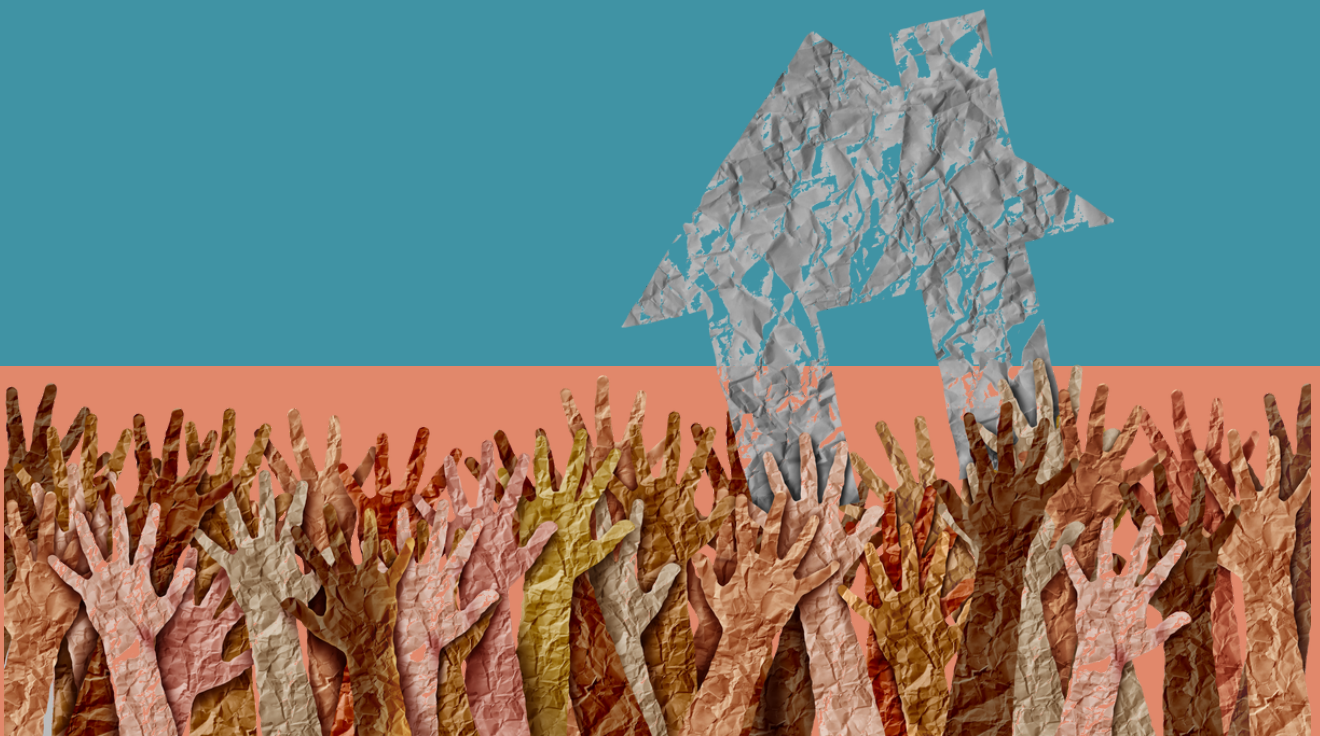


# COMMUNITY PARTNERS TABLE

## FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

December 2024



Produced By



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## OVERVIEW

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This document was drafted by Headwater People, a consulting firm contracted by King County to form, convene, and staff the King County Affordable Housing Committee's (AHC) Community Partners Table (CPT), and reflects the ideas of the CPT after two years of engagement. As the Table concludes its work as an advisory body, King County asked the CPT to recommend changes to the way that the AHC operates to help ensure the AHC advances the priorities of the communities most disproportionately impacted by housing cost burden across the county.

Bree Nicolello, representing African Community Housing and Development, served on the CPT prior to Bilan's involvement.

Our final recommendations include:

- **Best practices** the AHC could employ to bring communities impacted by the housing crisis, subject matter experts, and elected officials together to design policy solutions to the housing affordability crisis and share power.
- **A road map** outlining how the communities most impacted by the housing crisis in King County can more effectively participate in shaping the policies and investments that will define the future of housing in our region.

## Past and Present Community Partners Table Members Include:

- Bilan Arden, African Community Housing and Development
  - Angie Hinojos, Centro Cultural Mexicano
  - Bhavna Madappa, Indian American Community Services
  - Dr. Pran Wahi, Indian American Community Services
  - Ebo Barton, Lavendar Rights Project
  - Harold Odom, Lived Experiences Coalition
  - Ginger Kwan, Open Doors for Multicultural Families
  - Paul Tan, Open Doors for Multicultural Families
  - Brittany Blue, Sound Generations
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# Road Map to Centering Communities in the Future of Housing in King County

## INTRODUCTION

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The King County Growth Management Planning Council formed the Affordable Housing Committee (AHC) in 2019 to serve as a regional advisory body with the goal of recommending action and assessing progress toward implementation of the Regional Affordable Housing Task Force's Five Year Action Plan. Since then, the committee has functioned as a point of coordination and accountability for affordable housing efforts across the county and this past year alone, reviewed 27 draft comprehensive plans for alignment with Countywide Planning Policies, providing written feedback to cities and King County on their affordable housing policies and growth strategies.

Over the past two years, the Community Partners Table (CPT) has worked with the AHC to elevate and advance housing priorities of communities most disproportionately impacted by housing cost burden. Since first convening, the CPT has worked diligently to understand and advocate for the housing needs of people who are low income, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities, gender diverse communities, people experiencing homelessness, people with intellectual and physical disabilities, older adults, LGBTQIA+ people, youth, and immigrants.

In the first year, the CPT provided feedback and reflections on the AHC's accountability and implementation framework. By the second year, the group struggled to identify tangible ways to contribute to the work of the AHC. This report aims to remedy this by offering a new vision for how community organizations working on the frontlines of the housing crisis and the communities most impacted by the housing crisis can engage more directly in how jurisdictions plan for and implement housing solutions.

CPT members are committed to building a future where all communities have access to safe, quality, affordable housing that affirms their cultures and identities and remains accessible to all ages and abilities. CPT member organizations are currently growing housing solutions by developing housing projects that serve their communities, advocating for policies that protect and advance affordable housing, and by working to move resources so that the prosperity that is generated through housing investments is shared by communities of color and low-income communities.

**This document offers a road map to centering communities in the future of housing policy decisions throughout King County, helping envision how the communities most impacted by the regional housing crisis can have a stronger role in shaping the policies and investments that will define the future of housing in our region.**



## ROADMAP



### 1. Change the narrative for housing

How we talk about housing in regional policy spaces has become so esoteric and abstract that everyday people can't engage in these discussions. We need to make these conversations accessible to the average person and find ways to keep the public informed of housing policy work. Doing so will build more support for housing solutions so that elected leaders understand they need to deliver on community housing priorities. The AHC has a role to play in creating accessible ways for people to understand our housing crisis and advocate for housing solutions.

| Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Lead |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Amend the AHC charter to require the AHC to periodically spotlight topics of interest to the media.                                                                                                                                                                               | AHC  |
| Find new, accessible ways to talk about housing in reports to communities and diversify what report backs look like so as to reach more people.                                                                                                                                   | AHC  |
| Hire a consultant to develop a narrative strategy that can be applied to King County (KC) Department of Community and Human Services Housing and Community Development Division's efforts to help people better understand solutions to the housing crisis and feel moved to act. | KC   |

### 2. Increase representation and diversify decision makers

Across the county, cities and the county are making decisions about zoning, land use, developer incentives, and other housing policies, but we rarely see the communities most impacted or representatives from frontline organizations participating in these spaces. The AHC can help address this issue by modeling structures for building the capacity of frontline organizations and supportive infrastructure so they can participate in the AHC and beyond.

| Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Lead      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Reserve membership on the AHC for frontline organizations representing those most impacted by the housing crisis and ensure that members have support and resources to confidently participate in the work of the AHC. This could look like coaching, meeting prep, mentorship, and intentional relationship building. | AHC       |
| Create pipelines for impacted communities to become AHC members perhaps by recruiting from other KC advisory boards, where community members have gained additional experience and capacity.                                                                                                                           | AHC       |
| Build structures for cross-advisory group caucusing and power building to disrupt silos.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | AHC<br>KC |

### 3. Support multi-level, hyper-local democratic participation

The CPT cannot be the only place the AHC engages with impacted communities and the responsibility to engage communities cannot only fall on the AHC. To truly reach communities and ensure that the feedback provided is representative of the actual needs of communities, we need a regional community engagement system that supports hyper local and multi-level engagement.

| Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Lead        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Work in partnership with other government entities to develop a system whereby each jurisdiction is required to establish clear decision-making structures and standards that ensure the needs of disproportionately impacted populations' are prioritized and community members and leaders, organizations, and institutions share power and resources when developing their comprehensive plans. | GMPC<br>AHC |
| Assess and improve existing guidelines to ensure jurisdictions conduct quality community engagement when they are making major land use or zoning updates, perhaps building from Countywide Planning Policies H-8.                                                                                                                                                                                 | AHC         |
| Engage community members in the evaluation of jurisdiction's efforts to plan for and accommodate their housing needs.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | AHC         |
| Grow AHC community engagements across King County, facilitating strategic engagement and also supporting broader engagement through town hall meetings, community workshops, and listening sessions, perhaps even hosting a housing summit.                                                                                                                                                        | AHC         |
| Help jurisdictions in King County develop and implement innovative strategies for engagement and development of housing policies.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | AHC         |
| Regularly communicate AHC progress with a broad community audience. This could include a newsletter, external progress tracker, report on website, and other easy access points for information.                                                                                                                                                                                                   | AHC         |

## 4. Invest equitably in the housing economy

King County should ensure communities of color and low-income communities benefit economically from housing investments. As institutions, government entities procure everything from construction services to data collection. In order to ensure communities that have historically been locked out of our regional prosperity can benefit from future investments in housing, King County and the cities within King County must transform how they procure services and issue grants, so as to prioritize businesses and organizations that both serve and represent the communities most impacted by historical divestment.

| Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Lead |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Identify and recommend strategies to remove barriers that prevent communities of color from participating in the housing economy. The CPT is especially interested in strategies that address barriers to home and land ownership, and the barriers developers of color face. | AHC  |
| Offer grants and contracts to frontline organizations to collect regional housing data.                                                                                                                                                                                       | KC   |

## 5. Hold jurisdictions accountable

Though the work of the AHC is based on good faith relationships and peer-to-peer commitments, building systems for long-term accountability in how jurisdictions approach housing investments ensures these solutions will last and that housing advocates can successfully protect and direct investments.

| Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                    | Lead        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Set clear expectations for cities and King County in planning for housing, ensuring they set equitable goals.                                                                                      | GMPC<br>AHC |
| Increase jurisdictional transparency by requiring cities and King County to publish public reports that track if and how housing policy commitments shift over time.                               | GMPC<br>AHC |
| Build accountability steps cities and King County must follow when they decide to shift from their commitments. This could include requiring public statements, requiring community meetings, etc. | GMPC<br>AHC |
| Be bold in how the AHC publicly discloses when cities and King County do meet housing expectations and commitments. This could look like “grading” jurisdictions on their housing efforts.         | AHC         |

## 6. Assess impact and fill data gaps

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In order to understand whether the AHC's work to guide effective development and implementation of housing policies across King County has the intended impact, the AHC must develop mechanisms that capture impact and assess changes. The AHC is already making investments in a data dashboard and other tracking mechanisms. The CPT encourages the AHC to explore strategies for engaging communities in the development of these tools, especially when it comes to defining metrics, collecting data, and analyzing results.

| Recommendations                                                                                                                                                           | Lead |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Create a monitoring program that can be used to evaluate each jurisdiction's progress to implement their housing plans, community engagement efforts, and policy changes. | KC   |
| Require jurisdictions to produce report cards based on agreed upon metrics with a local community advisory board or a local "CPT".                                        | AHC  |
| Develop a public data table/evaluation tool to monitor progress and track the production and preservation of housing units.                                               | AHC  |
| Improve the quality of the public data available to assess progress by creating new mechanisms for collecting data to address current gaps.                               | KC   |

# Recommended Best Practices for Engaging Communities

*The last Community Partners Table (CPT) meeting of 2024 was designed to have members reimagine how government and community can partner to address the housing challenges in our region. The multi-hour discussion generated many creative ideas as represented in the Road Map and elevated best practices for equitable and effective partnership. The following document outlines the practices CPT members recommended to help shift the Affordable Housing Committee (AHC) and other local government entities away from traditional community engagement and towards co-governance and power-sharing. These recommendations aim to ensure frontline organizations working to support those most impacted by the housing crisis have a meaningful role in shaping policy and influencing investments.*

## 1. Share power and decision-making

One of the most effective ways to foster equitable partnerships between government and communities is by reformulating how power is distributed in collaborative spaces. Instead of predetermining priorities, bring people together to co-create priorities and work plans. Rather than merely gathering feedback from communities, design projects that empower community members to actively participate in decision-making.

The AHC's work is long term and sometimes it can feel like the AHC doesn't hold conventional power. These constraints can and should be examined with communities. Together, you can identify places where there is power, where decisions will be made, and where communities can influence how housing is implemented across the region.

When communities feel a sense of ownership over priorities and have a role in shaping the direction of initiatives, they become more invested in driving progress, overcoming challenges, and contributing their unique skills and resources. This collaborative approach reduces the burden on government conveners to serve as the sole drivers of outcomes, while growing responsibility, ownership, and ultimately power for communities to shape their own futures

## 2. Convene with purpose and maintain continuity

Even when community members are compensated, it is essential to ensure that meetings have a clear and meaningful purpose. The time that community members dedicate to advisory groups often competes with other personal or professional priorities. Therefore, it's crucial to make every meeting count—ensuring that discussions contribute to the organization's goals and drive positive change for the communities involved.

The CPT experienced several changes over the two years the group was convened. The focus of the CPT changed from year 1 to year 2, the consultant facilitator changed, and organizational representation changed with some members leaving the table, a new member being added, and multiple organizational staff members sharing CPT responsibilities. This made it difficult to maintain a strong focus and continuity from meeting to meeting, and members didn't always know how to contribute.



Though there may always be changes an advisory group will need to navigate, when a group has a specific charge and understands how their participation is helping build/direct/define/implement a policy or program, continuity is easy to maintain because they see the scope is contained. Conveners can further support this continuity by keeping members up to date on the changing circumstances, how projects are evolving, and the ways their feedback is getting integrated. This helps members feel connected, stay activated, and remain committed to achieving collective goals.

### **3. Foster a two-way relationship**

Community advisory groups are often set up to function like focus groups, where conveners present information and gather feedback. However, this process typically lacks transparency regarding how the feedback is used. Community members join these groups because they want to make an impact—they seek to play an active role in crafting solutions and understanding the tangible outcomes of their efforts.

CPT meetings regularly provided important information and helped grow member's understanding of the AHC's work. Still, members didn't always feel as though they were in conversation with the AHC's work. When they provided feedback, it was hard to see where that feedback went and how it was integrated into the work of the AHC.

To build trust and ensure genuine engagement, it is vital for conveners to communicate how community input influences related decisions and outcomes. This requires transparent, two-way communication where feedback is shared out, integrated, acted upon, and activities are reflected back to the communities that gave feedback.

### **4. Identify the distinct role of advisory groups within broader engagement strategies**

Advisory groups should be seen as a component of a larger, comprehensive community engagement framework, with a dedicated role. Rather than being the sole channel for gathering feedback or representing community needs—an approach that can lead to tokenization and placing undue pressure on a few individuals to represent an entire community—advisory groups can instead play a significant role in shaping initiatives and policies.

CPT members were effective in sharing their work and the perspectives of their organizations but often found it uncomfortable to speak on behalf of all housing advocates, or all people impacted by the housing crisis. They expressed a desire to engage with more regional data and wanted to understand the landscape of feedback and ideas that were being shared by other stakeholders. They also wanted to have a more intentional role in helping build solutions for the communities they serve.

By positioning advisory groups within a broader engagement ecosystem, their contributions become more responsive to diverse community perspectives and their capacity is better harnessed to amplify and grow solutions.





## 5. Invest in learning, relationship building, AND action

An effective advisory group thrives through a balance of learning, relationship-building, and action. Consider how time and resources can be used to ensure members gain the knowledge they need to actively and confidently participate.

In feedback sessions, CPT members suggested shaking up the bimonthly virtual meeting structure to allow for more relationship building and work deep dives. They also suggested different ways of helping the group feel more effective that included more engagement with AHC members and other stakeholders.

Building in activities that foster strong relationships among participants and with other key stakeholders, breaking away from regular meeting structures, and bringing in external expertise to support the group's growth are a few ways to balance the needs of an advisory group and foster empowerment. When you invest in advisory groups as though they are long term partnerships—rather than one-time engagements—you cultivate a powerful relationship that will continue to sustain and advance your shared goals beyond just one project.

