

Swarthmore Development and Affordability Task Force Report

Appendix E

Community Outreach Events: Comments, Questions, and Notes

Swarthmore Friends - 12/4/22
If the borough is willing to change zoning - that would be exciting and productive
"Home share" opportunities for seniors - not discussed today - would be wonderful (renting a room & helping owner). The other piece to home sharing is that there needs to be an organization that vets the homeowner and the prospective sharer, and is there to support them in various ways. The state of Pennsylvania has developed such a program now in, I think, two counties, but not in Delaware county. So Swarthmore borough might want to consider setting up such an agency, or asking the state to begin one in this county. This would not only help people needing a low rent, but would also help seniors to be able to stay in their homes longer.
The fact that people are working hard to address this problem
I'd hope we could pursue some of the options for promoting low cost options, e.g. ADUs, subdivision of homes, etc. I like the cohousing option the best.
Increase density, allow ADUs, more rental opportunities
I think ADUs, multifamily conversion, & townhomes are all good housing options we should explore. Don't have as clear a sense of what cohousing involves, but I think that is a worthwhile option too. Some houses are so enormous that I can see how cohousing might work well.
Diversity encouraging alternative housing possibilities could work well in Swarthmore. However, if wealthy homeowners need not make progressive changes and sacrifices for an ideological greater good, then the causes of the housing problems are not really being addressed.
It's exciting to know that there are options possibly available to avoid becoming a more & more exclusive town.
I love that your group is digging deep into understanding this issue!
It seemed like one attendee took great pride in Quaker influence in the borough
It was also mentioned by one attendee that Quakers have tried to live differently in a capitalist system.
It would be interesting if we could get more data points for prices of houses in a particular year. It would provide a better understanding of what's selling.
What is role of HUD subsidies? Most reasonable/used for senior housing for those who live on Social Security alone. Asset to owners of property: that income will continue for the life of the renter (unlike jobs that can be lost).
College has a role in who/how faculty & staff come to live in town.
Is the HBNS suffering from gentrification that is causing people to have to move out?

Swarthmore Friends - 12/4/22

What are the details of a land trust? Is the trust responsible for taxes?

What options can help people NOW? Tax incentives?

How can we collaborate with other WSSD municipalities? Some NP council members are very interested in this.

Roadblocks for ethical housing transactions, e.g. incentives for 1st time homeowners only require residency for 1 year, challenges for people with unsteady incomes - how do we support systems for working outside of the capitalist market?

What happens to generational wealth if a senior can not pass that on or afford to remain in their house. A family member may not be able to afford the property because of it's increased taxes.

An attendee recognized and wondered whether she had contributed to gentrification by purchasing a property in a historically Black neighborhood in Media

THANK YOU for coming together, for doing research

Race - over time issues have dissolved(?) but not disappeared. "Segregated community" here is changing but...

Philly programs in 1980s - seniors cohabiting with family & help each other pay mortgage & taxes

Attendee shared experiences with racism and bias while growing up Black in Swarthmore

Public Meeting - 12/12/22

Multi-family residences create a good mix in a community, keeps the quality of the neighborhood

Our recommendations seem to be doing a good job of building on solutions that are already in the works (ADUs for example)

Love the idea of group housing.

Small houses close together creates a strong sense of community.

Our recommendations seem to tie together with the Aging in Place TF solutions well.

The existing multi-family residences in town are NOT a problem. We should point this out to people who are concerned about converting new ones.

Love the idea of ADUs! I think the appetite for them has increased over the last few years.

If the zoning (in favor of ADUs, multifamily conversions, etc) changes now, people in the community can plan on them, possibly enabling some people to stay in their homes who would otherwise have to leave for cost reasons.

I like the idea of building on housing types we already have and could do more of.

Is it easier to convert existing buildings to multi-family than to build new structures? - Easier to for neighbors/the community to accept?

Public Meeting - 12/12/22

Should we change the definition of "family" in the zoning code?

We need to consider Swarthmore's high tax burden when we look at affordability.

It is VERY hard to find an entry-level home in Swarthmore today.

There is not much open space to build on here.

We need to be aware of the desire to keep open/green space, and the concerns about adding impervious surfaces.

Public Meeting - 1/9/23

Morganwood would be a good place for affordable housing - either town homes or small homes or even affordable apartments

Existing municipal infrastructure (such as sewer lines) may have plenty of capacity to accommodate more density

And without the need to build more infrastructure, the increased density would me a higher tax base without much added capital outlay

We should pursue opportunities to work with the College for win/wins

The timing is good for affordability to be part of the multi-municipal master plan

Having more affordable housing would help us keep/grow our town's diversity

As people become more concerned about their environmental footprint, they will be interested in smaller living spaces (such as ADU, multi-family, etc.)

ADUs would mean more surface coverage on parcels which might become a problem for stormwater management

Would new infrastructure investments (sewer lines, etc) be needed?

More kids would be enrolled in the local schools which could lead to (even more) crowding

People who are living in neighborhoods that today are all single-family homes, would not want to have multi-family homes in or small homes added to their neighborhoods.

There's not much land in town to put these new units.

This process (of creating more affordable housing in Swarthmore) is going to take a long time. The more specific we can be with our recommendations, the more quickly we can move the process forward.

Swarthmore Senior Citizens Association - 1/11/23

ADUs would work well in Swarthmore - they are attractive, and the process for creating them could be controlled so new ADU are consistent with the neighborhood

Swarthmore Senior Citizens Association - 1/11/23

There are other benefits to smaller housing units, people living closer together - including the benefits of more social interaction and the ability to share things such as tools or dinner.

Cohousing would be complex to implement but has a lot of benefits.

Many Swarthmoreans have TMH = too much house. Cohousing could make sense for them.

This group liked the idea that developers of future real estate development projects would have to include affordable units or pay a fee.

Swarthmore should change its definition of "family" (for zoning purposes)

It takes a long time to get zoning changes.

Taxes are an important issue impacting affordability in Swarthmore

The idea of making changes to our zoning code might be scary to a lot of people in town - who are worried about how the changes would impact their property values.

Swarthmore Rotary Club - 1/19/23

How do Swarthmore home prices compare to other nearby communities? Isn't it still possible for people who work in Swarthmore to afford to live in less-expensive communities nearby?

What impact will increased density have on local schools? We can't assume kids won't live in small units.

How do the Task Force's ideas fit with the existing (or soon-to-be-updated) multi-municipal comprehensive plan?

Can borough regulations require that rental properties be well maintained? For example, can the owners of "the barn" on N Chester Road be required to "keep up" the property? Can the owner of 6 College Ave be required to "maintain" his property?

It would be hard for Swarthmore to enforce a lot of regulations around rental/condo properties.

Our report should address the differences (in impact to the neighborhood) between condos vs rentals. The idea being expressed here is that condos will be better maintained than rental units.

We should look at the (few) infill opportunities.

We should look at the results in communities where ADUs have been permitted. Have prices stabilized? What other concerns/benefits have arisen?

It's not realistic to expect homeowners to sell below market rates.

Look at Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Look at what Stanford U has done to partner with local communities to create affordable housing.

It will be important for the TF to address the "school crowding" question in our final report.

Swarthmore Rotary Club - 1/19/23

Taxes are a big part of what makes Swarthmore unaffordable.

Trinity Episcopal Church - 1/22/23

Tax base would go up if we had more density in town

ADUs are a trend. There are success stories out there.

How can we provide affordable housing options for retirees returning to Swarthmore?

Look at Charleston, SC where there are lots of examples of multi-family conversions of big, old homes

We need to balance preserving the mix of people with preserving the mix of housing types

People need to organize to keep pushing (after the task force is finished) on ways to address the challenge of affordability

We need to preserve existing rental units, and maybe grow more types of rental units

Task forces should be talking to and coordinating with the College

Swarthmore Environmental Advisory Council - 1/24/23

The existing multi-family conversions in town are a benefit to the neighborhoods were they are located

Community Housing Trust could have environmental benefits if the trust also protected the land or invested in landscaping that would benefit habitat on a long-term basis

How much density can Swarthmore handle? What is the maximum number of of ADUs, for example?

Increased density > what about overcrowding @ SRS? Answer to questions about whether kids in Swarthmore, in future, will be able to attend SRS in future.

Multi-family units on the block look like large single family homes. Good neighbors and attractive buildings.

Higher density living is more energy-efficient living. That's straightforward and unquestionable. They are inherently environmental in a way. That's not necessarily the case in small unit new construction, that's a little more nuanced.

What's the borough-wide capacity for ADUs? What do we know? They would take considerable financial investment. We need a multi-pronged approach.

ADUs can be a win-win b/c adding income from their property, increase to tax base.

Suggestion that we also consider allowing for the splitting of large lots

Consider constraints such as the maximum number of units allowed, or the maximum size of ADUs, etc., and that we explicitly compare the benefits of condos vs rental.

Swarthmore Environmental Advisory Council - 1/24/23

This group was very concerned about the impact of more density on school crowding

The task force should recommend zoning regulations that require energy-efficiency standards to decrease ongoing housing expenses.

Incremental changes are best!

Public Meeting - 1/25/23

There are a lot of overlap between affordable housing solutions and environmental benefits.

Where is there land that could be used for development of affordable housing?

A number of very specific suggestions to possibly include in our recommendations, specifically regulations about energy efficiency in affordable housing.

The proposed new condos on Park are needed.

Accessibility is important for any new affordable housing

Town Center, Inc. - 2/8/23

ADUs are low-hanging fruit.

Myers Ave is the perfect spot for more density!

What are other local communities doing? What are they finding to be successful?

How much density can Swarthmore handle? Can we really accommodate more people?

What market segments are we really creating housing for? What's needed is moderately priced homes for families. It looks like we're creating housing for the low end, or at least small units.

What about rent control?

People on streets with big, single-family homes they've paid a lot of money for won't want their neighbors to add ADUs.

In order for ADUs to work in Swarthmore, there needs to be better oversight of landlords. Today there are very few requirements of landlords to maintain their rental properties, and the borough does not check on properties. TC folks suggested annual inspections.

Seniors need affordable options. Taxes make it very difficult to stay in Swarthmore

Be careful with "set asides." They can be very difficult to administer.

(At the TC meeting after our presentation, TC decided to write a letter to borough council recommending more stringent landlord requirements and annual inspections of rental properties.)

Rent control is problematic.

Swarthmore Presbyterian Church - 2/12/23

There is a lot of interest in shared housing - especially among older people, with TMH, too much house

Co-housing zoning already exists in Swarthmore, it just needs to be updated

What are the reasons ADUs have not been approved in the past?

Big concern: will what we proposed bring down (or risk bringing down) the values of the homes in Swarthmore?

Are we speaking to people in Wallingford and Rutledge?

Should we be suggesting tax incentives for following sustainable building practices?

Our solutions do not bring down taxes, which is a major driver of un-affordability

Look at Lansdowne, PA - some people thought it was a warning/threat of what NOT to do (convert single homes to multifamily). Other people thought it represented the diversity many people want. The problem with Lansdowne is poor schools.

Good schools and diversity are what young families are looking for today! (In the past it was just good schools)

We are really looking at two things: Market rate homes but smaller, and below-market rate homes. Trying to create below-market options will be VERY difficult