

Date: April 2021

To: Metro Council

From: Metro Affordable Housing Bond Community Oversight Committee

Re: 2020 Annual Report

A report to the community from the Metro Affordable Housing Bond Community Oversight Committee

Over the past two months, the Metro Affordable Housing Bond Community Oversight Committee has reviewed progress reports from all eight implementation partner agencies, as well as an analysis of regional progress and performance presented by Metro staff. We are happy to report that, in a year of unprecedented challenges, the Metro affordable housing bond program is **on track to exceed the promises made to voters**. What's more—there are opportunities to go above and beyond. And we should.

So much has changed in the past year. The housing crisis has been intensified by the ripple effects of the global pandemic, increasing the urgent need for more affordable homes and other services to ensure that everyone in our community has access to safe, stable affordable housing.

The program is on track to exceed its goals due to a combination of policy and market forces, as well as early action from implementation partners. Federal policy changes have increased the value of 4% Low Income Housing Tax Credits, a major source of leveraged funding in the housing bond portfolio. Interest rates are low, meaning projects can leverage more private debt than initially anticipated. Finally, housing bond implementation partners have moved quickly to deploy resources; in addition to responding to the urgent need for housing, these rapid efforts to advance implementation are reducing the impact of construction cost escalation (although cost escalation is expected to increase the cost of delivering units later in implementation).

Combined, this early progress and market/policy changes impacting leveraged funding opportunities mean that the average per unit need for Metro bond funding required to achieve our targets is lower than initially forecasted.

From the passage of the Metro supportive housing services measure in May to economic recovery efforts at the state and federal level, there is an influx of new resources in the system of funding that layers and intersects with affordable housing development. Additional federal funding for housing development is anticipated in forthcoming federal infrastructure funding packages.

With the region on track to exceed the unit production goals established for the measure, and new resources coming online, we believe there is not only an opportunity, but an imperative, to do more with these resources - whether that means going broader to achieve more overall units and/or going deeper to support the most challenging-to-fulfill needs such as permanent supportive housing and larger, family-sized units. There are also opportunities to look for synergies that allow housing bond investments to leverage state/federal/other local funds and to be integrated with complementary investments, such as digital equity and co-location with early learning facilities. **We need to ensure that, as a system, we are working toward “doing more with more.”**

Along these lines, there is an important opportunity to **support integration of Metro supportive housing services funding with affordable housing bond investments to ensure that these**

voter approved funding sources can fulfill their game-changing potential to address the needs of community members who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It is essential that supportive housing implementation plans include prioritization of long-term rental assistance funding in the form of project-based vouchers that can be integrated early in the development process, so that we are designing and programming affordable housing buildings specifically to meet the needs of individuals and families exiting homelessness. There's a critical opportunity for ongoing coordination between Metro bond implementation and supportive housing implementation within each county, as well as between Metro and implementers.

As an oversight committee, we have been charged not only with ensuring progress toward the unit production targets, but also with ensuring that implementation is aligned with the core values established by the Metro Council, including the charge of leading with racial equity throughout implementation. Early indicators show that jurisdictional and development partners are taking these commitments seriously—with much more remaining to be seen as projects begin to lease up.

Key highlights of progress on advancing racial equity include:

- *Fair housing access:* Projects are distributed across the region and are incorporating strategies for fair housing access through thoughtful approaches to low-barrier screening and affirmative marketing—consistent with the expectations established in Metro's work plan. Continued monitoring will be needed to evaluate fair housing outcomes once projects start to lease up. Beyond lease up, Metro should work with partners to explore creative approaches to monitor stability and resident satisfaction over time.
- *Culturally responsive programming and services:* Local progress reports reflect robust community engagement throughout planning, and we believe this early engagement will help to improve resident livability throughout the life of the investments. It will be important for the relationships established through engagement to continue beyond development to operations. Implementing partners need to think about who is providing services for residents, as well as the need to invest in capacity building (i.e. cultural competency) among property managers.
- *Equitable contracting and workforce:* We are seeing strong commitments for equity in contracting, which was emphasized by the committee in the local implementation strategy review process. More work and investment is needed to support economic opportunities for women and people of color through construction. Tracking workforce diversity may be a positive first step, but requirements could have unintended consequences, particularly for smaller subcontractors. Workforce strategies are a priority area that should be considered for technical assistance.

The Metro affordable housing bond is already catalyzing new regional coordination and partnership to respond to the region's housing crisis. There are opportunities for Metro to engage local jurisdiction partners in a conversation about how to expand the impact of our investments beyond initial targets. These conversations need to acknowledge that jurisdictions face different challenges and are participating in implementation at varying scales and with varying internal capacity. **We recommend that Metro work with implementing jurisdiction partners to ensure that project investment decisions are being made with an eye toward maximizing collective impact of Metro bond and leveraged funds, as well as aligning with complementary investments, such as digital equity, early learning, and green building. We also recommend**

that Metro provide funding and technical assistance to increase the region's capacity to implement permanent supportive housing and equitable workforce strategies.

Finally, we want to underscore the need for Metro to further staff up to support this work. The housing bond team has accomplished so much with limited capacity, but, as noted in the recent audit, additional investments in staff are essential to ensure that Metro can take advantage of the opportunities outlined above. We are excited for the recent arrival of a new regional housing director, who can support those conversations with partner jurisdictions about opportunities to elevate commitments together, and for other staff who will join Metro's housing team soon to support program evaluation and administration. We look forward to continuing to build on this progress in 2021.

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