

Observer: Betty Hayford

Aldermen present: all

Media present: Three— Evanston Now, Evanston Roundtable, NU Daily

Meeting began: 7:00 pm

Meeting ended: 9:50 pm

Announcements: The Mayor announced that an ETHS grad was among the Emmy winners this week. This is National Suicide Prevention Week and he presented a plaque to the head of an involved agency. The City Manager called on a citizen to report on the 4th of July Events and Lawrence Hemingway to report on summer programs. The Clerk explained that he had planned to make a presentation on Participatory Budgeting at this meeting but was told that the Clerk did not have the authority to do so. He will schedule the presentation for another time.

Public comment. 25 citizen comments. All but one addressed Affordable Housing, but from different perspectives. Some mentioned housing for elderly; some emphasized homeless; some mentioned need to provide affordable housing to keep African American population in Evanston, some with bitterness over lack of progress; some asked support for landlords working to maintain affordable housing; several attacked the proposed Albion project; several criticized the proposed development at Dempster and Pittner; some emphasized need to scatter affordable housing throughout Evanston; some opposed additional luxury high-rise buildings. One criticized the reconstructed Emerson/Green Bay Road intersection as an “abomination.”

(SP1) Affordable Housing and Economic Development Budget Issues. Johanna Leonard, Sara Flax, Evonda Thomas Smith and other staff presented a power point on issues of affordable housing, starting with the HUD definition, information about how the current city programs provide general and emergency assistance that tries to prevent homelessness, and describing the housing situation in Evanston. Johanna presented possible steps for an action plan:

1. Revise city code to create new options
2. Increase affordable units in market rate developments
3. Expand revenue for affordable housing fund
4. Create paths to home ownership
5. Preserve existing affordable housing
6. Expand programs to overcome barriers
7. Promote healthy housing and neighborhoods.

[It seems that Council was impatient with this presentation. It was long, it had been distributed in the packet, and it was abstract. Alderman Rainey objected that staff was presenting policy options, which should be Council's job. She wanted time for Aldermen to discuss options and determine policy.]

Extensive discussion by Alderman took place. Alderman Wilson spoke at length with fervor said the issue was important and it needed to be stated that persistent racism had to be part of the discussion. The goal was citizen empowerment, not charity. Fleming said median incomes in Evanston needed to be part of the discussion. It might be necessary to require more affordable units in developments. Or, fee in lieu should be increased. She was concerned with housing for seniors.

Alderman Rainey said she was concerned about increasing call to ban future tall buildings. These projects bring new residents to Evanston and contribute to tax base. Restricting these projects would reduce permit fees and property tax base growth. Rue Simmons endorsed Wilson's call for empowerment, not charity. She urged Aldermen to engage in discussion that would lead to an action plan. She believed affordable housing should be scattered throughout Evanston, and landlords providing affordable housing should be supported/subsidized.

Wilson echoed the concern for looking into the balance between providing affording units or fees in lieu of units. Revelle emphasized the importance of maintaining existing affordable units. She also wondered if there are experienced developers specializing in affordable housing who could become partners with the city. She added that it would be useful for Council to discuss the Downtown plan as part of the affordable housing question.

The City Manager said staff would put together a paper responding to these questions for the next session. After some discussion it was agreed that Council would discuss the Downtown Plan on October 2 at 5:30 and Affordable Housing on October 30. The October 30 meeting would be in the Library so Aldermen could discuss more easily. A small number of citizens could observe, and it would be broadcast.

In Call of the Wards, Alderman Fleming pointed at that there is increasing frustration in Evanston about police issues. She urges Council and staff to recognize this frustration, while also making clear that they know the EPD is working hard to provide responsible and equitable services. Wilson asks for some data on police operations.

The meeting adjourned to Executive Session at 9:50 pm.