



Housing and Zoning Positions Update / Consensus Questions February 15, 2022

Planning

1. Should the City of Evanston develop an affordable housing plan in the near future, prior to the development of a broader comprehensive plan (a multi-year planning process that municipalities go through every 10 to 20 years). Much of the research and analysis for such a housing plan has been done. What remains is to prioritize solutions, establish quantifiable goals, define actions to be taken, and assign responsibility for implementation and timeframes.

Pro: Putting a plan in place now will encourage more immediate action towards increasing affordability, even while other planning is going on, and help to remove barriers that prevent affordability and exacerbate issues of inequity and segregation.

Con: The City is embarking on a multi-year comprehensive and strategic planning process that will feed into a revision of the City's zoning and guide the direction of future affordable housing planning. Some people think we should not spend time on affordable housing planning until these other steps are complete.

Education

2. Should the City offer more information to educate about the need for and the benefits of affordable housing and more flexible zoning codes; increase public understanding of the costs to the community of housing cost burden, homelessness, and how zoning and other policies and practices can contribute to the problems; and take a proactive posture in educating the community about the benefits of more affordable housing and less restrictive zoning?

Pros: The more people understand the impact of current zoning on housing—that it operates to maintain segregation and reduce housing opportunities—the more likely they will be to support the correction of these unintended and unwelcome consequences.

Cons: Some feel that more expense to educate is unnecessary. They think that people understand that zoning restricts housing choice and prefer those restrictions, believing strongly that the current system is preferable and consistent with the right to protect the character of neighborhoods and property values.

3. Should the City make training opportunities available to landlords, renters, sellers, buyers, developers and the general public to address specific areas such as financial literacy, homebuyer counseling, fair housing, rights and responsibilities of



landlords and tenants, inspections, property maintenance, and other housing-related concerns?

Pros: Written materials and workshops covering city policies, procedures, services and direct topic education in areas such as financial literacy, rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants, fair housing and homebuyer programs would benefit all stakeholders. When the parties are well-informed they will have more opportunities and are likely to make better decisions. Some offerings could be achieved through partnerships with the non-profit organizations, service providers, and businesses.

Cons: Critics argue that there is already adequate information and that this is an unnecessary cost to the City both in time and dollars.

Policies

4. Should renters and homebuyers of all income levels and sizes be able to rent or purchase in all Evanston neighborhoods?

Pros: This would increase economic and racial integration, increase the availability of housing throughout the city, and maintain the character of Evanston as a diverse and interesting city rather than a boring suburb. This would also permit people who have grown up in Evanston to continue to make their homes there instead of being priced out.

Cons: This would increase density in some neighborhoods, and has the potential to destroy the character that makes Evanston unique.

5. Should the City's housing and zoning policies prioritize equity, lower housing costs, and the reduction of segregation?

Pros: Enhanced focus on equity will lead to reduced barriers to development and thus additional housing. This in turn will reduce the costs of housing in Evanston.

Cons: Diversity should be a matter of individual choice, not public attention. Plus, there is fear that changing current neighborhoods will decrease property values and negatively impact the character of the community.

6. Should the City change zoning to eliminate restrictions that limit housing choice and perpetuate racial and income segregation, and focus instead on resident wellbeing, housing stability and equity? As examples, should modifications permit two- or four-flats or townhouses and other non-high-rise multi-family units on lots zoned single-family and allow or encourage increased density?

Pros: Research indicates that single family zoning artificially inflates the cost of housing, pricing out low- and middle-income families from those neighborhoods. Less restrictive zoning would eliminate the financial burden on single-family homeowners, especially seniors wishing to age in place on a fixed income and offer increased flexibility to homeowners in the use of their own property. This would acknowledge the changing definitions of “family” and permit innovative living arrangements such as shared elder housing. This would speed the process by which people could modify their homes to suit their current needs.

Cons: This would increase density in neighborhoods currently zoned single-family or single-use-only. Critics also cite as part of the density issue: parking, traffic, reducing property values, etc.

7. When new development is proposed, should nearby neighbors or the Council member of that ward have veto power over that development?

Pros: This permits residents to have a say in the environment in which they live.

Cons: This permits a minority of people to determine the way the majority can live. This reinforces existing patterns of economic and racial segregation which interfere with Evanston’s welcoming and diverse nature, and decreases the likelihood that projects get built, lowering housing starts.

8. Should housing and zoning policies be modified to permit, without additional approval, modular or pre-fabricated construction, omission of sprinkler systems in accessory dwelling units, and other similar cost-saving measures as long as safety is not compromised?

Pros: This would speed the process by which people could modify their homes to suit their current needs. It would also make possible a more diverse and affordable housing stock, and may lower the cost of construction, which has been rising due to inflation in recent months.

Cons: This would introduce new forms of housing to the community and decrease the control the City currently has over aesthetic standards.

9. Should the City eliminate restrictive zoning policies that are intended to control property maintenance and resident behavioral issues? An example would be allowing occupancy of units by three or more unrelated persons.

Pros: Enforcement of existing laws (number of occupants per square foot, etc.) will be more effective than making household size or structure a proxy for such bad behavior. Allowing unrelated persons or nontraditional families to live together will help more people afford to live, or stay, in Evanston.

Cons: Some feel that using family structure as a proxy for bad behavior is the only protection available and should be maintained in the relevant ordinances. Existing laws will not resolve the student issues.

Practices

10. Should the City work toward streamlining approval processes and incentivizing developers by exempting affordable housing developments from some of the extra fees, hearings, and other administrative requirements that are imposed upon many residential developments? For example, developments that will vary from the maximum height defined in the zoning code are required to be treated as planned developments that have to go before the Design and Project Review Committee, the Plan Commission, the Planning & Development Committee, and City Council for approval, increasing the time and costs.

Pros: The current process often adds to the cost of building new housing, making it even more difficult than it already is to create affordable housing. Additionally, the process, which requires the City to allow public comment at each review point, gives opponents of affordable housing more opportunities to protest and stop these developments from moving forward, further increasing the expense to developers and, at worst, preventing them from building.

Cons: Allowing more development of affordable units without the extra oversight associated with planned developments would decrease the amount of public input around affordable developments and would also decrease the City's control over how often certain variations are allowed, depending on what processes the affordable developers are exempted from.

Financing

11. Should the City of Evanston utilize the Affordable Housing Fund to provide gap funding on projects that utilize external financing resources such as Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, the Illinois Affordable Housing Tax Credit, and other financing offered by community development financial institutions (CDFIs) and the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA)?

Pros: The City of Evanston would not be able to finance most affordable housing projects entirely on their own. This could be an effective use of the City's Affordable Housing Fund if the federal or state government and developer can finance a majority of the project, with the City covering a smaller percentage of the total cost. This is the best (and perhaps the only) way to make multifamily affordable housing projects a reality in Evanston.



Cons: The Affordable Housing Fund can be utilized for a variety of purposes, and it is worth questioning whether this is the most effective way to spend the City's money to address the need for affordable housing.

12. Should the City of Evanston consider utilizing non-cash resources, such as land and fee waivers, to incentivize the financing and development of affordable housing?

Pros: Land costs and permit fees both affect the feasibility of affordable housing development in Evanston, and these policies could make the difference in ensuring that an affordable housing developer pursues a project in Evanston, as opposed to a nearby municipality.

Cons: The City of Evanston operates on a relatively tight budget, and it would forego an opportunity for revenue from the sale of land or permit fees through this policy.

13. Should the City of Evanston consider applying an affordable housing impact fee on commercial developments as a revenue source for the City's Affordable Housing Fund?

Pros: The Affordable Housing Fund has, at times, struggled to have a consistent stream of revenue. If implemented, these impact fees could be a new income stream which could fund affordable housing developments, subsidize rental units, pay for tenant protection legal aid, or cover any other eligible Affordable Housing Fund expense.

Cons: This policy may disincentivize developers from taking on commercial projects in Evanston, inhibiting economic growth and job creation.

Enforcement

14. Should the City expand its inspection process beyond a complaint-only system and increase the size of its Property Inspections staff so as to do more inspections related to property upkeep, occupancy, and other issues related to landlord compliance with City ordinances?

Pros: Regular inspections of rental property would reduce the number of buildings that are run-down and not complying with City code, as well as give inspectors more frequent access to determine whether occupancy limits are being violated. Citing landlords in violation of City ordinances is one way to reduce the impact of absentee or predatory landlords by monitoring living conditions for their residents.

Cons: Increasing the size of the Inspection Department will increase costs for the City.



- 15.** Should the enforcement of fair housing laws be strengthened by making it a high priority, requiring greater accountability of contractors and more training for City staff, landlords, renters, lenders and buyers?

Pros: Discrimination in housing deprives Evanston of qualified citizens and reduces the cosmopolitan nature of the city. Discrimination is against the law.

Cons: Private groups including real estate brokerages and nonprofits already do everything necessary to assure fair housing.

Regionalism

- 16.** Should the City of Evanston take a regional approach to affordable housing and zoning and collaborate with other area municipalities?

Pros: A regional perspective can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the economic conditions that contribute to local housing needs. Additionally, regional approaches offer opportunities for localities within a region to align strategies and share resources, staff, and knowledge to more effectively address shared housing challenges. A regional approach to housing can help complement and support collaboration on other cross-jurisdictional issues that are closely linked to housing, such as transit planning, environmental protection, and workforce development.

Cons: Difficult to get buy-in from other communities and can be time consuming, taking time away from staff's responsibilities in their own jurisdiction. Also, critics often want priority given to residents of their own community, so they are less likely to collaborate, fearing they will have to serve "outsiders".