



MEETING MINUTES

LAND USE COMMISSION

Wednesday, November 13th, 2024

7:00 PM

Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, James C. Lytle City Council Chambers

Members Present: George Halik, Jameika Mangum, Kiril Mirintchev, Darush Mabadi, Matt Rodgers, Myrna Arevalo, Jeanne Lindwall, Brian Johnson

Members Absent: Max Puchtel

Staff Present: Neighborhood Land Use Planner Meagan Jones, Zoning Administrator Melissa Klotz, Senior Planner Sam Hubbard, Planning Manager Liz Williams, Community Development Director Sarah Flax

Presiding Member: Matt Rodgers

I. CALL TO ORDER/DECLARATION OF A QUORUM

II. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: September 11, 2024, September 25, 2024, October 9, 2024, and October 16, 2024

Commissioner Halik questioned why the Discussion minutes were in a different format than normal meeting minutes. Planning Manager Liz Williams explained new staff are doing minutes, she also explained that the minutes aren't the official record and that every meeting is video recorded.

Chair Rodgers voiced he would like clarification if the meeting minutes were the official record or if the video was.

Commissioner Lindwall moved to approve the September 11th meeting minutes. Commissioner Arevalo seconded.

Ayes: Halik, Mangum, Mirintchev, Mabadi, Rodgers, Arevalo, Lindwall, Johnson

Nays:

Abstain:

Commissioner Lindwall moved to approve the September 25th meeting minutes with edits. Commissioner Mirintchev Seconded.

Ayes: Halik, Mangum, Mirintchev, Mabadi, Rodgers, Arevalo, Lindwall, Johnson

Nays:

Abstain:

Commissioner Lindwall moved to approve the October 9th meeting minutes with corrections. Commissioner Arevalo seconded.

Commissioner Halik noted that October 9th and October 16th meeting minutes didn't seem finished as there were no answers to the commissioners questions.

Commissioner Halik moved to table the October 9th and October 16th meeting minutes for further review. Commissioner Lindwall Seconded

Ayes: Halik, Mangum, Mirintchev, Mabadi, Rodgers, Arevalo, Lindwall, Johnson

Nays:

Abstain:

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. Major Variation | 318 Greenleaf Street | 24ZMNV-0037

John Gonzalez, applicant, submits for a Major Variation requesting building lot coverage of 30.7% where 30% is the maximum coverage permitted (Section 6-8-2-7) and to establish open parking located more than 30' from the rear property line or alley on the existing driveway in the west interior side yard where open parking is required to be located within 30' of the rear property line or alley (Section 6-4-6-3, Table 4-B.19), in order to construct a roof/canopy over a new front entry, eliminate the existing interior garage parking spaces on the west side of the structure, create one interior garage space on the east side of the structure off the alley, and establish open parking on the existing driveway in the R1 Single-Family Residential District. The Land Use Commission is the determining body for this case in accordance with Section 6-3-8 of the Evanston Zoning Code. PIN: 11-19-216-021-0000.

Chair Rogers swore in John Gonzalez. John Gonzalez, 2181 North Stonehenge Court, Round Lake Beach IL, Presented and told the board about the proposal. He stated it had historical roots but needs updating and renovating.

Commissioner Questions/Discussion

Chair Rogers asked if there were any questions from the other commissioners, there were none.

Chair Rogers asked if there was anything Mr Gonzalez would like to say in summation. John Gonzalez said he feels like the proposed changes will be tasteful and appropriate to the neighboring context. He also hopes the Land Use commission can share the vision with him.

Public Comment

Nicole Berger, 1045 Jensen Ave, owner of the coach house that this address was attached to, wanted to make sure nothing would interfere with her use of the driveway and questioned how far their driveway would be.

It was shown that the drive would not be changed or “messed with”, She asked for more details on the driveway details shown on the screen. John Gonzalez then went over driveway size and layout.

Public testimony was closed.

Deliberations

Chair Rogers asked if there were any additional comments from Commissioners.

Commissioner Lindwall noted that the Preservation Commission reviewed and recommended approval of this project.

Chair Rogers was confused that the Preservation Commission “checked yes and no” as part of the recommendation. Zoning Administrator Melissa Klotz informed Chair Rogers that the Preservation Commission recommended the historic aspect of the project, just not the zoning aspect.

Chair Rogers stated he had issues at first with the project but after reviewing the plans, saw the property and realized that it's a circular drive that kind of serves both properties it seemed kind of foolish to make a curb cut go away to inconvenience the next door neighbor.

The Chair reviewed the seven Standards for Major Variations (Section 6-3-8-12.E).

1. The requested variation will not have a substantial adverse impact on the use, enjoyment or property values of adjoining properties: Testimonies from neighbors were made and no foreseeable adverse impact is expected so this standard is met.
2. The requested variation is in keeping with the intent of the zoning ordinance: Intent of the ordinance is to get cars off of the street off of the alley. Project is in line with this intent so this standard is met.
3. The alleged hardship or practical difficulty is peculiar to the property: Chair Rogers stated that this was a unique property but the change should not create any issues. This standard is met
4. The property owner would suffer a particular hardship or practical difficulty as distinguished from a mere inconvenience if the strict letter of the regulations were to be carried out: If the garage were to try to fit two vehicles in the garage, that would lead to a number of interior changes that would cause issues. This standard is met.
5. Either the purpose of the variation is not based exclusively upon a desire to extract additional income from the property, or, while the granting of the variation

will result in additional income to the applicant and while the applicant for the variation may not have demonstrated that the application is not based exclusively upon a desire to extract additional income from the property, the Land Use Commission or the City Council, depending on final jurisdiction under Section 6-3-8-2 of this Chapter, has found that public benefits to the surrounding neighborhood and the City as a whole will be derived from approval of the variation, that include, but are not limited to, any of the standards of Section 6-3-6-3 of this Chapter: Property will not be used as income property and brings the property more into compliance for the owner so this standard is met.

6. The alleged difficulty or hardship has not been created by any person having an interest in the property: The homes were built when both held in common ownership (home and a coach house) and current owners have done nothing to create the existing situation on the property. This standard is met.
7. The requested variation requires the least deviation from the applicable regulation among the feasible options identified before the Land Use Commission issues its decision or recommendation to the City Council regarding said variation: Adding a front stoop is not excessively large and keeping the driveway intact helps to still serve the neighbor and bring a vehicle off of the street. This standard is met.

Commissioner Lindwall recommended that the Land Use Commission approved the requested variations. Commissioner Mabadi Seconded. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed 8-0.

Ayes: Halik, Mangum, Mirintchev, Mabadi, Rodgers, Arevalo, Lindwall, Johnson

Nays:

Abstain:

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Envision Evanston 2045: Referral Regarding R1-R3 Residential Zoning Districts

Planning staff will facilitate a discussion regarding a City Council referral to increase the maximum number of permitted dwelling units per zoning lot to four in the R1, R2, and R3 Residential zoning districts as part of Envision Evanston 2045.

Neighborhood Land Use Planner Meagan Jones led the commission through the discussion. City Council referred a proposal to the Land Use Commission to revise zoning regulations to allow up to four housing units in R1 through R3 residential districts and to reduce minimum lot size requirements.

Goals of the Referral:

1. Increase Housing Supply and Affordability: Address housing shortages, rising costs, and promote socioeconomic diversity, accommodating residents like young professionals, families, and retirees.
2. Promote Housing Equity: Foster inclusivity in neighborhoods previously restricted

- by exclusionary zoning, reducing social and economic disparities.
3. Efficient Land Use: Optimize limited land resources, supporting climate action goals and efficient housing solutions.
 4. Boost Local Economy: Increase population density to attract businesses, services, and public transportation while stimulating economic activity.
 5. Meet Evolving Housing Needs: Provide flexible housing options for diverse household types, including single-person homes and multigenerational families.
 6. Preserve Neighborhood Scale: Introduce incremental density changes without drastically altering the character of neighborhoods.

She then provided details on current zoning requirements in the R1 -R3 Zoning Districts and provided data that had been compiled regarding the number of non-conforming lots within those zoning districts, as they relate to the minimum lot size requirements.

Staff then posed the following for Consideration by the Commission:

1. General thoughts on the proposed zoning changes.
2. Guidelines or standards to implement as part of this change.
3. Ways to expand housing choices while minimizing negative impacts.
4. Additional methods to expand housing in R1–R3 districts.
5. Information required from City staff for further deliberation.

Commissioner Questions/Discussion

Commissioner Halik stated he has several issues to talk about. He asked if the idea is to eliminate all lots because to his understanding the commission deals with a lot of non-conforming lots and they're smaller than the regulation size, he asked if the idea was to eliminate all non-conforming and go the smallest lot or or eliminate lot size requirements.

Neighborhood Land Use Planner Meagan Jones said they were not looking to eliminate lot size requirements all together.

Chair Rodgers brought up outdated code. Planning Manager Liz Williams spoke about helping properties to be conforming to new regulations.

Commissioner Lindwall said it would be helpful to have some sort of chart that shows you which lots would be conforming. She then asked what size lot would accommodate three to four units.

Commissioner Halik inquired whether there is any concern that reducing the minimum lot size significantly might encourage property owners with larger lots to subdivide them into smaller lots. Planning Manager Liz Williams explained that the intention of the policy is not to drastically alter the built form of neighborhoods but to allow for incremental changes. The goal is to maintain existing height and density requirements while slightly increasing lot coverage to accommodate up to four units per lot. However, they clarify that the current draft proposal does involve reducing the minimum lot size,

which could enable subdivision. The speaker concludes by noting that this conversation involves two distinct issues that require further clarification.

Commissioner Halik expressed concerned that with the new regulations, buildings will look too much like the City of Chicago.

Senior Planner Sam Hubbard explained that the height regulations in the proposed policy would remain consistent with current regulations. For instance, if the current zoning allows a 35-foot-tall single-family home, the same height limit would apply to a four-unit building. This ensures that the overall built form remains comparable.

Chair Rodgers interjected and expressed skepticism about the feasibility of fitting four units into the same height limit, suggesting that might not be realistic. They highlight a concern, drawing from his experience living in Edgewater, where similar changes led to single-family homes being replaced by more intensive housing, potentially altering the neighborhood's character. He also had concerns about the potential aesthetic and functional outcomes of increasing housing density on narrow lots.

Chair Rodgers is particularly concerned about the practicality and desirability of such developments on narrow lots, such as 25-foot-wide lots. He suggests that these constraints could lead to "shotgun" style apartments or condos, which might maximize density but could compromise the quality or appeal of the homes. He acknowledges that people have purchased similar homes in the past but questions whether this type of housing truly meets residents' needs or preferences.

Commissioner Mabadi highlighted challenges with subdividing R1 properties, as many existing homes occupy the center of their lots, making division unfeasible without significant costs. He emphasized that high land and construction costs in Evanston make building affordable housing difficult.

Instead, he suggested focusing on legalizing existing non-conforming units, promoting accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and using zoning changes to create flexible, affordable housing options. He proposes requiring wider lot sizes (e.g., 60 feet) for multi-unit developments to ensure green space, parking, and neighborhood compatibility. Mabadi notes Evanston's history of diverse housing types as a model for balanced, incremental density changes.

Commissioner Halik said he thinks the needs of single families need to be preserved.

Commissioner Mirintchev called for clear goals and data on density in Evanston, noting the comprehensive plan lacks specific targets. He highlights a surplus of 6,000 housing units from the 2020 Census and questions the need for more density without understanding its impact. While acknowledging benefits, he raised concerns about green space, parking, and habitable space per person. He emphasizes the need for measurable density goals as part of a comprehensive plan before proceeding.

Commissioner Johnson expressed concern that the proposed changes would drastically alter the existing character of the city. He acknowledged that cities evolve but feels the proposed changes are too extreme. He also pointed out a paradox in the proposal, where the emphasis on promoting families seems at odds with moving away from the

current single-family home areas in the city.

Commissioner Lindwall stated she had a number of thoughts and questions. She raised a question about the proposal to eliminate minimum parking requirements, asking whether it would apply citywide or only in areas near downtown and transit. She believes this issue is relevant to the current discussion. Liz Williams said the city council directive on policy reform as it relates to Envision Evanston and minimum parking requirements is to eliminate them across the city.

Commissioner Lindwall then raised concerns about the impact of increased density in areas of West Evanston, which are not close to public transit and have heavy parking. She questions where the proposed development would occur, particularly in areas currently zoned R1 with expensive homes. She seeks clarification on which parts of the city would likely see this kind of development if the proposal moves forward.

Liz Williams responded that the council directive is to allow this type of development to incur in what is currently zoned R1 through R3

Chair Rodgers expressed concerns about the potential equity implications of increased development in poorer neighborhoods, noting that wealthier areas like Orrington may not be as affected. He questions whether the city is prepared for development to be more concentrated in these lower-income areas. He also raised caution about the permanence of a decision to allow four-flats citywide, suggesting that once such a policy is implemented, it would be difficult to reverse. While he supports the idea of increasing density with two-flats in some areas, he has reservations about the broader impact of allowing four-flats across the city. He emphasized the importance of community input before making any final decisions.

Commissioner Lindwall emphasized the challenges of reducing zoning density once it has been increased, noting that it could lead to legal action. She also highlights the importance of considering equity, pointing to Evanston's history of segregation and redlining. She discusses how zoning changes in the past, particularly in the Fifth Ward, led to higher-density residential areas, and how this has affected the community. Lindwall stresses the need for caution when making zoning changes and suggests that public input is crucial in shaping decisions. She also encouraged residents to ensure their elected officials understand their concerns.

Commissioner Mabadi discussed a specific property in Evanston (a \$1.25 million home on a 5,800 square foot lot) and argues that focusing on increasing density for affordable housing may not be the solution. He suggests the problem lies elsewhere and advocates for exploring alternative property types and designs, such as smaller duplexes or townhomes, rather than vertical development. He proposes expanding R1 zoning to allow additional units while maintaining community compatibility. He also stresses the importance of design considerations to avoid issues like blocking sunlight for neighbors.

Public Comment

Alex Palmer expressed support for the zoning reform proposal, emphasizing that zoning decisions today will have a lasting impact on future generations. He argued that expanding housing types in R1, R2, and R3 districts will promote economic and racial diversity, helping to prevent marginalized communities from being pushed out due to rising housing costs. Palmer highlighted the importance of equitable zoning reform while preserving the city's diversity and natural beauty. He urged the commission to vote in favor of the proposal.

Stuart Cleland, a member of the Evanston Lighthouse Rotary Club and Joining Forces for Affordable Housing, spoke in favor of the zoning reform referral. He shared his experience living in a home on Maple that had a variety of housing types around it. He used this example to argue that similar developments could help provide more housing in Evanston without disrupting neighborhood character, urging the commission to approve the referral.

Roger Williams, a real estate broker in Evanston, expressed support for the zoning reform but criticized the city's current approach to housing. He highlighted a disparity in home prices—single-family homes averaging \$888,000 and multi-family homes \$346,000—and argues that current zoning, both old and new, perpetuates racial and class segregation. He contends that without making it more attractive for developers to build affordable housing throughout the city, low- and moderate-income people will continue to struggle with housing affordability. He emphasizes that failure to reform will exacerbate racial and class segregation in housing.

Michael Bruning raised concerns about the speed and timing of the zoning changes proposed in the *Envision Evanston 2045* plan. He suggested that more time should be given for careful consideration and citizen input, possibly through a referendum vote. He points out a contradiction between the preservation plan, which aims to retain neighborhood character, and the zoning proposal, which could alter it by introducing multi-family housing in R1 areas. He highlighted potential challenges related to parking, city services, and environmental impacts, and argues that the plan should place greater emphasis on promoting business and industry, which could bring in significant tax revenue and could help fund housing and other services.

Jeff Smith raises several concerns about the *Envision Evanston 2045* plan, particularly regarding the rapid implementation of zoning changes without enough community discussion. He criticized the top-down nature of the process, driven by ideology rather than careful planning. He argues that Evanston already has a diverse housing stock, and that further density may not lead to more affordable housing. Increased density in recent decades has not made housing more affordable and has instead driven up prices. He then highlighted potential negative consequences for single-family homeowners and questioned the environmental impact of increased density, such as greater energy consumption and loss of green space.

He then expressed concern about the social and economic impacts of these changes, particularly how they may disproportionately affect Black residents and lower-income communities in Evanston. He called for more community input and a more thoughtful discussion before proceeding with any major zoning changes, asking the commission to delay a decision until that is done.

Sue Loellbach, representing Connections for the Homeless, supports the proposed zoning changes in Evanston, emphasizing the need for more affordable housing. She pointed out the disparity in life expectancy between different wards in the city, particularly in the Fifth Ward, which has a lower life expectancy and fewer housing options for low-income and minority residents. She then argued that increasing housing choice, is essential to providing affordable options for residents who currently spend a disproportionate amount of their income on housing. She then addressed concerns about the potential loss of single-family neighborhoods, asserting that the changes would not lead to the destruction of these areas, especially in wealthier northern districts where development would be slow and expensive. She emphasized that the zoning changes are meant to benefit the future, providing more housing choices and addressing long-term needs. She concludes by reiterating the importance of creating more diverse housing options for all residents.

Thomas Hughes raised concerns about the planning documents and proposals related to zoning and neighborhood changes, highlighting the potential for high-density development in residential areas. He then critiqued the planning maps, pointing out discrepancies and missing information. He also mentioned that certain areas, like the one where he lives, appear to have incorrect zoning designations, causing confusion about the proposed changes. He then expressed concern about the long-term impact of the proposals, noting the lack of discussion about significant local developments like the University's new stadium or future transportation needs, such as self-driving cars and the status of transit systems. He concluded by suggesting that the plan is incomplete and not yet ready for implementation, urging a more thorough review.

Paula Twilling expressed concern that many residents in Evanston are unaware of the details of the Envision Evanston 2045 plan. She feels more explanation is needed, as people are confused about the proposed zoning changes. She also argued that higher density does not necessarily improve living conditions and could harm the environment by reducing green spaces. Paula criticizes the public notice process, saying that many residents don't see the notices due to the declining circulation of the Evanston Review. She believes the community should be more involved and suggests a referendum could be a good idea.

George Kriplin advocated for changes to zoning laws in Evanston to increase the availability of multifamily housing, particularly in his North Evanston neighborhood. He highlighted the lack of diversity in his area, both racial and socioeconomic, and points out that housing prices have made it difficult for young families, including himself, to

stay or buy homes. He supports land use changes that would allow for more diverse housing options, believing this would lead to a more inclusive, connected community. He urges the commission to support the Envision Evanston 2045 plan to create a fairer, more equitable city.

Commissioner Questions/Discussion

Commissioner Lindwall emphasized the importance of supporting proposed zoning changes with data. She suggests that conclusions about the impact of increasing housing density should be backed by facts, particularly in terms of financial impacts, affordability, and the potential for displacement. She highlighted the need for data on how similar changes in other cities, like Minneapolis or Anchorage, have affected property values and housing stock and called for a better understanding of how this plan aligns with the goal of avoiding displacement and how it would impact families with children in Evanston.

Commissioner Halik shared several points in response to the discussions on zoning and density changes. He questions the idea that the push for eliminating single-family zoning comes from a bottom-up approach, suggesting it may have been more driven by elected officials rather than the community. He also challenged the claim that increased density automatically leads to more affordable housing, arguing that prices are determined by market factors like location and land cost, not just the type of housing. He emphasized that while he believes multifamily housing is appropriate in some areas, but it should not be applied uniformly across the city. He raised concerns about parking and the compatibility of more density with existing infrastructure and critiqued the example of Raleigh, North Carolina, as a comparison for Evanston, noting the need for similar cities in terms of size and demographics for an effective analysis.

Commissioner Mabadi emphasized the complexity of creating affordable housing, especially given factors like the current housing market dynamics and interest rates. He explains that many homeowners with low mortgage rates are unlikely to sell their properties, which reduces the housing inventory and inflates property prices. This makes it difficult to achieve affordable housing without intervention, such as adjusting taxes or land use policies. He stressed that while adding density might increase housing options, it's not a simple solution due to infrastructure and economic constraints. He proposes looking at ways to repurpose existing properties as a potential way to create more affordable inventory within the city. He also supports a slower, more measured approach to the issue, given its complexity.

Additionally, Commissioner Mabadi called for a more detailed, data-driven approach to urban planning that takes into account not just density, but also green spaces, infrastructure, and services, ensuring that any proposed changes are appropriate for Evanston's unique character.

Commissioner Mirintchev focused on a few key issues related to density and parking, emphasizing the unique circumstances of Evanston's proximity to Chicago. He raised concerns about the proposed changes in density, especially if they result in reduced parking requirements. He questioned how expanding density while simultaneously eliminating parking restrictions would work. He also highlighted the unique situation of Evanston as an extension of Chicago, pointing out that comparing Evanston to other cities like Minneapolis or Anchorage doesn't make sense due to their differing urban landscapes. He mentions that Evanston has a diverse and segregated population, with areas like the Fifth Ward differing significantly from other parts of the city. This leads him to consider how potential zoning changes, particularly in R1 through R3 districts, might impact the city in the long term.

He also expressed concern about change in general, noting that while people often resist change, it's crucial to think about how these decisions will affect the city 20 or 40 years from now. Finally, Commissioner Mirintchev touched on the need for staff to analyze which neighborhoods would be most impacted by these changes and pointed out that the odds of change in high-value neighborhoods are low compared to neighborhoods with smaller homes and lots. He asks staff to provide input on which neighborhoods are most likely to experience change and how factors like lot size may influence those changes.

Commissioner Arevalo expressed concerns about increasing density in Evanston without corresponding changes to parking regulations, suggesting that removing parking restrictions while expanding the population doesn't make sense. She also highlighted Evanston's unique position as an extension of Chicago, comparing it to other cities like Minneapolis and Anchorage, and points out how diversity and segregation within the city complicate planning. She emphasizes the importance of considering long-term impacts—20 to 40 years ahead—when making zoning decisions, particularly with regard to single-family R1 homes in more expensive areas versus lower-cost neighborhoods. She also requests staff's input on the likely impacts of zoning changes, especially regarding lot size, and expresses gratitude to staff for their hard work despite the challenging discussions.

Chair Rodgers expressed interest in understanding which neighborhoods in Evanston are most likely to see changes due to zoning adjustments, particularly focusing on the differences between high-value areas with expensive homes (e.g., \$1.5–1.7 million) and more affordable neighborhoods with homes priced around \$300,000. He seeks staff's input on whether his observations are accurate, asking for clarification on where the most significant changes are likely to occur. He also emphasizes the connection between lot size and density, noting that the ability to build multiple units on a larger lot versus a smaller one leads to different outcomes.

Chair Rodgers acknowledged the hard work of the staff, thanking them for their efforts and recognizing their challenges in balancing timelines, consultant work, community feedback, and coordination with elected officials. He ended by inviting staff to provide further input or guidance.

Liz Williams clarified a recent referral made by some members of the City Council regarding zoning changes, specifically allowing up to four dwelling units per lot and reducing minimum lot size. She emphasizes that this referral, though proposed by several council members, is not a directive from the entire city council but is part of ongoing discussions. Liz also mentions that the referral is based on earlier council updates and engagement with the community, particularly ideas presented several months ago.

She also updated the commission on the upcoming release of portions of the zoning ordinance, which will be available next week in preparation for the public hearing on December 4th. Additionally, she informed the commission that mailings have been sent to every taxpayer of record in Evanston to notify residents, although she notes that the timing of these mailings depends on USPS delivery.

Finally, she provided an overview of the timeline, mentioning that the public will have several months of discussions on this matter, including six public hearings starting next week, followed by meetings in December to review the zoning text amendments and the official map. She thanks everyone for their hard work on the project.

V. COMMUNICATIONS

None.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Lindwall Moved to adjourn. Commissioner Johnson Seconded.

Adjourned at 9:28 pm.

The next Evanston Land Use Commission meeting will be held **on Wednesday, November 20, 2024, at 6:00 pm**, in the James C. Lytle Council Chambers in the Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center.

Respectfully submitted,
Justin Bock, Administrative lead

Reviewed by
Meagan Jones, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
Sam Hubbard, Senior Planner