



MEETING MINUTES

LAND USE COMMISSION

Wednesday, January 15th, 2025

7:00 PM

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

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

Members Absent: Max Puchtel

Staff Present: Neighborhood Land Use Planner Meagan Jones, Senior Housing Planner Uri Pachter, Planning Manager Liz Williams, Community Development Director Sarah Flax

Presiding Member: Matt Rodgers

I. CALL TO ORDER/DECLARATION OF A QUORUM

Chair Rodgers explained the meeting's formal structure, emphasizing that testimony would be taken under oath, recorded, and should relate to zoning ordinance standards. Unlike typical meetings, this hearing was focused solely on the comprehensive plan, with zoning issues to be addressed on January 22.

Chair Rodgers explained that Commissioners would hear reports from key city boards before providing input on the final draft. Public comment would be taken at the end of the meeting rather than at the beginning. He acknowledged confusion in the process and assured the public that the commission would follow City Council's direction to finalize the comp plan before moving on to zoning discussions in the spring and summer. He encouraged residents to engage with their alderpersons ahead of the March vote.

II. OLD BUSINESS

A. Public Hearing | Comprehensive Plan - Envision Evanston 2045

The City of Evanston is proposing a new Comprehensive General Plan to guide development for the next 20 years. The draft plan includes a vision statement, goals, policies and actions related to the environment; land use; transportation; housing; economic development; placemaking, arts and culture; parks and open space; and preservation.

Ellie Shevick, Chair of the Parks and Recreation Board, summarized her board's discussions on Envision Evanston but clarified they had not yet voted on a formal recommendation. Their formal recommendation is expected after their January 16th meeting.

Key points from her presentation included:

- The board's initial focus of identifying missing parks on the zoning map, which was later corrected.
- The Parks and Open Space section of Envision Evanston was initially too brief, and the board requested more content. They have since been using a Google Document to make edits and suggestions.
- A major challenge being that the Parks and Strategic Green Space Plan is still in draft form, though Envision Evanston references it. Some board members believe Envision Evanston should be delayed until that plan is finalized.
- Ongoing concerns about park funding, maintenance, and accessibility, with particular attention to aging playgrounds (40 out of 53 are over 15 years old).
- A significant suggestion from board members of consolidating all park-related operations under a single Parks and Recreation Department, rather than having responsibilities split across multiple city departments.
- Concern that Evanston has half the national average of parkland per capita, prompting calls for active parkland acquisition and requiring new developments to include open space.
- The board is advocating for increased city investment in parks, improved restroom facilities, expanded water access, and better stewardship of natural landscapes.
- They await further discussion with consultants and city staff on finalizing the Parks and Green Space Strategic Plan, with the goal of aligning it with Envision Evanston.

Ms. Shevick concluded by acknowledging the city's tight timeline for Envision Evanston but emphasized the importance of ensuring parks are adequately addressed.

Commissioner Halik emphasized that the Land Use Commission should aim to get Envision Evanston right by incorporating recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Board. He requested a timeline from the board on when they could complete their review. He then noted that while Evanston might not lack parks overall, certain neighborhoods—like the Fifth Ward—are underserved. He encouraged a neighborhood-level analysis of park distribution. Commissioner Halik also supported adding public restrooms, noting that a lack of facilities can negatively impact residents' experiences.

Commissioner Halik suggested that beyond shared space, the city should have a strategic plan for repurposing District 65 school land if schools close, potentially adding parks in underserved areas. He then expressed skepticism about requiring new developments to include park space, arguing that it would be difficult to enforce and that contributions to parks might be a more feasible alternative.

Commissioner Mabadi asked for clarification on the proposed policy requiring no less than 5% of the city budget to be allocated to parks starting in 2026. He specifically wanted to know what percentage of the current city budget is allocated to parks to understand the impact of this proposal. Ms. Shevick did not know at that moment

Commissioner Mabadi then asked about a proposal related to increasing investment in the Northshore Canal. He and Ms. Shevick discussed the Parks and Green Space Strategic Plan,

particularly the goal of increasing investment, such as improvements to the canoe launch and other programming. Commissioner Mabadi asked whether these concepts would eventually be tied to specific dollar amounts or cost estimates. Ms. Shevick clarified that the consultants working on the strategic plan did include cost estimates for their proposed projects.

Commissioner Mabadi also pointed out that comparisons between Evanston and other communities need to account for its geographic constraints, particularly the lake limiting expansion. He supported Commissioner Halik's idea of prioritizing a more visual, needs-based approach—identifying areas lacking parks rather than focusing solely on numerical averages. However, he noted that acquiring land for parks in Evanston is extremely difficult, similar to the challenges faced in securing land for affordable housing.

Commissioner Johnson questioned how Evanston's parkland per capita compares to similar communities with a similar built environment. He specifically asked whether the statistic stating Evanston has half the national average of parkland per capita includes only city-owned parks or also factors in other open spaces like the canal and golf courses. Ms. Shevick responded that it included all of those.

Commissioner Johnson asked how Evanston compares to other communities with a similar population density—around 10,000 people per square mile. He noted that comparing Evanston to lower-density areas like Schaumburg or Naperville might not be meaningful and wanted to know how Evanston's parkland per capita compares specifically to cities with similar density levels. Ms. Shevick did not have an answer.

Commissioner Johnson noted that Evanston's population density is surprisingly close to that of Chicago, which he found unexpected. He acknowledged that Evanston is much denser than most suburbs and wondered how this high density impacts the provision of parks and open space compared to other similarly dense communities.

Chair Rodgers pointed out that multiple strategic plans are progressing through the city at different stages. He emphasized that the comprehensive plan (Envision Evanston 2045) is a long-term, 20-year document that will need to incorporate and adapt to future plans as they emerge. He cautioned against delaying decisions to wait for a specific strategic plan, as new ones will continue to be developed over time. Instead, the comprehensive plan should be seen as a snapshot in time that will be periodically reviewed and updated.

Sarah Dreler, Chair of Preservation Commission (at the time of the meeting), a public historian with expertise in architectural history and preservation planning, emphasized that historic preservation is intersectional, involving land use, economics, social justice, and cultural landscapes. She clarified that Evanston's Preservation Commission does not prevent property owners from making changes but rather helps guide responsible development, noting that in the last five years, every application brought to the commission has been approved. Her presentation highlights included:

- Expressing that the commission's work extends beyond building reviews, as they engage in long-range planning and strategic efforts, including their Preserve 2040 plan.
- Regarding Envision Evanston, Ms. Dreler pointed out that while the plan has strengths, there are missing chapters and areas needing expansion, such as implementation strategies and community systems.
- She recommended adding an urban design and community character section to ensure new development respects Evanston's existing diversity.

- For preservation, she urged the Land Use Commission to support Preserve 2040, consider neighborhood conservation districts, collaborate with tribal representatives on reinterment sites for indigenous remains, establish a demolition delay process, update the historic resources map, and introduce advisory reviews for projects near landmarks.
- Regarding housing, she raised concerns about unintended consequences of allowing more units in all residential zones, fearing it could lead to demolitions and profit-driven redevelopment. Instead, she suggested promoting "double houses" as a solution.
- For parks, she called for addressing the treatment of open spaces in historic districts.
- On environmental issues, she advocated for recognizing heritage trees, supporting volunteer landscape stewards, and implementing a deconstruction ordinance to preserve embodied energy in buildings.

Overall, she urged for a more comprehensive and actionable plan to ensure preservation aligns with broader urban planning goals.

Commissioner Halik expressed strong support for Sarah's presentation, calling it impressive and appreciating its holistic approach to preservation beyond just architectural details. He stated that he agreed with everything presented at first glance. He asked how the Preservation Commission could help city staff incorporate their recommendations into the comprehensive plan. Acknowledging that the current preservation chapter is inadequate, he noted that the detailed *Preserve 2040* report contains far more information than could be covered in the presentation and encouraged everyone to read it. Ultimately, he sought guidance on how to ensure these ideas are effectively integrated into the plan.

Ms. Dreler expressed uncertainty about how to proceed with aligning the comprehensive plan and the "Preserve 2040" document. She suggested that the solution lies in a hands-on approach and working through the details. Ms. Dreler emphasized the need for better alignment between the two documents, even though she could not offer a clearer strategy at that moment. Her focus was on ensuring the content matches up and is effectively integrated.

Chair Rodgers emphasized the need for better alignment between the comprehensive plan and "Preserve 2040." He acknowledged that about 85% of the ideas shared tonight align with the existing plan, but he pointed out that some new developments, like the reinterment site, weren't included previously. Cade Sterling, the city's Preservation Planner, agreed with the 85% estimate, noting that some areas were more foundational and would require approval before implementation.

Chair Rodgers suggested focusing on the 15% of missing elements not yet incorporated into the plan, particularly those from strategic plans of various departments. He highlighted the importance of keeping the document manageable in size, noting that no one would read a plan that grows too large. He specifically mentioned the reinterment issue and discussed the importance of addressing sustainability, like the deconstruction ordinance, and how that relates to carbon reduction efforts. He recommended continuing advocacy for these issues, with presentations already made to the city council, and encouraged further action to make a meaningful difference.

Commissioner Halik sought clarification, referencing Chicago's approach to landmark or orange-rated buildings. He emphasized that the discussion should go beyond just historically significant structures, addressing concerns about developers clearing entire blocks or individual demolitions that could significantly impact a neighborhood.

Ms. Dreler clarified the distinction between demolition and deconstruction. Demolition involves the complete removal of a building from a site, whereas deconstruction is a more careful process where the building is dismantled in a way that allows materials to be salvaged and reused. A discussion followed on the existing demolition process and establishing a process for evaluating buildings that may have cultural, architectural, or historic significance but are not officially designated landmarks. There is already a study list of eligible properties that are periodically reviewed and updated, but concerns were raised about ensuring the process is not overly broad, leading to unnecessary delays for all demolitions.

Additionally, the conversation touched on the issue of large-scale demolitions, where multiple lots are cleared for new developments. Some felt that this should be addressed beyond just historic preservation, potentially under environmental policies, due to concerns about landfill waste. The distinction between demolition (complete removal) and deconstruction (careful disassembly for salvage) was also reiterated to clarify how different approaches impact sustainability and preservation efforts.

Commissioner Mabadi expressed appreciation for the presentation and suggested considering an underutilized park space at Ridge and Lincoln as a potential site for reinterment, emphasizing the importance of finding suitable resources for such purposes. Additionally, he sought clarification on one of their recommendations, questioning whether the proposed oversight would extend historic landmark regulations to neighboring properties that are not officially designated as landmarks. Ms. Dreler explained that the concept of "integrity" in preservation refers to maintaining a landmark's character, including its setting. If changes to surrounding properties negatively impact a landmark's setting, it can be problematic. While the Preservation Commission currently has binding review authority, the proposal suggests only an advisory review process for adjacent properties. This would encourage discussions about potential impacts without imposing strict regulations. The idea is not yet included in the Preserve 2040 plan but is part of the 15% of proposed additions.

Cade Sterling clarified that when discussing the impact on a landmark's integrity of setting or feeling—especially for landmarks outside historic districts (of which there are about 430 in Evanston)—the focus is on demolition and the mass, form, and relationship of new construction. The proposal is not about advising on minor changes like small additions, window replacements, or similar modifications.

Commissioner Mabadi raised concerns about large mansions, particularly along Michigan, Forest, and Sheridan, some of which have been subdivided into multiple residences. He questioned how historic preservation views this practice, especially as family sizes have decreased over the past 30 years. He noted that the demand for massive single-family homes has declined and suggested that allowing subdivision could align with changing housing needs.

Ms. Dreler explained that the preservation commission in Evanston only has jurisdiction over the exterior of buildings, as that is considered a public good. However, subdividing a mansion into multiple residences would typically require exterior alterations, such as new entrances, which would be subject to preservation review. If significant changes are proposed, the project would require a certificate of appropriateness. She also clarified that individually designated landmarks have the highest level of protection, whereas buildings that contribute to a historic district are subject to a lower threshold of review, allowing for more flexibility in modifications.

Chair Rodgers sought clarification on the levels of preservation oversight, noting that there are landmarks, contributing structures, and non-contributing buildings within historic districts. He

asked whether non-contributing buildings, which have no historic significance, would be subject to even more flexible review compared to contributing structures or designated landmarks.

Mr. Sterling explained that Evanston's preservation ordinance does not formally differentiate between contributing and non-contributing buildings within historic districts. However, in practice, the commission considers staff recommendations regarding a building's status. The distinction is reflected in the commission's rules, where most changes to non-contributing structures, including additions, are handled administratively rather than requiring commission approval. He also provided data on the proportion of non-contributing properties within various historic districts, noting that some districts, like Ridge, have a higher percentage due to past subdivisions and less sympathetic interventions from the mid-20th century.

Commissioner Mirintchev praised the work presented and expressed strong support for the proposed implementation chapter. He particularly endorsed the idea of an Urban Design Commission and suggested incorporating phased checks into the implementation plan. He emphasized that mistakes in urban design are often irreversible, so regular evaluations—perhaps every five years—should be included to assess the impact of major changes in the comprehensive plan and allow for adjustments if needed.

A discussion followed covering several key topics related to historic preservation, urban design, and comprehensive planning. There was a focus on the implementation chapter of the comprehensive plan, emphasizing flexibility while ensuring that urban design decisions are evaluated over time. Suggestions included incorporating phased checks, potentially every five years, to assess the impact of changes.

Another major topic was improving access to historical data on properties, particularly regarding demolition delays and preservation. There was interest in integrating resources like historical society records into a centralized, accessible system, possibly through GIS mapping. This would help provide a fuller understanding of properties' histories when making decisions.

Concerns were also raised about new developments adjacent to historic properties, with discussions on whether additional guidelines or advisory reviews should be in place to help preserve neighborhood character. Some examples of successful historic preservation efforts were shared, including proactive engagement with realtors to market historic properties for adaptive reuse rather than demolition. There was a call to ensure that the comprehensive plan references other relevant documents, like Preserve 2040, without making it overwhelming. The goal is to capture key themes while maintaining flexibility for updates and other planning efforts.

Chair Rodgers introduced Chloe Thurston, a member of the Housing and Community Development Committee (HCDC).

Chloe Thurston provided a topline summary of the committee's discussions on Envision Evanston and the comprehensive plan. Key points included:

- HCDC's Role & Engagement: The committee has been involved in discussions since March 2024, receiving updates, asking questions, and participating in envisioning exercises. Their focus includes housing affordability, homelessness, economic development, and revitalization.
- Key Housing Issues Discussed:
 - Housing Cost Burden: Nearly 50% of Evanston renters are cost-burdened (spending over 30% of income on housing), with disparities across the city.

- Missing Middle Housing: Lack of housing affordable to households earning 80–120% of the area median income.
- Affordability Definitions: Varying perspectives on what constitutes affordable housing.
- Multi-Faceted Solutions Needed: Zoning alone cannot address all housing challenges; other policy tools are needed.
- Inclusionary Housing Ordinance (IHO) Vote:
 - In October 2024, HCDC voted 4-1 to recommend replacing the IHO to increase affordable unit requirements, incentivize on-site affordable units instead of in-lieu payments, and allow greater flexibility in unit size.
 - The ordinance's impact depends on the comprehensive plan and zoning update.
- Lack of Official HCDC Recommendation:
 - The committee discussed issuing a statement to City Council but ultimately did not reach a consensus.
 - Concerns included the scope of the plan, zoning changes (especially R1 district changes), and the need for clearer communication on neighborhood impacts.
- Diverse Committee Perspectives:
 - Some members supported simplifying zoning and increasing housing supply, while others questioned the pace and nature of proposed reforms.
 - Calls for clearer projections on zoning changes' impacts and better integration of affordability and environmental goals.
 - Discussion on whether the comprehensive plan should be a flexible, revisable document.

Overall, HCDC has actively engaged in the planning process but opted not to issue a collective stance, recognizing the complexity and varying opinions on Envision Evanston and its implications.

Chair Rodgers pointed out the lack of consensus in Evanston on the Envision Evanston plan, noting that it was unsurprising. He emphasized that the comprehensive plan should be a living document, subject to periodic revisions, rather than something static. He pointed out that the current plan lacks major topics like affordable housing, which wasn't a central issue when the existing plan was adopted in 2000.

He then raised a key question about the housing cost burden statistic related to how university students factor into that number. Since students typically have housing costs but not conventional incomes, he wondered if their inclusion artificially inflates the statistic. He requested clarification from staff on whether a more accurate measure exists that accounts for this factor. Senior Housing Planner Uri Pachter explained that housing cost burden is measured at the household level. Students living in dorms are classified as residing in group quarters, meaning they are counted as part of the population but excluded from household-based housing cost burden calculations. However, students living off-campus in non-institutional housing are included in the statistic. He noted that this group includes a diverse range of students, such as PhD and master's students, who may have different financial situations.

Commissioner Lindwall pointed out that Presbyterian Homes appears as a high housing cost burden area on one of the maps in the draft plan, despite not being in traditionally lower-income areas like the Fifth Ward or the west side of Evanston. She speculated that this might be due to the cottages and other housing on the property, where residents may not have traditional incomes but instead rely on social security and investments. She questioned how groups like

this, which may not be representative of Evanston's overall population, are accounted for in the housing cost burden analysis.

Mr. Pachter explained that most of the housing cost burden data in the comprehensive plan is taken at a macro level. However, when analyzing specific areas, the data can be broken down geographically or by income levels. For the Strategic Housing Plan, some preliminary data shared with HCDC showed that cost burden is significantly higher at lower income levels, which aligns with expectations.

He also noted that age-based analysis is possible, but the margins of error can be high when segmenting data that way. These different approaches can help ensure a more accurate assessment of housing cost burdens in Evanston.

Commissioner Mabadi asked whether HCDC has data on the number of housing units needed to mitigate Evanston's affordable housing crisis. He inquired if there is an estimate of how many units would be required to reduce the problem to a more manageable level. Given that the commission is discussing redesigning zoning codes, he emphasized the importance of knowing what specific problem they are trying to fix before making changes.

Chloe Thurston responded that HCDC does not have exact data on how much housing Evanston would need to fully address affordable housing challenges. While they receive regular updates on the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance waitlist, this is not necessarily an accurate indicator of need.

She explained that the waitlist does not track where applicants currently live, and by the time a unit becomes available, the first person on the list may no longer be eligible or in need. This means the available data is limited in its ability to quantify the exact number of units required.

Commissioner Halik raised concerns about how housing units are counted, questioning whether the data distinguishes between studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, or three-bedroom units when assessing housing needs. He emphasized that while the community frequently expresses a desire to support families, developers tend to build smaller units (studios and one-bedrooms) instead of the larger units that families need. He suggested that a key issue to address is how to encourage developers to build more family-friendly housing.

Mr. Pachter acknowledged that the issue of unit size has come up in discussions. He explained that the proposed updates to the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance (IHO) aim to provide more flexibility for developers by allowing different income levels and unit sizes. However, he noted that the IHO is market-driven—meaning it can only apply to the types of units that developers choose to build. If developers primarily propose studios and one-bedrooms, the IHO will only produce affordable units of those types. He added that while the IHO can help, it is not the primary tool for increasing the number of larger family-sized units. Instead, other policy tools, such as preservation efforts and different types of housing production strategies, will be needed to achieve that goal.

Mr. Pachter stated that the Strategic Housing Plan was not abandoned but temporarily put on hold due to a full agenda over the past year. Priority was given to discussing the HUD Consolidated Plan and Envision Evanston 2045. The plan remains a city council goal, with the aim of bringing it forward by the end of the year. Staff are currently focused on Envision Evanston but intend to advance the Strategic Housing Plan as soon as possible.

Commissioner Halik voiced concern that the current schedule from June to December is too focused on producing draft and final versions of the plan without room for deeper discussion. Given the many overlapping issues between HCDC, the comprehensive plan, zoning, and implementation, there is a request for a draft version of the Strategic Housing Plan or related materials. This would help raise additional questions and ensure that all key considerations are addressed.

Ms. Thurston said she could go back to the committee to see if they would like to provide questions to the commission. She mentioned that the committee was invited to submit questions to city staff, and some members did so in writing. Additionally, they were given the opportunity to write a collective statement but ultimately decided not to do so.

Commissioner Halik expressed the need for expert involvement in discussions about affordable housing. He emphasized that government funding is crucial for making affordable housing a reality, and suggested that before finalizing the zoning, there should be several meetings to gather experts in affordable housing and government funding. He requested that if city staff have access to such experts, they should be brought into the conversation.

Ms. Thurston agreed with the suggestion to involve experts, saying it would be beneficial for everyone. She mentioned that while the Housing and Community Development Committee (HCDC) focuses on making recommendations about the use of government funds, most housing is provided through the market. She explained that HCDC's agenda has been full this past year due to other recommendations, including those related to landlord-tenant ordinances.

Commissioner Lindwall discussed the concept of missing middle housing, explaining that it encompasses both price and building type. She described missing middle housing as the range of housing types between single-family homes and high-rise multifamily buildings, including two-flats, duplexes, and courtyard apartments. She noted that construction techniques play a role in defining these housing types. Additionally, she referenced income distribution data, which shows a concentration of residents at both high and low income levels, with a diverse middle segment. She asked if the approach being taken aims to ensure housing affordability across all income levels.

Ms. Thurston elaborated on the concept of missing middle housing, emphasizing that it involves both income accessibility and housing types. She explained that enabling a broader range of housing types—such as courtyard housing, two-flats, and townhouses—can help accommodate a more diverse set of residents. She acknowledged that discussions on missing middle housing often conflate income-based needs with building types but affirmed that both are relevant to the issue. She also noted that conversations about Evanston's missing housing types have taken place in various planning discussions, including those related to the Consolidated Plan, Strategic Plan, and Comprehensive Plan. Topics have included housing needs for an aging population, intergenerational living arrangements, and housing options that bridge the gap between large single-family homes and high-rise buildings.

She highlighted that while HCDC serves an advisory role with limited influence over housing production, initiatives like Envision Evanston provide an opportunity to shape future zoning and policy changes that could allow for greater housing variety to meet diverse needs.

Commissioner Lindwall reflected on the variety of existing housing types in Evanston, noting the presence of Cook County senior buildings, Prim Tower, Blake Homes, scattered-site public housing, and numerous two-flats and double houses. She questioned whether there were truly

any missing building types in the city and seemed to be considering whether the discussion should focus on something other than just housing typology.

Ms. Thurston clarified that when discussing missing housing types, it doesn't mean that Evanston has zero of a particular type, but rather that certain housing options might be underrepresented or not meeting demand. She suggested that potential zoning code changes could encourage the market to provide different kinds of housing by adjusting restrictions in certain areas. The goal is to consider the latent demand for housing types that current regulations may not adequately support.

Commissioner Halik expressed admiration for the knowledge shared and emphasized that the commission would benefit from the insights of the committee. He suggested that even if a formal report is not issued, there should be a dedicated discussion on the housing chapter as part of the comprehensive plan process. He invited participation from committee members in that discussion to bring forward both committee insights and personal expertise.

Ms. Thurston responded positively to the idea, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between different commissions. She noted that in the December meeting, she appreciated how the Envision Evanston process has integrated various commissions, as they often work in silos. She specifically highlighted the challenge of being on the housing committee while land use decisions are made separately, despite the strong connection between the two.

Commissioner Halik raised a concern about how student housing affects income and rent data in Evanston. He questioned Northwestern's dorm policies, wondering if only freshmen live on campus or if a significant portion of students—potentially two-thirds or more—reside in private housing. If that's the case, he noted, the presence of thousands of students with little or no income but paying rent could significantly skew housing affordability data.

Mr. Pachter explained that about half of Northwestern undergraduates can live on campus. However, graduate students have very limited on-campus housing options. He acknowledged that determining the exact number of students living off-campus is complex. Some students in Evanston attend schools other than Northwestern, while many Northwestern students live outside Evanston. Additionally, some students have families where another household member earns income, further complicating the data. Despite these complexities, he noted that they are aware of the university's housing requirements for undergraduates, which provides a general sense of how many students live off-campus.

Commissioner Halik stated that the presence of Northwestern students, particularly those living off-campus with little or no income, creates a significant caveat when interpreting income and rent statistics. He suggested that this factor could heavily skew the data, potentially making the statistic unreliable or even irrelevant. Mr. Pachter responded that, based on the data reviewed, the housing cost burden in Evanston is significant. He acknowledged that while some Northwestern students live off-campus with low or no income, they make up only a small portion of Evanston's total population. Additionally, because a meaningful portion of students live on campus and are excluded from these statistics, their impact on the overall data is limited rather than skewing the results.

Additional discussion touched on several housing issues, including the challenges college students face in Evanston. It was noted that many students, particularly those at Northwestern University, spend a significant amount on housing, often in private rentals that can range from \$1,000 to \$1,300 per bed. This creates a unique housing market segment that may not reflect

broader trends. The conversation suggested that instead of broadly analyzing housing around the university, it might be more effective to focus on specific neighborhoods, such as the difference in rental prices between areas. Additionally, there was a suggestion that a clear goal or target for affordable housing needs to be set to avoid unnecessary anxiety or confusion.

The possibility of establishing a local housing authority or land trust was also raised as a potential way to control housing costs and encourage affordable housing development. It was noted that while Evanston already works with community partners on affordable housing, there are still challenges in creating affordable multi-bedroom units. The conversation also highlighted the importance of aligning various housing plans, such as the Strategic Housing Plan and the Comprehensive Plan, to ensure a unified approach to affordable housing.

The conversation concluded with a call to include considerations about the impact of institutional landlords and the use of algorithms in rental pricing in the Strategic Housing Plan.

Katarina Topalov, a member of the Environment Board and who serves as the chair of the CARP (Climate Action and Resilience Plan) Implementation Task Force. In her presentation, she outlined key recommendations for incorporating climate resilience and sustainability into the city's comprehensive plan. She emphasized the importance of making the goals of the comprehensive plan measurable, trackable, and enforceable. Topalov highlighted the impact of rising temperatures, increased precipitation, and extreme weather events on the community, urging the inclusion of these concerns in the comprehensive plan.

Her recommendations included:

- Integrating CARP into the comprehensive plan: She advocated for the climate action and resilience plan to serve as a foundational element of the city's development.
- Climate resilience and sustainability: She stressed the need to address both mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and sustainability (preserving the environment for future generations).
- Environmental justice: Recognizing that marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by environmental changes, she emphasized the need for equitable solutions.
- Green spaces and tree planting: She recommended enhancing green spaces, planting more trees, and using native plants to absorb stormwater and reduce the urban heat island effect.
- Transportation and walkability: Advocating for more reliable, accessible, and evenly distributed transportation options, she suggested promoting mixed-use zoning to encourage walkability.
- Nature-based solutions and circular economy: She encouraged nature-based climate adaptation solutions and support for the circular economy, such as deconstruction and material reuse.
- Quantifiable goals and tracking: Topalov proposed using a climate action dashboard, similar to other cities, to track the community's progress in real time.

In conclusion, Topalov highlighted the need to prepare for future climate challenges to avoid costly consequences in the long term, using scientific data to inform proactive planning.

Commissioner Halik raised concerns about balancing ambitious climate goals with the financial and social implications they may have on residents, particularly in terms of costs. He specifically

pointed to the challenge of implementing goals like carbon neutrality by 2050, achieving 100% renewable energy on all properties by 2030, and zero waste by 2050. His concern was that these initiatives could lead to higher costs, such as increased rent for apartment owners, which could burden residents, especially those already struggling financially. He questioned how to reconcile these climate action goals with the need to maintain affordable living conditions and avoid exacerbating economic inequalities. There is a need to address how these goals can be achieved in ways that mitigate negative effects on affordability, possibly through incentives, phased implementation, or incorporating equity-focused policies to ensure the costs are not disproportionately borne by vulnerable communities.

Ms. Topalov responded by acknowledging the concern about the cost implications of implementing climate action goals. She emphasized that the focus should be on the long-term view of environmental issues, rather than short-term budgetary concerns. She argued that the real conflict lies in not addressing the long-term health and environmental costs that can arise from continuing to use outdated or harmful appliances, like gas stoves. Ms. Topalov pointed out that replacing gas appliances with electric ones could help reduce health risks, such as asthma, which is more prevalent in children exposed to gas stove emissions.

In response to the concern of who pays for these changes, Ms. Topalov mentioned programs like the Green Homes project, which is designed to help low-income families replace old appliances, improve insulation, and make other energy-efficient upgrades. She suggested that such programs could help alleviate the financial burden on vulnerable communities while still advancing environmental goals.

There was additional discussion about balancing environmental goals, such as carbon neutrality, 100% renewable energy, and waste reduction, with the financial burden they might place on property owners, particularly in terms of rent increases for apartment owners. The long-term benefits of environmental actions were stressed, such as reducing health risks like asthma from gas stoves, and it was pointed out that low-income households could be supported through programs that help replace appliances and weatherize homes.

Commissioner Lindwall raised a question about the challenge of planting trees in areas with contaminated soil, especially in former industrial corridors. Ms. Topalov explained that certain plants can absorb toxins, offering a potential solution. The distribution of trees was also discussed, with some pointing out that it isn't strictly linked to redlined areas and calling for a more nuanced approach to the issue.

Acknowledging the global scale of climate challenges, Commissioner Mabadi emphasized the importance of focusing on tangible benefits for residents through local actions, such as increasing the tree canopy and promoting mixed-use zones. He expressed concern about the practical impact of such initiatives, noting the need for prioritization in the context of broader environmental challenges.

Commissioner Mangum brought up the 13-year life expectancy disparity in Evanston, particularly in certain areas, and a discussion followed on how that is influenced by factors such as access to fresh food, parks, and environmental conditions like air quality. Jerri Garl recommended reading the detailed EPLAN report on the contributing factors to gain a deeper understanding of the issue.

The restart of a local program that helps low-income residents improve energy efficiency in their homes was also mentioned. The use of native plants was discussed, with a focus on balancing

the need for plants suited for urban environments with those historically native to the area. This was identified as an ongoing topic for further discussion.

Chair Rodgers expressed support for mixed-use zones and concerns about how to implement them effectively in certain areas. Questions were raised about attracting the right businesses to these zones and ensuring that they contribute to walkability. He called on the city to take the lead in sustainability efforts, such as developing an urban forest and advancing green energy goals, while addressing the potential burden on homeowners. The importance of revisiting and adapting sustainability goals regularly, given the ongoing climate crisis, was emphasized, ensuring that these discussions remain active and relevant. He also mentioned that the city should collaborate with neighboring communities to address environmental issues more effectively, as the city's efforts alone can only go so far. These partnerships could help distribute the costs of sustainability initiatives, easing the tension between affordability and sustainability.

Ms. Topalov mentioned teaching environmental biology where she emphasized the importance of holding on to aspirational sustainability goals despite the challenges. She pointed out that, globally, there have been significant shifts toward sustainability, offering hope for positive change. She then suggested that the city should celebrate its successes in sustainability, such as the growing number of electric vehicles on the streets, as a way of motivating the community and acknowledging progress.

The conversation then moved to the challenge of environmental justice, particularly in areas with industrial history. It was proposed that certain plants, known for their ability to absorb toxins, might offer a solution to environmental concerns in these areas. The discussion acknowledged the complexity of the issue and the need for a range of solutions, not just trees or native plants, to address environmental challenges in urban areas.

Ms. Garl stated mature trees can reduce energy costs for households, emphasizing the equity implications. Low-income neighborhoods, often without enough tree cover, tend to have higher utility bills. This highlighted the need for more trees in underserved areas to help reduce costs for residents. It was also noted that while some areas are experimenting with environmental health initiatives, convincing residents in low-income neighborhoods to adopt sustainable practices like planting trees can be difficult due to concerns about maintenance costs. This underlined the importance of considering all factors when planning for sustainability in diverse communities. The group then discussed the city's ongoing efforts, including a grant for building electrification that could serve as a model for smaller buildings. Ms. Garl emphasized that while affordability is a concern, these issues would only become more pressing in the future, making it crucial to act now.

Chair Rodgers touched on how various city committees have provided input for the comprehensive plan, including concerns about health. It was suggested that the health chapter be reviewed by health professionals, but it was also noted that the input from committees and commissions would be integrated by staff as part of the city's planning process. The importance of balancing the input from various groups was acknowledged, with the understanding that staff would play a key role in incorporating valuable suggestions into the final recommendations for the city council.

Planning manager Liz Williams thanked everyone and made a point to emphasize that if the Commissioners heard anything during the meeting that they supported, they should share it that evening. She clarified that the purpose of the presentations was to gather input and feedback from the Commissioners to ensure their perspectives were incorporated.

Commissioner Halik responded, asking if they had already addressed that point in their previous discussions. He expressed hope that staff had been listening and taking notes during the meetings. Ms. Williams responded, confirming that she had been taking notes and listening throughout the meetings. She emphasized that it would be helpful to know if the commissioners agreed or disagreed with any points discussed that evening.

Ms. Williams added that every board and commission in the City of Evanston had received communication about the process and the opportunity to submit comments. She noted that this information was shared by the mayor, who works with appointing members to committees, boards, and commissions, and ultimately, the city council. She emphasized that everyone was informed about the ongoing process and had the chance to provide feedback as it moved forward.

Commissioner Lindwall shared several thoughts. She appreciated the outline for the Community Health chapter and suggested a similar outline for chapters covering schools, public buildings, and institutions. She emphasized including smaller organizations like the YMCA, YWCA, Family Focus, and daycare facilities, as they contribute to the community's quality of life. She then raised concerns about potential environmental hazards in housing, such as mold and lead paint, and suggested that these issues be addressed, possibly within the housing chapter. She also mentioned the importance of creating healthy living environments beyond just replacing gas appliances with electric ones.

Commissioner Lindwall also proposed that the city should consider not allowing certain uses that could negatively impact community health, such as smoke shops or cannabis smoking lounges then recommended expanding the aging-in-place concept to include universal design, which would ensure that all places in Evanston are accessible to everyone. She expressed agreement with the Preservation Commission's suggestion to have an implementation chapter, but emphasized that a full draft of the plan should be completed before developing the implementation chapter. She also noted the importance of including all public feedback in the narrative and policies. Overall, she suggested focusing first on finalizing the vision and policies, then developing the implementation chapter with clear metrics.

Liz Williams emphasized the importance of getting a clearer consensus from the Land Use Commission during their discussion. She noted that while individual commissioners' feedback has been valuable, it would be helpful for staff to know whether the suggestions are shared across the commission or just the opinion of one commissioner. This clarity would guide their ability to incorporate the feedback more effectively.

The discussion started with a consensus that the commission would like to see an implementation chapter, which staff is supportive of and plans to move forward with. The desire for a more detailed version of the health chapter was also mentioned. There was some discussion about whether all suggestions made were universally agreed upon. It was clarified that, traditionally, if there's no objection to a comment, it is assumed to be agreed upon by the commission, and the motion was moving forward.

Commissioner Lindwall motioned to request an outline of the community systems. Seconded by Commissioner Mangum. A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried, 8-0.

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

Nays:
Abstain:

City staff is leading the redrafting of the chapters, with some collaboration from consultants on specific details. The timeline for the new draft depends on the direction the commission provides tonight. The commission will discuss the timeline further in the next meeting. The goal is to incorporate public feedback where it aligns with the plan's overall objectives, though some feedback may not fit due to differing viewpoints. Staff has been reviewing public comments and will include a summary of citizen feedback in the next draft. This summary will be used to refine the plan, and any further changes will be made based on the commission's deliberations and their recommendations to the city council. Staff clarified that the process is ongoing and will involve reviewing all citizen comments and adjusting the plan as needed.

Chair Rodgers expressed concerns about the level of specificity in the comprehensive plan, particularly regarding density issues. He suggested that instead of detailing specific housing types, the plan should focus on exploring density in certain areas. He emphasized that including such specifics in the plan may inadvertently answer questions that should be addressed later through zoning ordinances. He referenced sections that propose allowing specific housing types by right and reducing development requirements (e.g., lot sizes and parking minimums), arguing that doing so within the comp plan could prematurely resolve questions intended for zoning discussions.

Commissioner Lindwall made a motion to remove specific density-related language from the next draft of the comprehensive plan, particularly the references to certain housing types and zoning requirements in H2.1 and H2.2. Commissioner Halik Seconded.

A roll call vote was taken and the motion carried, 8-0.

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

Nays:

Abstain:

Commissioner Lindwall mentioned including general language instead of H2.1 and H2.2. She suggested looking at the addition of language further encouraging the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which provides some gentle density.

Commissioner Johnson expressed agreement with the previous comments about the plan being too specific. Reflecting on his experience with past comprehensive plans, he noted that this plan is much more detailed, particularly in terms of population growth targets, which is a departure from the general, aspirational nature of earlier plans. He emphasized that the community's concerns are centered around this level of specificity. He supported removing unnecessary specifics and suggested that the plan should focus more on the city's broad goals and vision, leaving the detailed aspects to be addressed later through zoning.

Commissioner Halik expressed concerns about the data in the plan, specifically regarding density targets. He suggested that such data could be acceptable if it were fact-based, but pointed out that community members are questioning the origin of the numbers. He raised the concern that the data could seem arbitrary, potentially used to justify a push for more density without a clear foundation. Chair Rodgers cautioned against implying that data or statements in

the plan were "made up." He emphasized the importance of ensuring the plan reflects the vision of the entire community, not just the opinions of a vocal minority.

Chair Rodgers pointed out that there have been numerous requests (around 60) for supporting information or citations related to certain statements and numbers in the comprehensive plan. He mentioned that these citations would be provided in a future iteration of the plan, following the recent vote.

Commissioner Mabadi expressed concerns about the potential impact of allowing more density, particularly regarding the fear that building a four-flat next to a home could reduce property values. He argued that removing specific density proposals (like 2.1 and 2.2) would address these concerns by reverting to the original zoning code, but questioned whether this would conflict with the overall vision of the comprehensive plan, especially if the zoning code isn't adjusted to reflect the plan's goals.

Chair Rodgers clarified that the specificity in the comprehensive plan can be problematic because it would require the zoning code to follow that level of detail. He emphasized that the code should be guided by the plan, but if the plan is overly specific, the code would need to reflect those specifics. He believes that a more general approach in the plan would allow for greater flexibility in the zoning code.

Commissioner Johnson clarified that while the specificity in data, like existing conditions, is important, the comprehensive plan should focus more on general goals. He suggested that instead of setting specific population growth targets by a certain year, it would be better to express a desire for continued growth and development. He also noted that the overly specific approach is part of the public's concerns, as reflected in frequent public comments.

Ms. Williams asked for clarification, specifically whether Commissioner Johnson was referring to the population projection and if he believed it should not be included in the comprehensive plan. Commissioner Johnson clarified that while the population projection is from CMAP, his concern is with the language and tone of the plan, which might come across as pushing for more density and population growth. He suggested rewording the plan to focus on Evanston's general goal of continued growth and development, with specifics like density addressed later in the zoning code.

Commissioner Mangum requested a density map or chart that shows the density levels across different wards or neighborhoods in Evanston. She wants to see the percentage of density per area to better understand where higher density exists and if additional density might be needed in certain neighborhoods. Ms. Williams responded that creating a density map at the census tract level would be feasible. However, it might be more complicated to do so at the ward or neighborhood level, as the American Community Survey does not report data in those boundaries. She assured that more granular information could still be provided.

The Commissioners discussed the need for more detailed data and visualization to understand density across the community, including exploring a 3D map of the city, helping to visualize areas with low and high buildings. There was interest in using 3D modeling to support future zoning discussions. Commissioner Mirintchev called for more detailed insights into housing needs, including projected population growth, household numbers, and potential types of housing to accommodate the population. Another point raised was the need to consider the impact of density on traffic and parking, particularly in light of possible zoning changes such as

eliminating minimum parking requirements. A suggestion was made to conduct a traffic study to understand potential impacts.

The conversation also touched on the importance of considering neighborhood character in planning, particularly as it relates to maintaining the unique architectural and built environment fabric of different areas. Commissioner Lindwall called for clearer definitions and policies around growth areas, with the suggestion to possibly shift away from terms like "centers and corridors" in favor of concepts like prioritizing improvements in areas supporting the city's growth and development. This comprehensive approach aims to balance density with the character and livability of the community while addressing practical challenges like parking and traffic.

The discussion around Evanston's future development included several considerations. One key point was the idea of expanding the focus beyond specific corridors or centers to avoid geographical restrictions. Commissioners discussed removing specific geographies and instead focusing on broader development principles, emphasizing economic growth and mixed-use development. The idea of development along arterial streets was highlighted, but commissioners emphasized the need to avoid overly restrictive geographical definitions. The focus should be on a more flexible approach, allowing for a variety of development across different parts of the city, including residential and mixed-use areas. The conversation continued with support for mixed-use development, reflecting the nature of Evanston's existing business districts, where commercial, retail, and residential spaces already coexist.

Commissioner Johnson brought up the significance of trains, particularly the historic role of Evanston's rail stations in the city's development. He suggested that the city's train infrastructure, especially the Metro and CTA lines, should be more prominently acknowledged in the comprehensive plan as part of the city's unique historical and transportation assets. Johnson also advocated for adding stops to the Yellow Line to improve transit access in Evanston, promoting greater walkability and connectivity. The plan would also include enhanced maps and resources for neighborhoods, especially regarding walkability around schools, emphasizing how schools play a vital role in family and neighborhood life.

Commissioners also discussed light pollution, particularly the impact of street lighting on residential life, wildlife, and health. Commissioner Johnson recommended adding this topic to the environmental considerations in the plan, connecting it to bird-friendly policies. There was also an emphasis on housing, with the recognition that Evanston has made efforts to increase the housing supply, such as allowing ADUs on residential lots. The plan needed to reflect these proactive steps to foster housing development.

Lastly, Commissioner Halik raised the importance of Lake Michigan as a defining feature of Evanston, suggesting that the plan should highlight efforts to enhance access to the lake, such as creating more multi-use paths to improve pedestrian and cyclist connections to the lakefront. This would enhance the city's appeal as a place that celebrates its natural beauty and waterfront lifestyle.

Overall, the commission expressed a commitment to refining the plan, balancing growth with environmental considerations, and ensuring that Evanston's unique characteristics, such as its rail network and lakefront, are central to its long-term vision. Despite challenges with the consulting team, commissioners praised the efforts of city staff in guiding the process.

Public Testimony

Michelle Chlebek, an architect and First Ward resident, expressed concerns about the blanket upzoning of single-family areas, warning it could lead to gentrification and the loss of neighborhood character, similar to issues in Glencoe and Waukegan. She suggested adaptive reuse could be a more sustainable and thoughtful solution for increasing housing. She urged the city to gather data and engage in meaningful discussions before making zoning changes.

Jeff Smith discussed the impact of students on housing, noting there are about 9,400 grad students and 8,400 undergraduates at Northwestern. He estimated that roughly 2,000 undergraduates and a third of grad students live in Evanston, which affects housing demand. He also reflected on past concerns about affordable housing and renewable energy in Evanston's downtown plan. Smith stressed the importance of gathering specific data on housing trends in Evanston, rather than relying on generalized theories, to inform future planning.

Carlis Sutton, a Fifth Ward resident, expressed his gratitude to staff and community members for participating in the Envision Evanston 2045 discussions. He shared concerns about increasing density, questioning why suburban areas should resemble urban ones with tall buildings and blocked sunlight. He reflected on his family's history in Evanston and opposed developments that could negatively impact residents. Mr. Sutton also voiced his approval of not hearing plans for a marina on the canal and criticized the committee for granting variances to developers without sufficient public input.

Parielle Davis, a parent with young children, shared concerns about the comprehensive plan, particularly regarding population projections. She pointed out that Evanston's population has only slightly increased since 1990 and questioned the forecasted growth. She then expressed worries about attracting young families, citing declining school enrollment and the state's population decrease. Ms. Davis also highlighted that families with young children often prefer single-family homes, as they offer more space compared to high-density condos, which tend to have smaller units. Lastly, Davis noted a conflict between walkability and the needs of families with young children, emphasizing that commuting by public transit can be difficult for parents with young kids.

Joe Caprile, a long-time resident and architect, shared several suggestions. He emphasized that the document should not just be a list of items to acquire, but a vision statement. To improve it, he recommended replacing stock photos with relevant images and sketches. He also urged the inclusion of an implementation plan that outlines priorities and a timetable. Mr. Caprile stressed the importance of addressing the city's long-term financial stability, beyond raising taxes, by considering commercial development and grants. He suggested adding a section on this topic to the plan. Lastly, Caprile asked for a clear timeline for the release of the next draft document so the community could review it.

Sue Loellbach from Connections for the Homeless spoke about the organization's focus on creating affordable housing, particularly for low-income individuals. She emphasized that the current zoning code is a significant barrier to this goal due to restrictions on where and what type of housing can be built, as well as expensive review processes. She stressed the importance of zoning reform to open the door for affordable housing but cautioned that it will not automatically resolve the issue. She expressed encouragement about the comprehensive plan's strategies for creating affordability and urged more diverse community input, particularly from renters and those facing housing cost burdens. Ms. Loellbach concluded by acknowledging the commission's hard work and reiterating her organization's commitment to the issue of affordability.

Mary Rosinski expressed concern about the lack of data transparency in the planning process, particularly regarding the real estate market and affordable housing. She criticized the absence of key data, including studies and feedback from renters and homeowners, and emphasized that the public should have the opportunity to review all the data and contribute to the final plan. Rosinski also pointed out that the process has felt rushed, with the public not receiving all the necessary information for meaningful input. She advocated for more time to review the complete draft, including all promised data and interactive maps, before it is sent to the city council. She concluded by agreeing with Commissioner Lindwall's comments on the matter.

Michael Kroll, a second ward resident and leader of the Go Evanston transportation subgroup of Climate Action Evanston, discussed the importance of the city's bus network in addition to rail service. He shared his experience moving to Evanston and finding housing near a bus line, which allowed him and his partner to embrace a transit-oriented lifestyle. Kroll emphasized that there are few transit-oriented developments outside of rail corridors despite the city's extensive bus routes. He pointed out that mismatched zoning along transit corridors and lack of density can limit the effectiveness of these routes, leading to service reductions. He urged the Commission to consider these issues in the comprehensive plan, as lack of affordable, transit-oriented housing is driving residents out of the city.

Lori Keenan, a Seventh Ward resident, expressed gratitude for the Board's efforts and suggested that a more realistic timeline for the comprehensive plan be considered. She criticized the decision to continue with the original timeline, despite staff's recommendations. Ms. Keenan also shared her concerns about HDR, the firm responsible for the plan, highlighting negative press about the company and its questionable work on the plan. She suggested that Evanston should have considered working with a local firm like Teska, which had previously created a successful plan for another city. She then questioned the use of potentially unreliable data and subcontractors in the plan, urging the city to reconsider the project and possibly start anew with a more competent firm.

Patrick O'Connor thanked the Commission for their work and highlighted three key areas missing from the comprehensive plan. First, he pointed out the lack of discussion about vacant housing units in Evanston, noting there are over 3,200 vacant units according to the 2025-2029 Consolidated Plan, and suggested this should be addressed. He emphasized the importance of integrating the new \$800 million stadium development into the city's long-term planning, including transportation, land use, and community issues. Mr. O'Connor echoed Commissioner Halik's comment about the importance of maintaining Evanston's "character," referencing the word's frequent mention in past plans and noting its near absence in the current draft of Envision Evanston. He urged the Commission not to let the city's unique character be overlooked.

Laura Gilbert, a 15-year Evanston resident, thanked the Commission for their hard work despite not receiving an extension on the timeline. She expressed concern about the missing data in the comprehensive plan, noting that critical information, such as housing stock, vacancy rates, and housing needs across income levels, was absent. She stressed that without this data, the plan cannot set clear, quantifiable goals. Ms. Gilbert also questioned the population growth projections, pointing out that Evanston's population has been declining, except for a spike in 2020 due to the pandemic, which skews the projected growth figures. She urged the Commission to consider the implications of these projections on housing strategies, arguing that the current plan could result in more unaffordable units. She concluded by advocating for a more thoughtful, data-driven approach to the plan, drawing lessons from neighboring Glenview's experience with misguided development.

Linda Damashek, a third ward resident with eight years of experience in affordable housing development for a nonprofit, emphasized the importance of affordable housing and supported the goal of increasing units in Evanston. However, she criticized the city's rushed approach to the comprehensive plan, suggesting that more time is needed to understand the real-world implications of the proposed changes. Ms. Damashek argued that simply upzoning would not achieve affordable housing goals, as it would likely be driven by profit-motivated developers. She highlighted the need for a detailed plan that includes subsidies to keep rents below market rate and mechanisms like Community Land Trusts to ensure affordability in perpetuity. She also echoed concerns from other speakers in the affordable housing field about the financial feasibility of the current approach and urged the Commission to slow down the process to allow for better planning and decision-making.

Laura Wern, expressed appreciation for the commission's hard work and stressed the importance of data in planning. She came from a data-driven background and pointed out that without solid data, it's difficult to make informed decisions. She highlighted the absence of essential data, such as the inventory of existing housing, current demand, vacancy rates, and gaps in housing types. She questioned the need for more one-bedroom and studio apartments if they don't meet the demand, especially when addressing affordable housing gaps. She also raised concerns about the population trends, noting that Evanston's population has been declining, and asked for data on how this affects schools, closures, and whether the comprehensive plan aligns with those trends. She advocated for a re-evaluation of goals and priorities based on real data and inquired whether there are plans to gather and share this information with the broader community. Her questions also touched on how success and goals are being defined, suggesting that more data is needed for meaningful planning.

Karl Kline shared his experience with neighborhood-focused planning from his time as an intern in Thousand Island Park, New York, where they developed a "character area" planning tool. He explained that a "character area" is a neighborhood or area with unique features that should either be preserved or enhanced. He then suggested that Evanston's future development should prioritize maintaining the distinct identities of its neighborhoods, as this is what draws people to the city. Karl Kline also mentioned that other cities, such as Statesboro, Georgia, have successfully used neighborhood-focused comprehensive plans that guide development while respecting community vision. He advocated for a similar approach in Evanston, where detailed planning for specific areas within the community could help ensure future development aligns with the community's character.

Jack Weiss, a founding member of Design Evanston and former Vice Chair of the Preservation Commission, spoke about the lack of a proposed Urban Design Commission in the draft comprehensive plan. He highlighted the work done in 2023 to create a proposed ordinance for a Community Design Commission, which would provide professional design expertise in the absence of DAPR and SPAARC. He noted that the City Council had rejected the ordinance but hoped the concept would be included in the comprehensive plan. Weiss pointed out that issues like the design of the repurposed Masonic Temple and the proposed signage for the UL Research at the Chase Bank building showcased the need for design expertise that an Urban Design Commission could provide without conflicting with the Land Use Commission. He urged the City to revisit the idea of an Urban Design Commission as part of the plan to ensure the important role of design in Evanston's future development is recognized.

Lee Greenberg spoke about focusing development on areas where density makes sense, such as transit centers or transit-oriented design locations, where infrastructure and amenities can

handle increases in density. He raised concerns about the environmental impact of construction, and suggested incentivizing adaptive reuse of existing buildings. He also highlighted the need to understand the specific types of housing needed in the city and to assess if the existing infrastructure can support future growth. He emphasized learning from other cities, such as Chicago, regarding transit-oriented design and handling increases in density and affordable housing. He also responded to comments about neighborhood design and expressed the importance of 3D zoning maps, noting that GIS technology can support this data and should be used, particularly for plan developments.

A letter from Michael Lore, who has lived in Evanston for 17 years, was read expressing disappointment in the process and the challenges stemming from the consultant's work. He criticized the proposal for zoning changes and emphasized that such a sweeping change to the zoning of every single parcel in the city is reckless, arbitrary, and irresponsible. He contrasted this with the typical scrutiny given to large development projects, noting that developers have to undergo multiple public hearings but the proposed citywide zoning changes are being rushed through without the same level of detailed review. He then applauded the council's action in separating the comprehensive plan from zoning.

Additional Discussion

The meeting concluded with a brief reflection on the discussions and a focus on a few points raised by speakers. The importance of financial stability was highlighted, especially with upcoming budget challenges and a lack of federal support. Another suggestion was the concept of "character areas" for neighborhoods, which could help preserve their unique aspects.

The idea of forming an Urban Design Commission was revisited and recommended, with support for its inclusion in the comprehensive plan. There was also mention of acknowledging major developments, such as the Northwestern football stadium, in the plan, especially concerning its impacts on the community and infrastructure. There was a brief discussion regarding comments made in reference to the City's planners and the consultants for Envision Evanston.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Approval of 2025 Meeting Calendar

Tabled until the next scheduled meeting.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Lindwall moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson

Meeting adjourned at 11:04 pm.

The next Evanston Land Use Commission meeting will be held **on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, 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