Approved

MEETING MINUTES

LAND USE COMMISSION

Wednesday, February 26th, 2025
6:00 PM
Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, James C. Lytle City Council Chambers

Members Present: Loren Berlin, Kiril Mirintchev, Chair Jeanne Lindwall, Darush Mabadi, Max Puchtel, Brian Johnson, Jameika Mangum, George Halik

Members Absent: Myrna Arevalo

Staff Present: Neighborhood Land Use Planner Meagan Jones, Planning and policy Supervisor Erin Baynes, Planning Manager Liz Williams, Policy Coordinator Alison Leipsiger Community Development Director Sarah Flax

Presiding Member: Jeanne Lindwall

I. CALL TO ORDER/DECLARATION OF A QUORUM

Chair Lindwall called the meeting to order at 6:00pm

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.

Deputy City Manager Steve Ruger introduced Version 2.0 of Evanston's Comprehensive Plan, emphasizing the community's significant input and engagement in improving the draft. He acknowledged the hard work of the Land Use Commission and city staff, particularly in addressing public comments. He highlighted that the original zoning code draft is no longer part of the process, with the focus now solely on the comprehensive plan, followed by zoning updates later.

Mr. Ruger provided some data from Phase 1 of public engagement, mentioning 5,700 website visits, 2,500+ survey responses, and 79 public events, with a strong representation of diverse community input. A key concern from respondents was housing affordability, with over 40% of people dissatisfied with current housing conditions. The survey revealed a divide in satisfaction across different demographics, with younger, Black, and Hispanic/Latino respondents being less satisfied with housing availability.

Mr. Ruger also outlined the structural changes in Version 2.0, including new chapters on community health, well-being, and implementation. Several chapters were renamed to better reflect feedback, such as "Transportation" becoming "Getting Around" and "Parks and Open Space" changing to "Parks, Recreation, and Open Space." Major changes to the plan include the addition of metrics on existing conditions, a focus on balancing neighborhood preservation with new development, a streamlined transportation chapter, and stronger connections to the city's Climate Action and Resilience Plan (CARP).

He also addressed feedback not incorporated into the plan, like suggestions to remove certain chapters and references to specific proposals that may change over time. Mr. Ruger assured the commission that the plan will remain adaptable and reviewed regularly, with opportunities for amendments as new initiatives arise.

Commissioner Berlin raised a question about how amendments could be incorporated into the 20-year plan, specifically in a way that allowed for changes within a year rather than waiting for the standard five-year review cycle.

Planning Manager Liz Williams explained the ongoing review process for the Comprehensive Plan. The plan includes an annual work plan that City staff will develop in collaboration with the Land Use Commission to focus on key items for the year. Additionally, certain updates, like the addition of a new historic district, can be integrated administratively without requiring a formal amendment.

Ms. Williams also highlighted that the plan introduces a five-year check-in, which is something new for Evanston. This will allow the city to assess the plan's progress, revisit key metrics, and evaluate trends or emerging issues that may not have been anticipated. The Comprehensive Plan will be treated as a living document, with both annual updates and five-year assessments to ensure it stays aligned with the community's evolving needs.

Commissioner Mabadi inquired about how the plan would be amended before the five-year mark, expressing concern about potential changes that may arise more frequently than expected.

Liz Williams provided an example of how the city's climate action and resiliency plan operates. Similar to that plan, the Comprehensive Plan will involve an annual work plan developed by City staff in partnership with the Land Use Commission. This plan will be presented to the City Council for acknowledgement, and the responsibility for implementing the activities outlined in the work plan will be assigned to the relevant partners involved in those tasks. The process ensures that the work plan is regularly reviewed and its progress is monitored throughout the year.

Commissioner Halik shared his comments, acknowledging that the plan was much improved from previous drafts. He commended the format set up for review and suggested using this format as a model going forward. Commissioner Halik emphasized the need to include measurable goals in the implementation section. He expressed a desire to see another example of a plan that had successfully included measurable goals.

Ms. Williams suggested that setting specific metrics and targets likely goes beyond the Land Use Commission's purview. Instead, she proposed that the Commission could recommend incorporating policies or actions to develop those metrics and targets. Once established, these would be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Mirintchev echoed Commissioner Halik's sentiments and stressed the importance of defining metrics for the goals within the plan. For example, density was mentioned as a goal, but there were no clear metrics on how it would be measured. He also called for projections on the expected population in Evanston over the next 20 years to be included.

Commissioner Halik pointed out that much of the plan was aspirational. He noted that for every idealized proposal, there should be considerations of potential consequences. He also mentioned that the new Northwestern University (NU) stadium was not included in the plan, despite its expected impact on traffic and events, such as games and concerts. Commissioner Halik then suggested incorporating community character into the Vision Statement. Regarding affordable housing, he clarified that increased density does not automatically lead to affordable housing and noted that residents in R1/R2 zones had expressed concerns about upzoning.

Commissioner Mirintchev praised the efforts of those who worked on the draft but suggested that the plan could be more effective if it were shorter. He compared this draft to the 2000 Plan, which contained only four chapters, while the current draft includes 15. He noted that some sections were vague or contradictory, pointing out Page 36, which discusses developing a variety of housing types and sizes, but does not specify who will develop these projects. He also questioned the lack of projections for the number of housing units and households in the next 20 years, and whether or not these estimates should be included in the plan.

Commissioner Johnson explained his reasoning for requesting that population projections be removed from the plan. He expressed skepticism about the accuracy of the population data from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), given that the community had been relatively stable in population for the past 75 years. Johnson suggested that population change was unpredictable in a built-out community. Commissioner Halik agreed with Johnson's point, adding that density issues applied to all of Evanston and were driven by an influx of people into the city.

Commissioner Berlin acknowledged the points raised during the discussion, noting that upzoning does not directly subsidize property. However, she emphasized that the city needed to increase the variety of housing types available, as different types of housing could create more opportunities for ownership and accommodate a broader range of households. Commissioner Berlin also pointed out that while rental units might not immediately be affordable, increasing their supply could slow the rate at which rental prices rise, using the example of people spending 33% of their income on housing. She suggested that the plan could also consider the needs of current residents who were struggling with housing costs.

Commissioner Halik agreed with Commissioner Berlin but reiterated that building more housing does not automatically ensure affordability. He suggested spending more time in the Housing Chapter to explore ways to address affordability within the plan.

Commissioner Mabadi added that both buying and renting pressures on housing were higher than ever before, with inventory being lost as people were not selling their homes. He noted that more rental units were being built than condos or homes, and he disagreed with the idea of focusing heavily on increasing rental units. He then emphasized that the plan should include strategies for building affordable housing.

Chair Lindwall expressed her approval of the improvements in the current draft compared to the earlier versions. However, she pointed out that there were many other chapters to consider

beyond just housing, and that zoning was not being discussed at this time. She noted that there were competing priorities within the plan that needed to be addressed.

The schedule for upcoming meetings was discussed, with the next meeting planned for March 12th. It was proposed to hold an additional meeting on March 19th, with input gathered by April 4th. Special meetings could be scheduled for April 16th and/or April 30th.

Commissioner Halik suggested organizing meetings by focusing on specific chapters, so that each meeting could cover a smaller, more manageable section of the plan.

Commissioner Mirintchev raised the question of whether maps would be included in the plan. While some had commented that maps were not necessary, Mirintchev disagreed and argued that maps should be included. Alison Leipsiger, Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, clarified that specific map requests would be helpful and that it might require a change order, but that GIS staff could assist in updating the maps.

Commissioner Mangum agreed with Commissioner Halik's suggestion to break the review into smaller sections to make the process more manageable.

Ms. Leipsiger mentioned that if the Commission has specific maps they'd like to see, it would be helpful to know. She clarified that while the current plan includes about five or six maps, additional maps would require a change order to continue working with the consultant. However, she noted that the city has in-house GIS capabilities, so specific maps could be produced, albeit not in the final document format. These maps would be functional but not as polished as the professionally designed ones.

Ms. Williams emphasized the importance of staying focused in the conversation and being specific with the recommended changes. She noted that Chair Lindwall found it helpful to review the draft page by page with staff, and suggested that other commissioners might also benefit from individual meetings to go through their comments. This would help compile everyone's feedback while maintaining transparency and ensuring that the process remains open. She highlighted the positive feedback from the public, including those who carefully reviewed the draft. Ms. Williams stressed the need to avoid circular drafting and encouraged more specific input as they move forward.

Commissioner Mangum agrees with reviewing two to three chapters per meeting, with extra focus on Chapter 10 (housing), and recommends breaking it into smaller sections to allow public input. They also mention that spring break in late March should be considered for scheduling. Regarding additional meetings, Ms. Williams confirmed that they would be held in addition to the regular second and fourth Wednesday meetings, but cautioned about a heavy workload from upcoming cases that will demand attention. Commissioner Johnson inquired about special meetings being held at 6 p.m. and acknowledged potential timing conflicts. Chair Lindwall recommended adjusting the schedule if needed to avoid extending the process too far into the summer. Ms. Williams confirmed that public meetings are noticed but do not require specific announcements for reviewing individual chapters.

III. PUBLIC TESTIMONY

Sarah Friedman expressed her support for upzoning, stating that she wanted to represent those who advocate for it. She commended the second draft of the plan, noting the improvements in

its organization. Ms. Friedman supports increasing housing options in single-family neighborhoods and mentioned that she has hosted meetings in her home with 14 households, none of whom opposed upzoning. Of the 12 households with younger children, and the 2 with grown children, she has not heard any opposition. When asked by Halik if she had seen diagrams of what upzoning might look like, she confirmed she had, providing an example from Portland.

Scott Roberts from the 3rd Ward, part of the "Say Yes to Duplexes" campaign, urged the recognition of duplexes and double houses in the plan. He noted that existing zoning had moved away from duplexes and double houses, even though they already exist. Mr. Roberts suggested that the language in the plan be changed to reflect this and include duplexes and double houses.

Julia Forgash from the 4th Ward stated that she did not find much objectionable in the revised draft but raised concerns about Chapter 5, Neighborhoods and Places. She mentioned that she lives in downtown Evanston, a mix of business and housing, and expressed that the downtown area is the only section of the plan mentioning high-rise buildings. She questioned why downtown residents should be subject to taller buildings while other neighborhoods are not. Forgash also emphasized that while affordable housing should be a goal, she wondered if it would actually benefit Evanston residents.

Michelle Chlebek from the 1st Ward appreciated the mention of preserving buildings and existing homes but expressed concerns about the plan's intention to increase density. She is still worried about the proposal to remove single-family areas and the suggestion of upzoning. Chlebek requested clearer language on preserving R1 and R2 districts, although she does not oppose multi-use buildings.

Steve Test expressed gratitude for the removal of language suggesting the elimination of single-family districts. He requested that language be added to affirm the protection of these districts unless specific lots are designated for change through a public process. Test referenced comments he previously provided to the Commission.

Jack Weiss, representing Design Evanston, discussed the need for the Community Design Commission's input to be incorporated into the revised plan. He felt that the plan lacked the intended emphasis and urged that the language on page 44 be strengthened.

Jeff Smith suggested that the document should reflect a consensus and referenced previous comments he had submitted. He felt that zoning concerns were still pervasive in the plan and indicated that he would provide additional comments.

Dr. Alvin Williams referenced a planner’s statement in a publication, asking whether rezoning was part of a larger scheme towards gentrification, and emphasized the need to support existing residents.

Pat Mulhern, a resident of Hinman, expressed concern that the plan was creating division among residents. He stated that while everyone supports more affordable housing, the process should unite people rather than pit them against each other, and encouraged the Commission to do the process right.

Jeff Wooton echoed previous comments, noting that many policies and actions in the plan seem to conflict with one another. He emphasized the need to prioritize issues and questioned the

definition of "housing diversity," noting that Evanston already has an incredible variety of housing options, which made the suggestion seem off-base.

Karl Klein thanked the Commission for the timeline and mentioned that the Preservation Commission would review the chapter and discuss the draft at its regularly scheduled meetings. He included a comment letter, asking that these be incorporated into the plan.

Toni Rey, representing Interfaith Action, stated that the goal should be to create more affordable housing and emphasized the importance of working together to achieve that goal.

Tom Doyle, a resident, noted that Evanston shoulders a number of burdens from nearby institutions, including high-traffic areas, and suggested that this factor be considered in the plan. He questioned the process for a proposed prefabricated home proposed to be placed on his block.

Beth Cerny expressed concern about current green space at 1222 Washington being proposed to be converted to housing.

Mark Styslinger inquired about whether zoning would ever be put on a ballot or whether the Council would decide. Commissioner Lindwall clarified that zoning is distinct from the overall plan and explained the difference.

Jon Kennedy expressed approval of the plan's improvements but noted that there was still a lack of granular data. He felt that the appendix needed more detailed data, specifically to identify areas that could accommodate additional density versus those that could not.

Juan Espinoza, who recently moved from Los Angeles, shared his positive experience living in an area with zoning similar to what was being proposed in Evanston. He mentioned that while zoning changes can be slow, they could be beneficial if done well. Mr. Espinoza noted that zoning changes don’t force people to use their property in a specific way, but instead make certain developments possible.

Sue Loellbach, representing Joining Forces, shared that housing advocates had met and supported the new draft for its focus on housing affordability and equity. She praised the plan for being based on best practices and data but noted that the high-level narratives allowed for flexible interpretation, which could support or oppose housing efforts. Ms. Loellbach stated that recommendations would be submitted to the Land Use Commission and staff.

Phyllis Nichol, a housing advocate and resident, stated that she works with people who support the policies in Chapter 10. However, she suggested that the plan should include more explicit language that supports the development and preservation of affordable housing.

Frank Hill expressed appreciation for the specific policies in the plan but felt that the case for incorporating equity could be stronger. He referenced a Forbes article stating that Evanston has the 10th-worst income disparity in the country and hoped that metrics for equity would be better described in the plan.

Elizabeth Bryant, a resident, shared her concerns about the decline in the Black population in Evanston due to gentrification, which she feels makes it difficult for people to age in place. She suggested that metrics such as race and ethnicity be used to track these trends, and that demographic information about the wards should be included in the plan.

Wynn Shawver, a member of Joining Forces, pointed out that while life expectancy is a useful metric, it should be explained in context, along with other relevant metrics.

Bonnie Wilson, a real estate professional and member of Joining Forces, supported the policies in the plan but suggested that early chapters could be strengthened by including community needs. She pointed to Consolidated Plan data that should be incorporated into the comprehensive plan.

Stuart Cleland, a member of Joining Forces and Evanston Lighthouse Rotary, agreed that more could be done to enforce equity in the policies. He praised the city for showing the intersectionality of housing with other areas but noted that equity issues in housing could be more strongly emphasized.

Cory King expressed his approval of the recommendations in the plan, noting that they would help make Evanston a more attractive place for developers to create affordable housing. He also emphasized the importance of streamlining processes and looked forward to the Strategic Housing Plan. Mr. King added that while the timeline may not be an issue for those in single-family homes, it is critical for others, as the "clock is ticking" for them.

Jill Graham voiced her support for the strategic housing plan, stating that implementation would be a vital tool. She highlighted the importance of strategies to combat displacement, support landlords, and incentivize developers to build affordable housing.

Luke Harris-Ferree, while discussing what a comprehensive plan is, stated that this plan should not be the only document guiding the city's development. He praised the plan for providing a strong vision and implementation strategy, stressing the need to move forward with zoning code updates. Harris also noted that people with privilege often have more opportunities to participate in the process.

Olin Wilson-Thomas expressed appreciation for having a commission member with a focus on housing. He praised the Transportation and Arts and Culture chapters for their strength but discouraged the use of "character" in the plan, as it is often vague and exploited by those opposing change. He also referenced yard signs in opposition to R1 zoning changes, suggesting that many are opposed to changes they do not fully understand.

Paul Janicki raised concerns about losing landmarks and properties in historic districts when the term "character" is used. He noted that while the Preservation Commission is a recommending body, demolitions cannot be entirely prevented and should be mentioned in the EE45 plan.

Ann Trompeter questioned the broad brush approach to increasing density, suggesting that it might not lead to affordability as intended and could encourage unchecked development by profit-driven developers. She expressed concern about the timeline.

Linda Daneshek, concerned about citywide upzoning, argued that it would not create more affordable housing. She suggested identifying specific parcels suitable for affordable housing through a community land trust.

Jim Slingo praised the plan's writing but argued that simply adding more units on a property would not increase affordability and could lead to gentrification. He emphasized the need to be specific and intentional about increasing affordable housing and mentioned concerns about parking and limiting development to three units.

Comments for the Land Use Commission should be submitted through the comment form available on the commission's webpage. Larger attachments can be sent directly to the provided contact information. Meetings will continue at the current location through March and will transition to 909 Davis in April. It's also helpful to provide feedback on specific pages or paragraphs if the exact language is unavailable, as this will assist staff in addressing concerns.

Commissioner Puchtel expressed appreciation for receiving specific text change proposals, as ambiguity is not helpful. However, he voiced concern about managing the workload in just two more meetings, predicting that the commission would receive numerous proposals. He asked for clarification on how the process would work effectively within the tight schedule.

Chair Lindwall clarified that the next two meetings are not intended to review all comments but rather to allow the public and other boards and commissions to provide feedback on the language. This feedback will be compiled into a cohesive packet for the commission to consider during the two meetings in April. If more time is needed, additional meetings will be scheduled. The Chair also encouraged commissioners to meet individually with staff to address questions, while ensuring compliance with open meetings laws. Ultimately, all material will be incorporated into a suggested edit document for public review, with opportunities for public comment. However, the commission will need time to deliberate and discuss the changes.

Commissioner Berlin expressed concern about the conflicting feedback being received from residents. While the intention is to incorporate feedback into the plan, there are starkly different opinions, making it difficult to satisfy everyone. She emphasized the need for transparency, suggesting that the commission should be clear with residents that while their feedback will be considered, it may not always be possible to incorporate it all. Commissioner Berlin acknowledged the challenge of balancing sincerity in listening with the reality that not all concerns can be fully addressed, stressing the importance of managing expectations while delivering a responsible plan.

Ms. Williams suggested that the commission use the next two meetings to continue gathering public feedback on various chapters. However, she emphasized that by the last meeting of public comment, the commission should begin evaluating and prioritizing the feedback to provide direction to staff. This process will help staff draft alternative proposals for the commission's consideration. Ms. Williams acknowledged that the commission's role is to reconcile differing community perspectives and provide clear guidance to staff for creating the best possible outcome. She encouraged the commission to listen carefully to all feedback and then weigh the differing viewpoints to finalize the plan.

Commissioner Puchtel expressed that ideally, the commission would receive around 50 specific proposals. These would then be consolidated into approximately a dozen proposals, which would be more manageable for the commission to evaluate in a meeting or series of meetings. Each proposal would be reviewed, voted on, and moved forward.

Continued discussion centered around the Envision Evanston 2045 plan, emphasizing that it remains a high-level document, and zoning specifics should not be a major focus at this stage. The plan aims to be a broad guide that reflects the diverse nature of Evanston's neighborhoods, which often vary from block to block. The importance of community input was emphasized, with suggestions that people define their neighborhood's character and express their desires for its future.

It was acknowledged that the plan will naturally have conflicting viewpoints, which is seen as positive as it reflects community tensions. While some areas may seem out of sync with Evanston's identity, these discrepancies are seen as opportunities for refinement. The plan also strives to balance the needs of different stakeholders, including those unable to attend meetings, with suggestions for alternative engagement methods like written comments or one-on-one sessions with city staff.

IV. COMMUNICATIONS

A new Planning and Policy Supervisor, Erin Baynes, introduced herself and shared her qualifications. She expressed her excitement to support the drafting process and highlighted her background in public policy, public administration, and several certifications, including in hospitality and tourism and economic development.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Johnson Moved to adjourn the meeting
Commissioner Puchtel Seconded

Ayes: Halik, Mirintchev, Berlin, Lindwall, Mabadi, Puchtel, Johnson, Mangum
Nayes:
Absent: Arevalo

Meeting adjourned at 8:57 pm

The next Evanston Land Use Commission meeting is scheduled to be held **on Wednesday, March 12, 2025, at 7:00 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