

Housing and Neighborhoods, Meeting #3

September 2, 2021, 10:00 AM | 2 hours

Documented by: Benjy Sachs

MEETING MATERIALS
















[Agenda](#)

[Presentation](#)

ATTENDEES

- Fran Rood
- Enrique Castillo
- Felice Eckhouse
- Ann McKenzie
- Dalia Aragon
- Daniel Cruz
- Emma Roberts
- Victoria Moreno
- Grace Chan McKibben
- Freda Madison
- Jameson Skaife
- Jerome Wade
- Jessie Wang
- Jo de Presser
- Juan Luna
- Juan Sebastian Arias
- Wade Jerome
- Claudia Herasme
- Sendy Soto
- Mare Ralph
- Marlene Hopkins
- Myk Snider
- Paola Villegas
- Patricia Fron
- Steven Vance
- Susie Schoenrock
- Michelle E.L. Merritt
- Victoria Ogunsanya

Recording

	Benjy Sachs (City Bur...			Juan Luna Nunez
				
				
	Susie Schoenrock	Paola Villegas		

MEETING GOAL

Refine priority topic areas, develop guiding questions, and review the rest of the We Will Chicago process going forward.

WHERE WE ARE



Step 1

We Are*Setting the Stage*

Step 2

We Have and Need*Develop A Policy Toolkit*

Step 3

We Will*Set Policy Framework*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1

Every Housing and Neighborhoods group member agreed that housing affordability is a large and growing problem, especially when it displaces longtime residents of a neighborhood. Not many people offered any solutions to this problem beyond favoring smaller landlords over large corporate entities.

2

The group discussed how to invest in historically disinvested communities without causing or accelerating gentrification. Members argued that community engagement is key, as past efforts from the city like [designating Pilsen buildings as historic landmarks](#) were fiercely resisted by residents.

3

Various members also raised issues like accessibility for people with disabilities, the amount of green and recreational spaces, and the availability of jobs as major factors to a neighborhood's quality of life.

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

"I recognize the impact of rising housing prices and property taxes on longtime residents of the neighborhood."

Juan Sebastian Arias | Mayor's Office, Deputy Director of Policy

"My big question is: what kind of housing is available for all of us – as physical and other changes occur to all of us? After an illness, accident, mental health issues/cognitive issues? We are all TABs: Temporarily Able-Bodied. Frequently, housing disables us even more."

Felice Eckhouse | Elderspaces, Owner

"Historically about 70% of rental units have been owned by community groups. Recently, that's dropped down to around 50% due in part to the pandemic. How do you protect the role of neighbors in providing neighborhood housing?"

Myk Snider | Morrill & Fielder, Public Affairs Consultant

"Jobs are just as important as housing in building a neighborhood. I wonder how we can improve job access in communities, so people don't have to commute as much. It's also about the vibrancy of public spaces, where people can get to know their neighbors."

Claudia Herasme | Department of Planning and Development, Managing Deputy Commissioner

NOTES

Kickoff and Introductions

- Opening reflection question: “How do you experience housing and neighborhood design in your community?” Several group members shared how the type of housing (flats, bungalows, single family homes, etc.) and layout of their neighborhood affects their everyday quality of life.

Overview

- Michelle E.L. Merritt, artist-organizer, presented on moving beyond a “deficit model” that focuses on what has been extracted from redlined and disinvested communities into an “asset-based approach” that focuses on what remains and what has been preserved. The 4 neighborhoods of focus are Bronzeville, Chinatown, Pilsen and Englewood. She plugged an event coming up this Saturday, a neighborhood peace circle in Bronzeville in which the artist-organizers will engage with community members and “discuss their visions for how to build equitable and resilient neighborhoods across the city”

Priority topic areas

- Fran Rood presents the 5 priority topic areas that the group has reached: (1) A planning process centered on people and community (2) Equity in neighborhood options (3) Safety (4) Affordability in neighborhoods (5) Diversity of amenities in every neighborhood
- The working definition for this pillar is “We Will’s Housing and Neighborhoods pillar involves the residential spaces and surrounding communities where Chicagoans pursue their private lives, raise families and spend the bulk of their leisure time.”
- Group members collaborate on the Miro board. Felice Eckhouse urges everyone to consider not only affordability but also accessibility. Everyone’s bodies change over their lives, everyone is only temporarily able-bodied. Housing often disables us further. Dalia Aragon says that people often associate affordable housing with criminals moving into a neighborhood. She says we ought to educate people who don’t understand—affordability helps the nonprofit workers, nurses, teachers, etc. who live in the neighborhood.
- Myk Snider says that historically about 70% of rental units have been owned by community groups. Recently, that’s dropped down to around 50% due in part to the pandemic. How do you protect the role of neighbors in providing neighborhood housing?
- Claudia Herasme says that jobs are just as important as housing in building a neighborhood. She wonders how we can improve job access in communities so people don’t have to commute as much. It’s also about the “vibrancy of public spaces” where people can get to know their neighbors.
- My breakout room has Michelle E.L. Merritt, Juan Sebastian Arias, Ann McKenzie, and Mare Ralph. Ann McKenzie says that the group should focus on preserving “naturally occurring” affordable housing that is owned by small, community-based landlords. Mare Ralph recalls the recent pushback in Pilsen against historical building designations that was perceived as gentrification. She asks how the city can invest in historically marginalized communities without displacing the inhabitants. Michelle Merritt says that, often, by the time these

changes are handed down to a community without their input, residents become reactive and intimidated. She wonders how we can educate residents on the process of development. Arias asks how, in addition to education, how the process itself can be reformed and improved to be more understandable and accessible.

- Fran Rood asks what data this pillar group could analyze to assess housing affordability. For example, tracking the number of two-flats that have been converted to single family homes could serve as a proxy to housing access in a neighborhood.

RESOURCES

We Will Chicago events calendar

<https://wewillchicago.com/calendar>

Gateway to Midway committee website

<https://gatewaytomidway.com/index.html>

Chicago Citywide Affordable Rental Housing Analysis

https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/citywide-affordable-rental-housing-aalysis.html

Harvard Landlord study

https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/research/files/harvard_jchs_covid_impact_landlords_survey_de_la_campa_2021.pdf

NEXT STEPS

- After reviewing past city plans, consider what plans should be elevated for review and why. What within that plan should be elevated and what should be left behind?