

[2nd] Connected Communities response: Margaret Keim, resident of North Avondale

Description

There are many valid reasons for Cincinnati to use caution before moving forward with the controversial Connected Communities Plan; lack of conclusive data indicating success, unintended consequences such as gentrification and displacement, issues of parking, infrastructure, etc.

Many residents respectfully asked city leaders to “Pause” before moving forward with such a sweeping plan until the serious potential problems have been resolved. I’d like to touch on an additional angle that hits close to home for many Cincinnatians.

Cincinnati has a rich heritage of historic homes and cherished unique neighborhoods which are already functional, diverse, thriving and attractive to new residents. There is a complete disregard in the Connected Communities plan for the protection and preservation of these cohesive neighborhoods. Rather, an indiscriminate zoning line has been drawn on a map designating transportation corridors and incentivizing mass development in those areas. Setback requirements have been completely removed which promotes maximum building size regardless of neighborhood character. Off street parking requirements have been removed. Bolstering the housing market should not be accomplished at the expense of existing successful neighborhoods. The Connected Communities plan strips homeowners of the ability to maintain the integrity of their neighborhood and places the power in the hands of developers.

Additionally, City Council is misleading citizens about their “2-year public engagement” process. The engagement consisted of 236 people participating in a presentation showing theoretical housing models. Questions raised by participants were not sufficiently addressed. During these presentations there was no mention of proposed widespread zoning changes as the solution to housing need. 1,271 residents participated in a survey and the results were posted on the website as evidence of public support. The quality of research and study sample size are all in question as representing the community at large. Cincinnati has 309k residents. A sample size of 2200 participants represents .7% of the population, hardly an accurate scientific model.

Cincinnati should also be learning from others’ mistakes. Following California’s passage of SB-9, a similar legislation to eliminate single family zoning, many municipalities are now scrambling to put measures in place to blunt the ill-effects they are now experiencing. These include: restricting building height and size, mandating parking spots, requiring landlords to rent only to those making moderate or low income, mandating the planting of trees, and requiring residents to live on the property for a minimum of 3 years following a split into multiple family units.

Five Southern California cities—Redondo Beach, Carson, Torrance, and Whittier and Del Mar—sued the state in 2022, claiming the law was unconstitutional because it interfered with their local authority over land use and zoning. In April of this year, Judge Curtis Kin, ruled that the legislature’s intention—housing affordability—didn’t match up with the design. Because SB 9 doesn’t require any of

the units constructed to actually be below-market-rate, it was not “reasonably related and sufficiently narrowly tailored” to ensuring access to affordable housing—and therefore unconstitutional. The judge’s opinion echoed critics’ doubts that increasing supply actually boosts affordability.

Minneapolis, one of the first cities to enact similar legislation, has been touted as an example of success, but in April, 2024 rents in Minneapolis have shown an increase of 2.5% over the previous year. Cincinnati is reported as having a 1% increase, but our increases in the last 2 years have been documented as bringing our previously low rates more in line with other cities like Columbus, Indianapolis, Cleveland, etc.

Zoning changes can be a valuable tool for positive change, but only when the appropriate parameters are in place. There is ample opportunity for City Council to further modify this program and address the very legitimate concerns of the community. To proceed without the backing of Cincinnati residents and without assurances of successful results is naively idealistic at best, but more accurately irresponsible and inexcusable for the decision makers in our City Hall.

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Date Created

June 1, 2024

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