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Zoning Committee backs protections to prevent gentrification on Northwest Side

Developers seeking to demolish multi-family apartment buildings to make way for luxury single-family homes would be required to pay a penalty, while converting two-, three- and four-flats to single-family homes would be expressly forbidden on blocks dominated by multi-family buildings.

By Fran Spielman | Sept 17, 2024, 4:17pm CDT

Bungalows on Chicago's Northwest Side, where new guidelines endorsed by the City Council's Zoning Committee aim to preserve affordable housing and slow gentrification by discouraging the demolition of multi-family buildings. | Sun-Times file



A broad swath of Chicago's Northwest Side could soon be covered with a protective blanket to prevent longtime, middle-class residents from being priced out of their homes.

Three years ago, the City Council approved a pair of "anti-deconversion" ordinances to slow gentrification displacing long-time residents of Pilsen and also the neighborhoods of Logan Square, Wicker Park, Humboldt Park and Bucktown, which border the Bloomingdale Trail, nicknamed The 606. Those ordinances — and anti-demolition rules around the 606 — made it harder for owners and developers of property on certain blocks to turn their multi-unit buildings into expensive single-family homes.

A twice-extended pilot program then imposed a \$15,000 "demolition fee" penalizing developers for tearing down detached homes, townhouses and two-flats and a \$5,000-per-unit penalty for tearing down "multi-unit residential buildings" in parts of Logan Square, Humboldt Park and Pilsen.

On Tuesday, the City Council's Zoning Committee signed off on a permanent replacement for those earlier protections. It covers a broader Northwest Side area and includes dramatically higher demolition fees to preserve middle-class, multi-family housing.

The "Northwest Preservation Ordinance" covers parts of Logan Square, Avondale, Humboldt Park, West Town and Hermosa.

A proposal approved Tuesday by the City Council's Zoning Committee includes demolition fees and other measures intended to preserve affordable housing and prevent the expansion of luxury single-family homes within a large portion of the Northwest Side. | City of Chicago

If, as expected, the full Council agrees with the Zoning Committee, developers who want to demolish multi-family apartment buildings to make way for luxury single-family homes would pay a penalty of \$20,000-per-unit or \$60,000-per-building, whichever is higher.

Proceeds of the surcharge would be funneled to the Chicago Housing Trust and the Here To Stay Land Trust and used to preserve affordable housing.

Converting two-, three- and four-flats to single-family homes would be expressly forbidden on blocks dominated by multi-family buildings.

Tenants would receive the “right of first refusal” to purchase their building if and when it goes up for sale. That means they would have an opportunity to match any third-party offer.

And construction of new two-flats would be legalized “by right” in areas now zoned only for single-family homes.

Logan Square Ald. Carlos Ramirez-Rosa (35th) said the wildly-popular 606 trail has become a magnet for walkers, runners and cyclists. But, he added, too many multi-family and “courtyard” buildings along the trail have been “de-converted,” causing property taxes and housing costs to “skyrocket.”

Families that “lived there for generations were pushed out,” Ramirez-Rosa said.

Over the five-year period ending in 2018, the area surrounding the 606 lost nearly 60% of its multi-family buildings, according to the DePaul Institute for Housing Studies.

“We have skyscrapers and we have single-family homes. But the vast majority of people live in that middle between those two extremes. ... That’s where most of our families find affordability. That’s where most of the working families in Chicago are able to find an affordable place to call home,” Ramirez-Rosa said.

The first right of refusal is critical, the alderperson said, noting his parents bought their four-unit building during the 1970’s with “aunts, uncles and cousins” pitching in.

“We want to preserve that American dream. We want to preserve that middle housing. ... If we don’t take action to preserve this housing stock, it will be missing. Our schools will suffer from lower enrollment. Our small businesses will suffer from lacking residents necessary to support their small businesses,” said Ramirez-Rosa, the former Zoning Committee chair.

Humboldt Park Ald. Jessie Fuentes (26th) noted more than 50 organizations that have been community anchors for decades came together to draft the ordinance and push it over the legislative goal line.

“This is what can be a model for the rest of the city of Chicago when we think about preserving naturally-occurring affordable housing and how you truly sustain and preserve communities across the city,” Fuentes told her colleagues.

“We are listening to our constituents. They want to be able to afford to live in their communities. This is one tool in a really big tool box so that, when we look up 10 years from now, now 20 years from now, families that are here today can still live in our

communities.”



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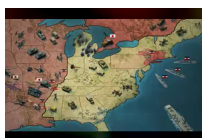
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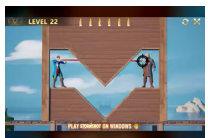
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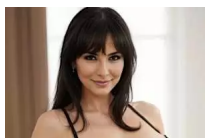
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