

Aldermen want to 'put a brake' on gentrification along The 606



The 606, a 2.7-mile-long park on abandoned train tracks, opened June 6, 2015. The 14-foot-wide multiuse trail along the narrow Bloomingdale Avenue runs through four neighborhoods — Bucktown, Wicker Park, Logan Square and Humboldt Park.

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Tearing down older homes or turning two-flats into single-family homes could get more expensive in neighborhoods along the western part of The 606 trail.

Aldermen **Proco "Joe" Moreno**, 1st, and **Roberto Maldonado**, 26th, are drafting an ordinance that would increase the demolition fee for residential properties and charge a deconversion fee when multiple-unit buildings are turned into single-family homes within a still-unspecified area.

Maldonado said the aim is to preserve existing housing stock and affordable housing in areas near The 606, the popular bike and pedestrian trail built on an old elevated railroad line.

"It is to try to put a brake on the pace of gentrification that is going on to the north and south boundaries of The 606," he said. "It's twofold — to slow down the pace of gentrification and to create a fund for those existing

homes to be improved for home and building owners and their tenants.

"If the developers are really willing to buy existing properties and want to demolish them to build higher-end new properties, making it almost impossible for neighborhood people to afford them, they will have to pay a premium demolition fee."

Such fees are assessed on a per-square-foot basis.

A proposed ordinance could be introduced at a City Council meeting later this month or possibly in April.

Maldonado and Moreno said they are working on the proposal with Ald. Carlos Ramirez-Rosa, 35th, and the Logan Square Neighborhood Association.

The discussions were first reported by Chicago Cityscape.

Areas west of Western Avenue are of particular concern to neighborhood activists and local officials. "That area is starting to heat up," said Raymond Valadez, Moreno's chief of staff.

Between when construction of the trail began in 2013 and 2016, housing prices near the part of The 606 west of Western Avenue rose by 48.2 percent, according to a study published last year by the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University. Just between when the trail opened in 2015 and 2016, prices rose 9.4 percent.

Already-gentrified areas east of the trail saw housing prices increase 13.8 percent between 2013 and 2016, and by 4.3 percent since it opened.

Those neighborhoods are now at risk, as buyers look to those areas to build luxury apartments and condos or convert multiunit buildings into high-priced single-family homes, said Geoff Smith, executive director of the Institute for Housing Studies, who wrote the study.

"The two-, three-, four-unit component of the housing stock has historically been an important part of Chicago's housing landscape," Smith said. "And very recently in the last five to seven years, we've seen it decline for various reasons, it's under threat."

Smith noted those kind of multifamily, small, multiunit affordable housing buildings aren't built anymore and "it's important for low-income families," he said. "It's important for us to try to preserve the stock as much as possible."

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