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Opinion

## Opinion: What critics get wrong about this anti-gentrification ordinance

By Traolach O'Sullivan and Juan Sebastian Arias



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In an [op-ed](#) last week, real estate broker Miguel Chacon argues Chicago's Northwest Side Housing Preservation Ordinance, [passed by the City Council](#) in September, would not do as intended to increase housing affordability and ease the housing

crisis in Northwest Side neighborhoods. Chacon's argument doesn't mesh with the facts, despite its popularity among some developers.

Chacon argues the ordinance's demolition fees will worsen housing affordability by discouraging new construction in the area and restricting the supply of housing. This presumes that new construction will *increase* the supply of affordable units or even the number of housing units generally.

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In many neighborhoods covered by the ordinance, that has not been the case. Between 2013 and 2019, Avondale, Hermosa, Humboldt Park and Logan Square lost nearly 600 two- to four-unit properties amounting to over 1,400 housing units, [according to](#) the DePaul Institute for Housing Studies. In Avondale, nearly 65% of those properties were converted to single-family homes, according to another IHS analysis. In Logan Square, more than 62% were. In Hermosa, nearly 47% were. And in Humboldt Park, nearly 28% were.

These deconversions, in fact, restrict housing supply by turning land that previously housed several families into land that houses one, eliminating the affordable units demolished on-site and reducing the total number of housing units available in the neighborhood overall. This puts renters and buyers in competition for fewer units, driving up prices. Even when developers replace a building with more units than were previously there, they are often luxury units priced beyond many families' budget. The result is a devastating loss of housing affordability and displacement for longtime residents.

Demolition fees are designed to prevent that. When they do not, the fees will then support land trusts that create a path to affordable homeownership for incumbent families on the Northwest Side.

Chacon also argues against granting tenants the right of first refusal, which would give them up to eight months to decide whether to make an offer on the building they live in and attempt to assemble the financing to purchase it if their landlord wants to sell. Chacon argues it is unfair to property owners to make them wait that long, and we empathize with that. But in the end, owners still get to sell their property, whether to their tenants or another buyer. In the context of neighborhoods that have been devastated by displacement, we think the wait is a tradeoff worth giving longtime residents a shot at staying in their homes.

Avondale, Hermosa, Humboldt Park, Logan Square, and West Town have experienced the [highest rates](#) of gentrification and displacement of all Chicago neighborhoods in the past decade, forcing out countless Black, Brown, and working-class families. We agree with Chacon that families who lived here before investors took interest in the neighborhoods deserve to stay as their communities evolve — but that includes property owners and renters alike and households at all income levels.

That's why organizers have fought for developments like Lucy Gonzales Parsons Apartments in Logan Square, which turned a vacant parking lot — previously the site of zero housing units — into 100 units of affordable housing near the Logan Square Blue Line station. ETOD (equitable transit-oriented development) projects like this expand housing supply, increase density, create more customers for local businesses, and give residents critical access to public transit.

The 2022 Connected Communities Ordinance reduced parking requirements near public transit, making it easier to build more ETODs. And the Northwest Side Housing Preservation Ordinance legalized construction of two-flats in areas currently zoned only for single-family housing, allowing for development of *more* units at affordable prices. We agree with Chacon that these are good ideas, but we disagree that the city should do them instead of measures like demolition fees that discourage turning more units into less. We can and should do both.

Equitable development leads to more housing units and greater housing affordability while minimizing displacement. That has not been the trend on the Northwest Side,

and rectifying that is a moral imperative. That is why 58 community organizations came together to support this bill — and why seven Northwest Side alderpeople endorsed it.

We are proud to have played a role in getting this ordinance passed and will continue to fight for equitable development in Chicago.

**Traolach O'Sullivan** is an organizer with Palenque LSNA. **Juan Sebastian Arias** is executive director of Elevated Chicago. Both grew up on the Northwest Side.

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