



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR COMMENTARY

Should the wealthy be allowed to demolish real estate to create their own open space?

Cities should be getting denser and more diverse, not demolishing their housing stock so that the rich can have larger yards.

By Letters to the Editor | Dec 21, 2021, 3:00pm CDT



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The owner of the Lincoln Park home on the left bought the building on the right and wants to demolish it for a side

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No one should shrug at the Sun-Times' recent coverage of **demolition in Lincoln Park**. The issue is critical: Is it OK for people to demolish housing and create open space in transit-served areas, simply because they can afford to do so?

Cities should be getting denser and more diverse, not demolishing their housing stock so that the rich can have larger yards. This is a key principle of sustainability — that cities should be evolving toward higher density while at the same time maintaining some degree of affordability, especially near transit. This is stated repeatedly by the City of Chicago in its many plans and programs; for example, their goal to “**expand access and choice**” in housing, or how the city wants to **encourage growth and vibrancy** in all neighborhoods, and its goal to protect neighborhood character through **historic preservation**.

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So why do actions that are so clearly against these goals go unchallenged?

What is especially interesting, as reported in the article, is that this is not the usual situation in which historic preservationists are labeled as NIMBY protectionists, preventing density where it's needed. This is a case of historic preservation aligning with the protection of multi-family housing and natural forms of affordability.

Many affluent parts of Chicago are moving in this perverse direction— toward lower density and therefore higher housing cost — even in places close to transit. In Lincoln Park and Lakeview, there is an epidemic of destruction of multi-family housing. Demolition and conversion of multi-family units into luxury single-family housing in leafy, transit-served neighborhoods is about the worst direction the city could go.

From 2013 to 2019, Lincoln Park experienced a 16% decline in 2- to 4-unit buildings. Half of these former multi-family structures were replaced by single-family homes, a **recent analysis** from DePaul's Institute for Housing Studies shows. But even worse is the destruction of housing with no replacement at all, as reported in this case.

Where does this end? Should the ultra-wealthy be allowed to demolish real estate in this way? What is the impact on small businesses and schools, in addition to affordability?

We need more spotlighting of this issues, which is a clear case of “the market” working against clear-headed public policy goals.

Emily Talen, professor, Division of Social Sciences, University of Chicago

Climate change is no longer theoretical

The Sun-Times asks “How many more warnings are needed before we take climate change seriously?” Answer, Part A: When the cost of buying insurance against what used to be “natural” disasters becomes prohibitively high, then becomes unaffordable altogether. Part B: When the air we take for granted becomes unfit to breathe, like the smog in Los Angeles some years ago before drastic steps were taken to mitigate air pollution. Try to imagine what *that* might cost.

The longer we as a global community delay reversing global warming, the more it's going to cost. The sooner we come to terms with the challenge at hand, the better the chances for life as we know it to survive.

Ted Z. Manuel, Hyde Park