

ALBANY PARK

# Here's How 33rd Ward Candidates Say They'll Preserve Affordable Housing As Neighborhoods Change

Neighbors have feared being uprooted from their homes as rents rise and two-flats are disappearing in the area.

Alex V. Hernandez 9:30 AM CST on Feb 22, 2023



**Credit:** Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago  
Two-flat homes in Avondale on Aug. 17, 2022.

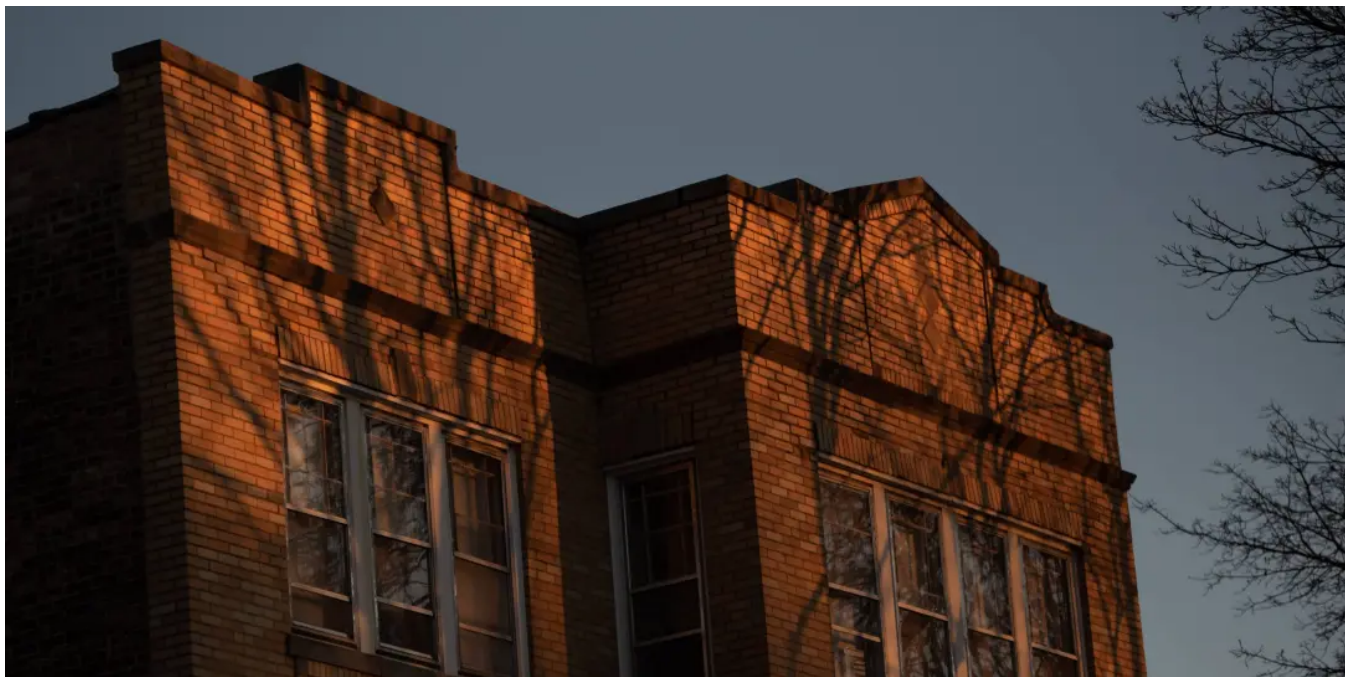
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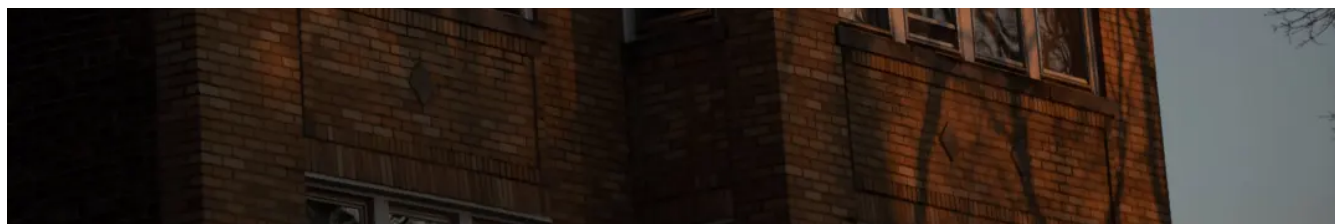
ALBANY PARK — The Northwest Side's 33rd Ward is grappling with gentrification and changes that some neighbors fear will drive longtime residents out of the area.

In interviews with Block Club, the three candidates vying to lead the ward — incumbent [Ald. Rossana Rodriguez-Sanchez \(33rd\)](#) and challengers [Laith Shaaban](#) and [Samie Martinez](#) — explained how they'd approach proposed developments, protecting two-flats and preserving housing affordability if elected.

The 33rd Ward covers parts of Irving Park, Albany Park and Avondale. Neighbors have feared being [uprooted](#) from their homes as rents rise and two-flats — long viewed as more affordable housing stock for Chicago families — [are disappearing](#) in the area.

Election Day is Feb. 28. If no candidate receives at least 50 percent of the vote, the top two finishers will go to a runoff April 4.





**Credit:** Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago

Sunlight graces the facade of a three-flat building in Albany Park on January 22, 2021.

## Preserving Two-Flats

Albany Park and Irving Park are the North Side neighborhoods that saw the largest growth in lower-income renters living in unaffordable units between 2012-2014 and 2017-2019, according to the [Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University](#).

At the same time, Chicago also [lost more than 4,800 two- to four-unit buildings between 2013 and 2021](#). That trend was [most acute](#) in higher-cost neighborhoods on the North and Northwest sides where the multi-unit buildings were replaced with single-family homes — fueling displacement, according to researchers.

Rodriguez-Sanchez has advocated for increasing affordable housing options to address displacement due to gentrification. If reelected, she wants to expand the [Anti-Deconversion Ordinance](#) City Council passed in 2021 to the Albany Park area, she said.

That [anti-gentrification measure](#) imposes up to a \$15,000 fee on developers who tear down single-family homes and multi-unit buildings but is currently limited to Pilsen and the area around The 606.

“Protecting the naturally occurring affordable housing units is something really important for us right now ... and looking at the anti-gentrification ordinance to try to prevent that makes a lot of sense,” Rodriguez-Sanchez said.



 A Flourish chart

Martinez cited a 2018 neighborhood plan by the North River Commission as his roadmap and said “corrective zoning” could be used to protect two-flats that are on land already zoned for a single-family home. But Martinez said he’d need to have a “supermajority” of area property owners agree to the zoning change

“I don’t want people to feel that they are being adversely affected in property value. I want to make sure that they agree on blocks [where] all the buildings are the same design. I don’t imagine that’s going be a problem,” Martinez said.

Shaaban proposed creating a program that would provide \$400 or \$500 a month to multi-unit landlords over a 20-year period to help keep their building affordable. Apartments in these buildings would be rented to qualified tenants, and the program could keep owners from selling or redeveloping their property into a single-family home, he said.

“The biggest thing [this does] is that it reduces the risk of displacement for the tenant as well as reducing the overall market risk for the landlord,” Shaaban said. “Look, if we talk to small landlords, we realize that the risks they’re facing, the costs they’re facing, are what are causing them to either sell their buildings to somebody who plans to redevelop it or actually developing the properties themselves.”



**Credit:** Chicago Coalition for the Homeless

The Bring Chicago Home ordinance calls for hiking the city's real transfer taxes on sales of properties worth \$1 million or more to fund homelessness services in the city.

## Bring Chicago Home

Introduced in 2018, the Bring Chicago Home proposed ordinance calls for hiking the city's real transfer taxes on sales of properties worth \$1 million or more to fund homelessness services in the city, including permanent and temporary affordable housing for the growing number of unhoused Chicagoans. It was crafted by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.

The measure would have been on the ballot next week had 25 City Council members not ditched a November meeting to to push the legislation

forward. Rodriguez-Sanchez was at the meeting and has advocated for the proposed ordinance.

But the challengers aren't so sure.

"Bring Home Chicago implies the real estate transfer tax. ... I really don't want to support any new taxes at this point," Martinez said.

Instead, Martinez said the city could use a \$60 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to address homelessness without creating a tax.

Shaaban said what Bring Home Chicago is trying to achieve is a "fantastic" goal, but he'd want to better study the potential market impacts and how it would fund homeless services before supporting it.

"I think that this is something that should be looked at statewide as a good way to fund housing and homelessness services across this across the state. But in its current form, I think it could potentially benefit from some tweaking," he said.

Rodriguez-Sanchez has pledged to keep fighting for the measure if elected to a second term.

"We also need to make sure that we are organizing people to fight for these things," she said.







**Credit:** Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago

Candidates Samie Martinez, Ald. Rossana Rodriguez Sanchez (33rd) and Laith Shaaban spoke at the 33rd Ward Aldermanic Forum event at Bateman Elementary on Feb. 1, 2023.

## Community Zoning And Participatory Budgeting

When Rodriguez-Sanchez was elected in 2019, she introduced a community zoning process and participatory budgeting to the ward, giving residents more input on changes in the area. She plans to continue with these processes if she wins reelection, she said.

“We don’t take contributions from developers or the real estate industry. It’s really important to us because we know that zoning is our biggest power and often the door through which corruption comes into Chicago politics,” Rodriguez-Sanchez said.

Shaaban would keep both processes in place if elected, he said. He called the measures “good governance” policies that are expanding to more wards.

“In the first year [of participatory budgeting] here in the 33rd Ward, we had about 800 people vote in the ... budgeting process,” Shaaban said. “We definitely need to keep that. It’s important to have community input. And I partake in community zoning process today through our neighborhood organizations.”

Martinez said participatory budgeting is a popular program he’d want to retain. But if elected, he’d reduce the amount of menu money neighbors can vote to spend,

he said.

“I would limit it to about a third of the total budget. The reason being that there are so many public safety priorities right now,” Martinez said. “So lighting and alley lighting, police observational devices, that’s of a high priority for me to make sure that we deal with crime.”

Martinez said he’d keep the community zoning model Rodriguez-Sanchez introduced to the ward.

“There’s a lot of work to be done in the ward, and there are paid professionals that really want to be involved, including local businesses and leaders,” he said.

Martinez would want to review proposals, consult with a steering committee and get neighbor feedback at a community meeting before making a decision “so we can deal with every single concern,” he said.

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