

HOUSING

What federal housing reforms could mean for Evanston

by **Adrian Martinez-De La Cruz**

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A mix of housing types on Judson Avenue near Dempster Street in Evanston. Credit: Google

Congress passed a rare, bipartisan housing bill last week aimed at addressing the country's shortage of new homes.

While headlines surrounding the bill, known as the [21st Century ROAD to Housing Act](#) have centered around President Donald Trump refusing to sign the legislation until lawmakers pass an elections bill he supports, there's a strong possibility it'll become law without his signature.

According to the Constitution, bills that are passed by Congress automatically become law if the


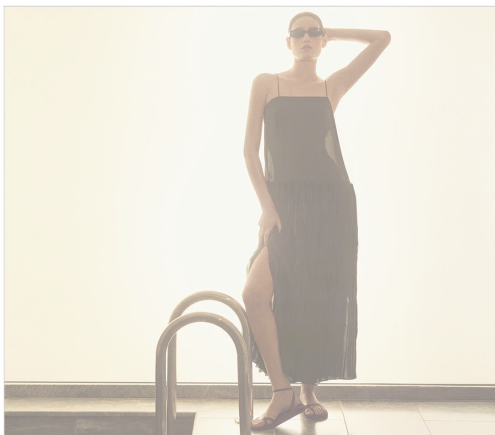

president doesn't take any action within 10 days (excluding Sundays) of being presented to him while lawmakers are in session. [Punchbowl News reported](#) on Friday that House Speaker Mike Johnson plans on sending the bill to Trump on Monday.

And if Trump were to veto the legislation, Congress could override it, something also likely given the overwhelming margins by which it passed in both the [House](#) and [Senate](#).

The bill, which has over 40 provisions, looks to boost the housing supply by rolling back federal regulations, easing lending requirements, and create and expand programs and policies meant to incentivize and reward local communities that promote homebuilding

"This bill is really a market driven strategy," said Geoff Smith, executive director of the [Institute for Housing Studies](#) at DePaul University.

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With the goal of adding more housing units, Smith said that, in theory, it would help take the pressure off the existing housing supply and allow for different types of housing (such as accessory dwelling units and duplexes) that could accommodate evolving housing demands.

Taking a look at the bill's provisions, here are a few that could impact and benefit Evanston, as it looks to address its housing needs.

New funding opportunities, new requirements

The housing bill creates a new \$200 million annual competitive grant program for local governments that show measurable increases in housing supply, and incentivize reforms such as permit streamlining and zoning changes.

If Evanston incorporates the pro-density frameworks laid out in its new [comprehensive](#) and [strategic housing](#) plans into its scheduled zoning code update, the city could be a prime candidate for this grant funding.

And, Evanston already received a [\\$7 million federal grant](#) early last year meant to address restrictive regulatory policies and remove barriers to build more homes.

The legislation also allows for localities to use their HOME Investment Partnership Program grant funds (which Evanston [received](#) over \$275,000 this year) for housing-related infrastructure.

It would also allow communities to allocate Community Development Block Grant funding toward construction of new affordable housing. Evanston received nearly \$1.7 million in CDBG funding this year.

And speaking about those CDBG funds, the legislation would also tie some of those funds to a locality's housing production, with bonuses or reductions based on their home building rate.

Additionally, since the city is a CDBG recipient, the bill would require Evanston to have a publicly accessible online database of undeveloped land parcels it owns.

Bob Palmer, policy director at [Housing Action Illinois](#), said the federal housing reforms are a positive step, but said he's cautiously waiting to see how they are implemented.

"The details of all these programs will have to be implemented by federal agencies, and honestly based on the Trump Administration's track record, you know, proposing to cut the [Housing and Urban Development] budget ... that's why we're taking kind of like a wait and see approach," said Palmer.

But before that, we'll have to wait and see if the bill actually becomes law.

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