

## HOMES

# Buying in to Austin

*Oak Park Regional Housing Center hosts annual housing forum offering advice and options for West Siders on finding homes*



by **Lacey Sikora**

June 16, 2025



Housing Center staff and partners layout the steps in the homebuying process. (Provided)

The barriers to homeownership on the West Side was the focus of a day-long event last month sponsored by the Oak Park Regional Housing Center. The annual Austin Community Housing Forum and Fair at Michele

Clark High School drew about 250 people.

June is National Homeownership Month, which makes it an ideal time to discuss the barriers facing Chicago families, OPRHC Executive Director Athena Williams said. These barriers include rising rents and housing costs – especially in underserved communities – that are making it more challenging for people to achieve the dream of owning a home, she said.

“There’s a lot of misinformation out there about homeownership,” Williams said. “People want to learn how to become homeowners. They’re not shy about what’s happening in the government or what is happening economically. They want to live in a home.”

Specifically, barriers to homeownership include personal financial obstacles, such as meeting income requirement levels or expectations for credit scores.

She said that Austin itself is also creating some barriers: “The market trend in Austin has dramatically increased,” she said, noting that in the past five to ten years many properties in the area have seen price increases of hundreds of thousands of dollars.



Ahkeem Henderson, mortgage officer of Huntington Bank, talks to residents about how to refinance their home. (Provided)

D

With an average area income of \$40,000, Williams said that making sure people from Austin can continue to live in and enjoy the community they are from is an issue of equity.

In partnership with local groups, the May 3 event covered various paths to homeownership. Habitat for Humanity was on hand to discuss pathways to ownership of a Habitat Home.

Representatives of the Austin Community Land Trust, Austin Coming Together and the West Side Health Authority, discussed the use of land trusts, which can take vacant or blighted land or properties and enter them into a community land trust to provide more affordable housing.

The City of Chicago and BMO Harris (banks) addressed the availability of grants in the homebuying process. A representative of the Cook County Tax Assessor's office talked about receiving exemptions on property taxes and also covered the tax implications of land trusts.

Staff from the DePaul University Institute for Housing Studies spoke about market trends in housing, and Coldwell Banker staff discussed the changing rules in the real estate industry and how they impact the process of buying a home.

The OPRHC holds the Housing Forum and Fair annually in Austin and will hold a second edition the first Saturday in November in Maywood. Williams noted that while the Oak Park Regional Housing Center is located in Oak Park it has offices in Austin and Maywood as well."

As a HUD agency, Williams said part of the scope of the OPRHC is to meet with clients one on one. Anyone who attended the May event and wants more information or anyone who missed the event but would like to learn more about homeownership may call the Austin office at (773) 887-5187 to learn more.