



# EQUITABLE ZONING PROJECT REPORT

A study of how different people are impacted differently by zoning in Evanston, Illinois, and recommendations for increasing equity through zoning reform

**SUMMER 2024**

[Joining Forces for Affordable Housing](#) is the advocacy program of [Connections for the Homeless](#), based in Evanston, Illinois. The Joining Forces team (consisting of staff and community advocates) educates, organizes, and activates residents, municipalities, and the State of Illinois to embrace the changes and use the resources needed to ensure that everyone has access to housing they can afford.

In 2021, Joining Forces began what is now called the Equitable Zoning Project (EZP), with the intent to identify how the zoning code of the City of Evanston, Illinois, may play a role in:

- Discouraging the development of affordable housing,
- Preserving racial and socio-economic segregation, and
- Perpetuating inequities among residents.

This document describes the results of our research, makes recommendations for changes to the zoning code, and shares what we learned in our efforts to engage people who are seldom consulted about such matters in sharing their experiences and providing their input.

More detailed information on the EZP is available on the [Joining Forces website](#).

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### ***Community Partners***

Center for Independent Futures  
Evanston Cradle to Career  
Evanston Latinos  
Evanston NAACP  
Evanston Own It  
Laudé Consulting  
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# 1. Executive Summary

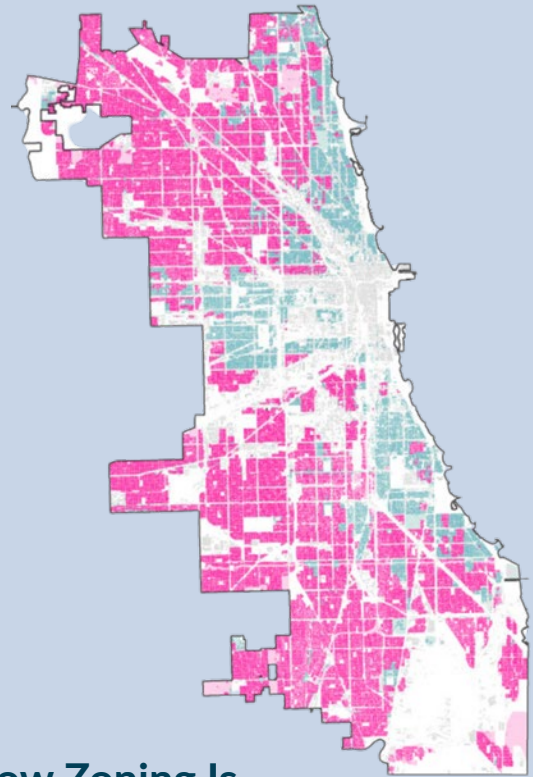
## CONTEXT FOR THE EQUITABLE ZONING PROJECT

The United States is facing a national housing crisis. The country is 7 million housing units short of what it needs to meet overall demand, and this shortage is driving up rent and home prices. The inevitable consequence is that those with the least means to afford the increases pay an ever-greater portion of their incomes — 30%, 50%, even 70% or 80% — to stay in their housing. And when they can no longer afford this high-stakes game of musical chairs, when they've exhausted their last option, when their last family member and friend has said, "I can't help you this time," they end up on the street, with nowhere to turn.

Evanston, Illinois, the home-base for Connections for the Homeless' (Connections') work in northern Cook County, is not immune to the housing crisis. Unsheltered homelessness went up 58% in the northern suburbs of Cook County between 2023 and 2024, according to the [annual point-in-time counts of homelessness](#) carried out by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In Evanston, there has been a visible uptick in people in need, and Connections has waiting lists for our programs. While each person we serve has a different story, the one thing they all have in common is that they cannot afford the housing that's available to them. And Connections cannot fulfill its mission—to serve and catalyze the community to end homelessness, one person at a time—unless more housing becomes available.

Connections for the Homeless has long recognized that zoning is repeatedly used as a key tool to influence—and often block—housing developments, particularly affordable ones. Therefore, in 2022, our advocacy program, Joining Forces for Affordable Housing (Joining Forces), started the Equitable Zoning Project to explore how the zoning code of the City of Evanston may play a role in:

- Discouraging the development of affordable housing
- Preserving racial and socio-economic segregation
- Perpetuating inequities among residents



## How Zoning Is Related to Redlining

As the [City of Evanston's EPlan](#) shows, patterns of inequity in Evanston closely match the redlining maps of the 1940's, which segregated Black and Brown people to live in what is currently Evanston's 5th ward. Much has been written about how redlining was replaced by zoning when redlining was banned. The [Joining Forces website Zoning page](#) provides a brief summary of this well-documented phenomenon.

The result is this report. Connections is not alone in doing this work. Illinois lawmakers, like state legislators across the country, are also considering requiring major changes to zoning codes to address this crisis. In February 2024, State Rep. Kam Buckner introduced legislation eliminating single family zoning for Illinois cities with 100,000 to 500,000 residents.

Additionally, the city of Evanston has begun to examine its zoning code, having recently launched Envision Evanston 2045, a yearlong process to review and update its city plan based on community input and to reform its zoning code to prepare our community to do its part to address this housing crisis. This effort is not a moment too soon.

## PROJECT PROCESS

Our country is now awakening to how current zoning rules not only perpetuate segregation but also create a housing shortage that impacts people in every state, with the greatest and most destructive impact being on people of greatest vulnerability. Exploring this impact and identifying ways the Evanston zoning code could be revised to mitigate it were key goals of the Equitable Zoning Project.

To achieve these goals, Joining Forces worked through Connections and our community partners to conduct an extensive survey of Evanston residents. The results of our surveys and focus groups confirm that people with low incomes, people of color, and people with disabilities struggle to find and keep affordable housing in Evanston to a greater extent than other residents. They also confirmed that people in need of affordable housing have different opinions on what zoning priorities should be.

Both before and after surveying residents and developing zoning recommendations, Joining Forces also reviewed best practices for equitable zoning, which have been evolving over the time we've been doing this project. Our recommendations are aligned with the latest recommendations made in the American Planning Association's [Equity in Zoning Policy Guide](#).

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

The EZP examined the impact of current zoning on residents of Evanston, along with new methods to re-focus zoning on ensuring adequate and equitable housing opportunities for everyone. As a result of our

**“If one does not have a good and decent accommodation, it tells on how the person blossoms in life.”**

■ **Black renter with no income during a focus group interview**

research, we have developed proposals for changes to Evanston's zoning code in the following areas:

### ***Promote Housing Affordability:***

The zoning code currently emphasizes the preservation of property values and the current character of the community.

### ***Connections recommends:***

- Changing the purpose of the zoning code to include housing for people at all income levels.
- Requiring housing-related committees to include affordability as one of their criteria in decision-making.
- Removing coded and undefined wording (such as the term “character”) that can be used to preserve the status quo and prevent increased affordability.
- Reducing restrictions on housing configurations such as the number of buildings allowed on a lot and lot and yard size minimums.

## Acknowledging Our EZP Community Partners

Connections' community partners throughout the project included:

- Center for Independent Futures
- Evanston Cradle to Career Advocates for Action
- Evanston Latinos

- Evanston Own It
- Evanston NAACP
- Laudé Consulting
- Radio La Différence
- VAJM Consulting

These organizations all support people in Evanston who have

relatively low incomes, are people of color, and/or have disabilities—and who comprise the majority of people who come to Connections for assistance with housing.

Community partner roles in the EZP are described on the [Zoning page](#) of the Joining Forces website.



- Expanding flexibility in allowed housing types to increase housing stock and density and to drive down prices for housing.

### **Encourage Housing Abundance:**

The zoning code currently prohibits multi-family and multi-use buildings across large swaths of the City. It also limits how many unrelated people can live together in any one unit and restricts what other forms of shared housing are allowed. This severely limits the City’s ability to provide enough homes for people who are currently here, prohibits growth, and keeps housing costs high.

#### **Connections recommends:**

- Allowing 2- to 4- unit buildings and multiple uses of buildings (e.g., both residential and commercial) in all zoning districts.
- Increasing access to public transit that will, in turn, increase access to grocery stores, banks, and other resources for people who do not own cars.
- Removing restrictions that limit how many unrelated people can live together.
- Allowing increased flexibility in home-sharing, with occupancy limits based on safety instead of resident family relationships.

**“My rent takes almost 60% of my income so it’s not so easy.”**

■ Focus group participant who did not fill out the demographic survey

### **Embrace Equity in Zoning:**

The zoning code currently does little to ensure that those who most need access to affordable housing have input into decisions around zoning and land use, which means that decisions for those people are often made without considering their needs and priorities. People with low incomes, people of color, and people with disabilities should be acknowledged as necessary and key stakeholders.

#### **Connections recommends:**

- Requiring diverse community representation on committees, commissions and boards.
- Expanding distribution of notices about zoning and land use discussions to include renters and not only home-owners.
- Engaging trusted community partners and leaders with ties to those most in need of affordable housing to solicit input from residents who might otherwise not participate in housing- and zoning-related discussions.
- Using communications channels that people already have in place to ensure information-sharing about housing- and zoning-related issues to all sectors of the community.

Joining Forces welcomes all advocates for common-sense zoning reform based on density, abundance, and affordability to join with us so together we can advance the project of making Evanston a model of zoning that supports building for the 21st century. Reshaping zoning laws in communities across the country is crucial to solving our national housing crisis.

## **2. Findings**

Throughout the EZP process, Joining Forces found that people among the groups at risk of housing instability (low-income, people of color, those with disabilities) have had very different experiences with housing in Evanston than people not at risk. Not surprisingly, the opinions expressed by participants related to land-use priorities and zoning also varied among the two groups.

### **EXPERIENCES RELATED TO HOUSING AFFORDABILITY**

Throughout the EZP, Joining Forces gathered information on community members’ experiences with housing and available levels of affordability. We found that experiences correlated closely to income levels and race. Higher income people, who were primarily white homeowners, expressed general satisfaction with their well-being as residents, while lower income people, who were primarily renters

“Earning little and renting don’t go together sometimes, but you have to put a roof on your head and sacrifice some other things. Three square meals have been hard, you know, and you don’t get to buy everything you want.”

■ Black renter with income between \$25,000 and \$75,000

and people of color, described experiences of hardship.

The following themes recurred consistently among survey respondents and focus group participants:

- Housing cost burden (paying more than 30% of a household’s income on housing) is a destructive force, particularly among people with low incomes and people of color.
- People of color, people with low incomes, and people with disabilities experience housing cost burden and its effects in greater proportion than other people.
- People across all demographic categories indicated that affordable housing was a top priority for them in considering zoning and community development issues.

## COMMUNITY MEMBER PRIORITIES RELATED TO ZONING

Joining Forces asked survey respondents to rank in order of importance a set of priorities that must be considered when new housing is created. The priorities under consideration included:

**Accessibility:** Ability for people with physical disabilities to live in housing that meets their needs

**Affordability:** Ability for people at all income levels to live in housing that they can afford

**Maintaining Building Types:** Keeping the same kinds of buildings in neighborhoods where they already exist

**Minimizing Environmental Impact:** Ensuring that buildings meet the City’s environmental standards

**Minimizing Traffic:** Ensuring that buildings do not create unreasonable increases in traffic

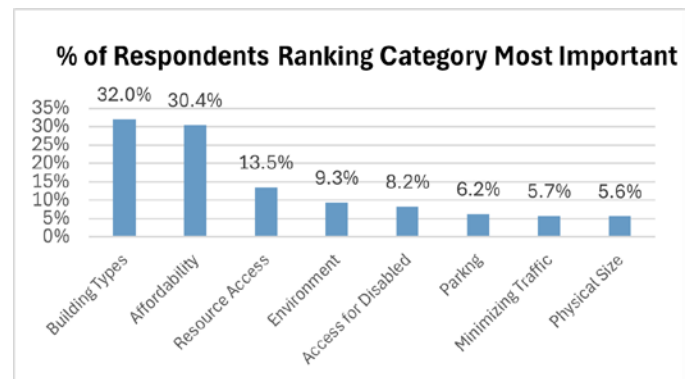
**Parking:** Ensuring that parking needs are met but not exceeded

**Physical Requirements:** Adherence to requirements related to height, lot sizes, aesthetics, and other physical characteristics

**Resources Accessibility:** Ability for residents to access grocery stores, pharmacies, shops, banks, and other services and amenities

Participant rankings showed that groups most likely to struggle with housing affordability all have viewpoints that are different from those of people not at risk.

The following chart lists the priorities as the full group of respondents ranked them when their answers were all aggregated. Analysis of responses by different demographic groups is provided on the [Joining Forces website](#).



### Overall Priority #1— Maintaining Building Types:

People in the groups at risk—particularly renters and Latino respondents—ranked Maintaining Building Types as being of critical importance (priority #1), while groups not at risk ranked this priority as very low (as low as #8) in importance. Of note, survey results also showed that renters in multi-family building are overwhelmingly people with lower incomes and people of color.

### Overall Priority #2—Housing Affordability:

Nearly all groups ranked this as the #1 priority, including people with the highest incomes, who

**“I’m staying here right now because my family is here, and we can share bills.”**

■ Black respondent staying with family, no income

spoke in focus groups to the need for affordable housing for people with less wealth.

## THE NEED FOR HOME-SHARING

Home-sharing is a practice that has been used as a means of survival throughout human history. In Evanston, current zoning limits which zoning districts allow home-sharing and what form it can take.

EZP participants indicated that home-sharing is a key strategy for creating affordability when no other options are available. Based on research results, it appears that the number of people sharing housing in Evanston is high and that steps should be taken to support people in using this strategy until more affordable units can be made available.

Of the 82 focus group participants who answered a question about their housing situation, 25 (or 31%) indicated that they were sharing housing. Of those, 13 indicated that they are paying rent but not on the lease (so living with someone else who is on the lease), while 12 said they are staying with someone else for free, but often sharing other expenses. Based on those numbers and on verbal confirmation during the focus groups, home-sharing is a common phenomenon in Evanston and an important strategy for staying housed, particularly for people with low incomes.

**“Landlords who do take vouchers may not be up to code and may not take care of the apartment because people with vouchers have nowhere else to go.”**

■ Black homeowner with income under \$25,000

## SOURCE OF INCOME AS A BARRIER TO AFFORDABILITY

Several focus group participants commented on the difficulties of attaining housing using Housing Choice vouchers (also called “Section 8”). Many expressed that vouchers do not provide equity because of the stigma associated with them. Because landlords fear approving “bad” tenants, the vouchers are rejected and thus do not fulfill their goal of making housing affordable. Several focus group participants alluded to having been the victims of such stigma, as well as to other forms of bias against low-income people and/or racism.

## RESTRICTIONS ON WHO CAN LIVE WITH WHOM

Because of Evanston’s controversial set of ordinances that prohibit more than three unrelated people from living in one household, we gathered data on how many of our respondents live in households that violate this rule and what their experiences are. Many people declined to answer survey questions regarding this issue. However, many focus group participants shared views that showed an understanding of the problems that supporters of the 3-unrelated rule are hoping to quell, as well as an understanding of the limitations that the rule puts on people’s ability to live with whom they want to and to share housing to reduce per-person housing costs.

However, among those who did answer, significant variances were reported based on respondent race and income. Additionally, of the 389 survey respondents who said they were current residents of Evanston, 32 (8%) of them identified as student residents. Of those 32, 17 student residents said that they currently live in a household with more than 3 unrelated people.

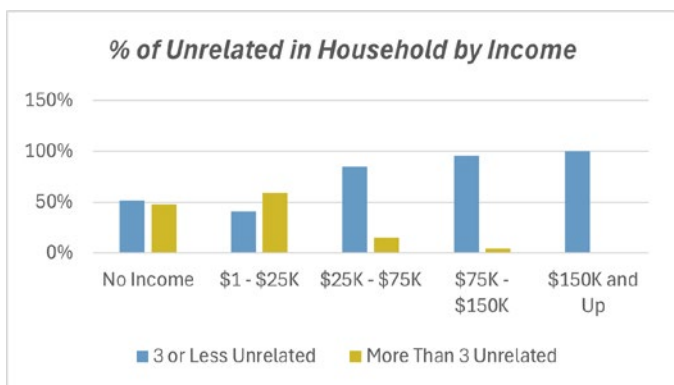
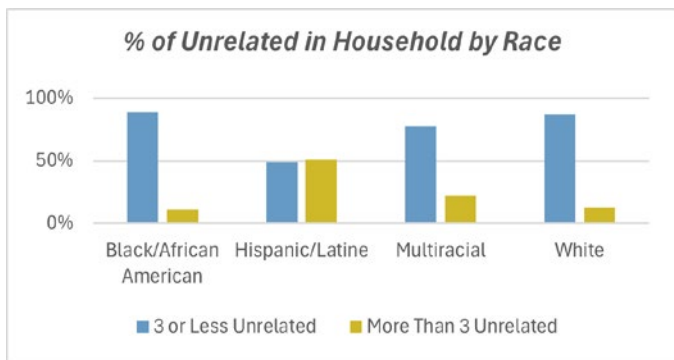
### *Variations by Race*

Among those who did respond to the question about unrelated household members, about half of the Latino respondents live in households with more than 3 unrelated people. Such shared-housing arrangements appear to be a successful strategy to reduce costs and one that may be a culturally accepted strategy among Evanston’s Latino population.

### *Variations by Level of Income*

Respondents with annual household incomes under \$25,000 reported having more than 3 unrelated





people living together in greater percentages than did those with higher incomes.

## UNIQUE HOUSING EXPERIENCES AMONG STUDENTS

Northwestern students face a housing environment that is unique among Evanston residents, and they expressed frustration with poor housing conditions, high costs of housing both on and off campus, and predatory and exploitive landlords. Because of the competition for housing, students feel they are forced to accept sub-standard apartments with higher-than-average rents. They also report having to secure leases and pay application fees and first-month rents nearly a year ahead of taking occupancy. When problems occur with their housing, those we spoke with said they tend to stay quiet for fear of eviction. Many live in units with more than three unrelated people in them and feel that the landlords use this as leverage to keep students silent when rents go up or when problems with the apartment are not fixed. Students say they feel that they are victims of the housing shortage and are virtually unseen.

## LEAVING EVANSTON AS A SURVIVAL STRATEGY

Another strategy for survival that EZIP respondents mentioned is to leave Evanston for places with

less expensive housing. The results of the project indicate that this is a successful strategy both for Black households and for low-income households and that it is likely a primary cause for the decline in the Black population in recent decades.

## 3. Zoning Recommendations

In this report, Connections' recommendations are based both on what we heard from community residents, summarized above, as well as on guidance from the American Planning Association, which released its [Equity in Zoning Policy Guide](#) in 2022.

### A. PROMOTING HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

During EZIP focus groups, residents expressed that, while Evanston is seen as a desirable place to live for those who can afford it, it is a very difficult place to live for those who cannot. Zoning can make a big difference in the ability of a community to increase affordability. Connections' recommendations related to this priority include the following:

#### *Redefine the Purpose of Evanston's Zoning Code*

The stated overall purpose of Evanston's zoning code does not currently include goals to ensure that residents have housing they can afford, and the code has no reference to and provides no support for the City's affordable housing goals.

#### *Current Zoning Code Issues:*

- The purpose statements for each of the residential districts are in large part focused on maintaining the status quo rather than meeting resident needs. For instance, the Purpose Statement for R2 districts, which only allow single-family homes, is: "The R2 single-family residential district is intended to provide for small lot single-family development at a relatively low density and to *preserve the present physical character of that area* while providing for initial development." (italics added)

- Plan Commission members, who make recommendations to the City Council on applying zoning rules to specific housing developments, are provided with standards to guide their decisions. These standards currently do not include any consideration of affordability or provision of housing for people at different levels of income.

### Recommendations:

The zoning code should be revised to explicitly support increased affordability, both in its statements of purpose and in its rules around development:

- Revise the overall purpose of the zoning code to support increases in housing affordability and choice for people at all income levels across all wards (in [Chapter 6-1, Title, Purpose and Intent](#)).
- Remove preservation of “character” as a goal, and be more specific about the purposes of and reasons for the zoning districts.
- Require decision-makers to consider the potential impact of their decisions on equity, affordability, and housing choice for groups at risk of housing instability (sections [6-3-4-5, Standard for Amendments](#); [6-3-5-10, Standards for Special Uses](#); [6-3-6-9, Standards for Planned Developments](#); and [6-3-7-10, Standards for Unique Uses](#)).

## APA Guidance: Benefits of Zoning Reform

“While fairer, more inclusive zoning alone cannot end systemic racial and ethnic segregation, prevent the erosion of cultural communities that wish to remain intact, or dismantle long-established systems of privilege, it can be used as a tool to help achieve all those goals. Because zoning is law, many other financial and economic institutions point to and use existing zoning as the reason they cannot or need not reform their own practices. Fixing zoning can promote broader change to reduce the human costs and impacts of racist and exclusionary practices throughout the economy and the nation (p. 4).”

## Allow for Greater Flexibility In Building Height, Lot Sizes, and Minor Zoning Variations

Evanston’s Zoning Code includes many development standards that mandate inefficient use of land and thus serve as barriers to creating affordability.

### Current Zoning Code Issues:

Several of Evanston’s zoning districts require that residential buildings have large lots, expansive yards, limited height, and other requirements and restrictions. This type of zoning increases the housing price per square foot, while prohibiting increases in density that would allow greater housing choice for people with lower incomes.

### Recommendations:

- Lift or reduce restrictions on the number of buildings allowed on a property to allow greater density and, therefore, more affordability ([6-4-1-6, Number of Buildings or Uses on a Zoning Lot](#)).
- Allow additional flexibility in all zones to create new affordability through non-traditional housing formats such as SROs, shelters, co-housing, transitional housing, tiny homes, factory-built homes, modular homes, and others.
- Modify lot size and yard requirements to allow for greater density. Reevaluate lot area minimums, minimum ground floor areas, and the prohibition against increases in the number of dwelling units against new best practices in equitable zoning ([6-8-1-10, Planned Developments in Residential Districts](#)).

## B. ENCOURAGING HOUSING ABUNDANCE

Evanston has insufficient housing stock to meet the needs of all sectors of the community. Because of restrictive zoning laws and practices, it is slow, expensive, and difficult to create new housing of any type and particularly so to create housing that is affordable to people at incomes lower than the median.

### Permit Multi-Family Housing and Multi-Use Buildings in All Residential Zones

The current zoning code focuses on protecting single- and two-family zones, while excluding possibilities for increased density that could enhance

## APA Guidance: Flexibility in Development Requirements

“While large lot size minimums are often defended based on preserving neighborhood character or property values, their impact has been to perpetuate patterns of economic and demographic segregation of historically

disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.” (p. 19).

“Revise zoning to allow a broader range of building forms, lot sizes, lot widths, and residential types in low-density residential neighborhoods.

However, if the residents of historically disadvantaged and vulnerable neighborhoods want to preserve single-household zoning to discourage speculative investment and displacement, those desires should be respected.” (p. 17).

affordability. This focus preserves segregation and perpetuates racial and socio-economic inequities.

### Current Zoning Code Issues:

- Two of Evanston’s residential zoning districts only allow single-family homes (R1 and R2), and one district only allows one- and two-family homes (R3). Single- and two-family homes are a more expensive use of land than homes with more units. The exclusion of other types of building severely limits Evanston’s options for increasing density in a way that would create more affordability, and it perpetuates the City’s deficit of housing for people at all income levels.
- Businesses and residences are not allowed to co-exist in several zoning districts. This prevents development of much-needed housing in instances where land or a building is available but housing is disallowed. In districts where only housing is allowed, residents have to travel

outside their neighborhoods to resources such as grocery stores, medical offices, etc., and some home business opportunities are disallowed. This reduces neighborhood walkability and requires people to drive their cars more or make use of public transportation if they do not have cars.

### Recommendations:

- Allow more flexibility in the types of housing allowed in the R1 through R3 districts. Throughout the country, municipalities are allowing development of duplexes, 3- and 4-flats, and even small apartment and courtyard buildings with 6 or more units in what used to be single-family-only districts.
- Allow more flexibility in the types of land use permitted in residential zones. By allowing corner stores and other amenities, the City could improve walkability and better accommodate households who would like to “go green” by

## APA Guidance: The Need for Multi-Family and Multi-Use Buildings

“Avoid districts limited to only single, detached dwellings when that will limit housing opportunities for historically disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. Evidence shows that single-household only residential zoning has a disproportionate impact on the ability of historically disadvantaged and vulnerable

groups to access attainable housing and quality schools and services.” (p. 17)

“Districts that allow a mix of appropriately scaled housing, commercial, and service uses can increase opportunities for historically disadvantaged and vulnerable populations to live closer to sources of

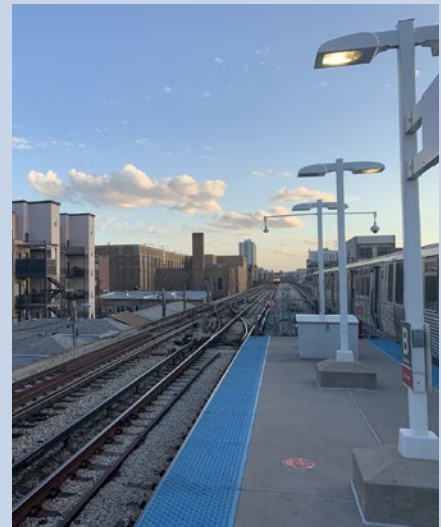


quality employment, goods, and services.” (p. 17)

## APA Guidance: Transportation Infrastructure

“Mobility and access to opportunity are essential to move the needle toward equity. Groups disproportionately challenged by mobility needs, and those in traditionally underserved communities, include low-income people, people of color, people with disabilities, people with lower levels of education, and the old and the very young. Without access to jobs, schools, health care, healthy foods, recreation, goods, and services, it is difficult to envision a pathway to opportunity.” (p. 18)

“[Cities should] utilize existing planning tools such as comprehensive plans, transportation plans, zoning ordinances, resolutions, statutes, site plans, and budget appropriations to create equitable communities in consideration of the need to design land-use and transportation facilities to provide access and connections to jobs, schools, health care, goods, and services. Essential to accessibility is the implementation of inclusionary zoning, provision of affordable



housing, and preservation of existing affordable housing in areas proximal to all modes of transportation.” (p. 19)

reducing and/or eliminating use of automobiles. Such measures would also support groups at risk who cannot afford their own cars.

and by requiring density and affordable units in transit-oriented zoning districts.

### **Increase Access to Transit and Other Resources**

Many participants in the EZP survey indicated that they do not live close to needed amenities such as grocery stores, banks, and laundromats and that public transit to such amenities, as well as to their jobs, is lacking.

#### **Current Zoning Code Issues:**

While public transportation is excellent in parts of Evanston, it is insufficient in other parts. People without cars are more impacted, and they are often people with lower incomes who are living in areas with lower housing costs by necessity.

#### **Recommendations:**

- With access to resources being such a high priority among EZP participants, Connections recommends that the City of Evanston’s new comprehensive plan prioritize expansion of public transit to areas of the community where it does not currently exist. We also recommend mandating housing affordability in areas where transit does exist by strengthening the inclusionary zoning ordinance to that effect

### **Expand Options for Sharing Housing**

Evanston’s zoning code restricts options for sharing housing. This makes it more difficult for people who cannot find a unit they can afford on their own and for people who are seeking non-traditional household configurations for other reasons.

#### **Current Zoning Code Issues:**

- The current zoning code limits how many unrelated people can live together in one unit, which places restrictions on residents who have no choice other than to share housing if they wish to remain housed. This limitation overwhelmingly impacts people with low incomes, primarily Latinos, as well as Northwestern students who want to live near campus.
- Definitions of and limitations on various forms of home-sharing are restrictive and discourage creation of new and creative ways for people to share housing. This decreases the ability of the community to increase housing stock without having to build new buildings.

#### **Recommendations:**

Remove all limitations on who can be included in a household from the zoning code and revise



## APA Guidance: Limitations on Unrelated People Co-Habiting

“The definition of “family” is an important, and often overlooked, part of zoning regulations when it comes to disproportionate impacts on historically disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.” (p. 23)

“If the definition [of “family”] includes a maximum number of unrelated persons, ensure that it is no lower than the number of related persons that would be permitted in the same size residential home.” (p. 23)

occupancy rules to pertain only to physical safety based on the number of people in a unit in relation to the size of that unit. Specifically:

- Base restrictions on the number of people living together on safety standards—such as number of people per square foot—instead of on the relationships among those people ([Chapter 6-4-1-14, Occupancy of Dwelling Units](#)).
- With the above recommendation, remove the definition of “family” throughout the zoning code (starting with [6-18-3, Definitions](#)).
- Ensure that limits on shared housing (including shelter) are not inequitably or unreasonably limiting people from sharing housing to reduce costs (in the City Code’s Housing Regulations, [section 5-2, Shared Housing Provider](#)).
- Simplify, consolidate, and provide more flexibility and consistency in the ordinances related to home-sharing, group homes, rooming houses, and lodging establishments so that new ways of housing people can be implemented.

## C. EMBRACING EQUITY IN ZONING

Those currently making decisions about zoning and housing developments, and residents trying to influence them, do not fully represent the communities for whom the decisions are being made. As the EZP results show, people at different income levels and of different races and ethnicities don’t always have the same priorities related to housing, and not all viewpoints are being considered.



## APA Guidance: Limitations on Diversity Among Decision-Makers

“Professional expertise is important, but these boards also need to include significant local community expertise and lived experience. Their members need to bring different kinds of knowledge that can be conveyed by diverse voices that better understand the impacts of zoning decisions on historically disadvantaged and vulnerable neighborhoods. Announcements of opportunities to serve on boards should be disseminated broadly, appointment procedures should be transparent, and classes should be offered to provide training and information about the roles and responsibilities of board(s) members. Communities should consider offering support services like transportation or childcare to members who agree to serve on boards and committees.” (p. 35)

## Require Community Representation on Committees, Commissions, and Boards

### Current Zoning Code Issues:

Evanston lacks standards for determining who represents the community on boards, commissions, and committees. In particular, the recommending bodies dealing with housing, land use and zoning do not currently have make-ups that reflect the need for housing in the community, nor the large numbers of people at risk of housing instability who are experiencing that need.

### Recommendations:

Expand the membership requirements and supports for both the current Land Use Commission and the Housing and Community Development Committee to include the following:

- Standards for commission/committee membership, including people with disabilities,



## APA Guidance: Public Notification

“A significant and growing percentage of Americans rent their housing, so limiting notification of public hearings to property owners effectively disenfranchises those residents from zoning decisions that affect them. Since historically disadvantaged and vulnerable communities have higher rental occupancy rates than the population, mailed notice

requirements that ignore renters introduce significant bias into the public hearing process. Because property owners are by and large, older, whiter, and wealthier than other segments in a community, notice may be received by a disproportionately large number of these households.” (p. 38)

“Staff should identify interested community members and

groups (housing authorities, tenants unions, community activist groups) and maintain updated lists of their contact information. While not everyone can receive electronic notices, this is a valuable and increasingly widespread means of communication for many groups and individuals and should become a mandatory form of notice.” (p. 40)

people of color, people with low incomes, renters, college students, etc.

- Provision of training, as well as assistance with childcare and transportation, and adjustments as needed to meeting times and locations to accommodate work and family schedules and ensure that participation is possible for all, not just those with time and resources.

Also set standards for who represents Evanston on Committees, Boards, and Commissions that better match Evanston’s diversity in experience and need.

### **Include Renters in All Public Notices**

#### **Current Zoning Code Issues:**

While the City allows comment at public meetings and notifies building owners of upcoming hearings around zoning and new development, it does not notify renters, who include a large percentage of the City’s low-income residents and people of color.

#### **Recommendations:**

Notify all residents within the geographical notification limits—not just property-owners, so as to ensure representative input from a range of community members, including those who may be at risk of housing insecurity.

### **Engage Trusted Community Partners and Leaders**

Joining Forces has heard throughout Evanston that people in its marginalized communities often

feel like their voices, concerns, and needs do not matter and are likely to be disregarded even when solicited. For the EZP, Joining Forces went beyond its usual communications networks and engaged with community partners with deep roots in the communities we were trying to reach for help with engagement.

#### **Recommendations:**

While engagement practices are not part of the zoning code itself, Joining Forces recommends that the City form ongoing relationships with community partners who can advise and support its efforts to engage marginalized communities in planning and development work. Through the EZP, Joining Forces learned the importance of the following practices:

- Adapt processes for input to accommodate community partners’ existing processes and their capacity to participate. Some organizations will need more support than others to increase participation in outreach efforts, and the number of hours an organization can spend on new activities such as outreach in a given time period may be limited.
- Provide ample time for communicating what is needed from community partners and allowing them to plan. Some partners will be ready to start their outreach immediately, while others will need more time for planning and approval of outreach activities.
- Provide compensation for community partners in line with the level of the work you are asking them to do. Joining Forces granted \$5,000 to each

## Examples: Using Existing Communications Channels

- Our partners, Radio La Différence and Laudé Consulting, used their pre-established radio shows to reach their largely Haitian-Creole-speaking audience.
- Evanston Latinos used their pre-established Cafecitos to reach their constituents.
- The Evanston NAACP designed several new events that they knew would get people interested in the topic and in participating in our research.



community partner and asked them to determine the best use of that funding. This funding was one of the key reasons that some of the partners agreed to participate, and partners felt that it was key to helping them succeed in their outreach.

### ***Make Use of Existing Communications Channels***

People communicate and socialize with one another in a variety of ways. Community engagement that makes use of these pre-existing communications channels can be very successful. The community partners who participated in the EZP gave the project significant reach into communities that are rarely heard from with regards to zoning, housing, and equity in Evanston.

#### ***Recommendations:***

- Work with community partners to design outreach activities that can piggyback on events that they are already doing. For some, holiday events are a great opportunity to do outreach, while others are overloaded during the holidays and don't want to add activities. Others find summer to be a great time to do outreach, particularly at outdoor events. Having events that look different during different seasons can help increase engagement.
- Invest in translation for groups who don't speak English. Joining Forces was successful in recruiting people from Evanston's Haitian community to complete interviews through the local Haitian radio station, but the language barrier was a challenge during focus groups, since we had not engaged a Haitian-Creole

translator. Evanston Latinos engaged many of its constituents in one-on-one sessions to complete the surveys in Spanish. However, again, we did not do any focus groups in Spanish and this was a missed opportunity.

- Use plain language. In all languages, try to accommodate people at different reading skill levels, particularly when dealing with unfamiliar and somewhat technical subject matter such as zoning.

## 4. Calls to Action

As a next step, Connections is issuing calls to action to all sectors in the community to encourage zoning reform that will remove many of the barriers to increasing housing affordability.

### **FOR THE CITY OF EVANSTON**

We urge the City Council to approve zoning reform through the Envision Evanston 2045 effort, including the recommendations in this report.

### **FOR THE COMMUNITY**

#### ***Community Advocates in Favor of Housing Affordability***

Evanston is full of people who are disturbed, if not heartbroken, by the racial and socio-economic inequities in Evanston. Housing is at the heart of

those inequities. This is the time to get involved in advocacy, even if you are not directly impacted negatively by the lack of affordable housing. See below for suggestions on advocacy actions.

### ***People Who Are Unstably Housed or At Risk***

If you are struggling to pay for your housing, and if you are among those groups who are most likely to be struggling (low-income, people of color, those with disabilities), your experiences are what decision-makers need to hear. See below for information on how you can advocate.

### ***Local Businesses Impacted by a Shortage of Workers***

Local businesses are highly impacted by the lack of affordable housing in the community. You can become advocates as well by doing the following:

- Share the difficulties you have in finding and retaining workers who can afford to live in Evanston or, if they can't, can afford to travel to Evanston for jobs
- Share how the stress of paying too much for housing impacts worker health, morale, and productivity
- Share any stories about how land use restrictions have limited what you can do as a business

### ***Human Services Organizations***

Non-profits that serve people with low incomes, people of color, and people with disabilities or other challenges know firsthand how destructive unstable housing is to people's well-being. Your experiences and those of the people you serve can be extremely effective in making the case for zoning changes that can lead to increased affordability.

### ***Communities of Faith with a Focus on Social Justice***

Because Evanston has so many houses of worship, congregants represent a potentially powerful driver of change in the community. We encourage the interfaith organizations in Evanston, as well as individual communities of faith, to band together in the mission to demand zoning reform leading to housing justice.

## **Examples: How Community Partners Used Compensation for EZIP Participation**

- To incentivize survey-takers and/or focus group attendees
- To increase their outreach capacity by paying volunteers to help
- To provide extra compensation for staff members to work on the project
- To help fund the overall organization

## **HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Joining Forces urges everyone to make their opinions known to City Council members, as well as to the community at large, through the following actions:

- Become a member of Joining Forces' Zoning Reform Campaign and receive information on how to participate.
- Participate actively in [Envision Evanston 2045](#) activities.
- Share your views within your spheres of influence by holding a neighborhood meeting, talking with people you know, using social media, etc.

Email Joining Forces for Affordable Housing at [joiningforces@connect2home.org](mailto:joiningforces@connect2home.org) to join the Zoning Reform Campaign or to get additional support in your own advocacy work.