

Lincoln Park isn't the best place to add affordable housing

By: David Doig, Bill Eager, Ghian Foreman and Richard Townsell July 12, 2018

Claiming it to be a remedy for historic racial segregation and the only path to opportunity for Chicago's poorest citizens, a chorus has arisen demanding that private developer and city resources be targeted to create housing in the city's most affluent neighborhoods. But while their motivations are good, it should not be necessary to live in Lincoln Park or Lincoln Square to go to a grocery store, attend a good school or find a job.

There are more than 20 communities on the South and West sides with **poverty rates of 25 percent or higher**, with hundreds of vacant lots marking the sites of former businesses, stores and homes—abandoned over decades by employers, building owners, banks, merchants and, in the end, many residents, young and old. These are also neighborhoods where people have roots and remain connected through family and friendship ties. These communities do not need further abandonment. They need investment.

Consider this: A dollar spent in Lincoln Park may help get a family an apartment, but research and experience show that a dollar spent in Pullman, North Lawndale, Garfield Park or Woodlawn will have a much more powerful multiplier effect and be a catalyst for positive change.

In Woodlawn, for example, a \$30 million federal Choice Neighborhoods grant **leveraged \$430 million in investment** in the last six years. Those dollars built 300 homes for low-income renters, 400 market-rate rentals, scores of newly rehabbed and purchased two-flats and bungalows, numerous new schools, recreation facilities and businesses on streets that not long ago were considered too dangerous to walk. When a **Jewel-Osco opens** on Cottage Grove Avenue next spring—the first full-service supermarket in 50 years—it will be in a community where crime is down and population and prices are up, all without any displacement.

There is similar change underway in Bronzeville. Where blighted and condemned housing once stood, the mixed-income Oakwood Shores housing complex and smart public investment have created greater density and a desirable mix of incomes and attracted schools, parks and businesses that serve the community and are important centers of employment.

And it is not only new construction or big federal money that works. On the Southwest Side, local groups have stabilized neighborhoods by buying up, rehabbing and selling or renting homes abandoned during foreclosure, all at affordable prices.

Despite claims to the contrary, and in sharp contrast to other top urban centers, **Chicago is an affordable city**. According to Geoff Smith, director of DePaul University's Institute for Housing Studies, nearly one-third of the city is considered "lower cost," with average home values of \$62,000 and affordable for families making less than \$39,500 per year (50 percent of area median income for a family of four). Another one-third is considered "moderate cost," with home values of \$180,000 and affordable to families earning \$63,200 (80 percent of area median income for a family of four).

A city that works for all. That is the promise and the possibility of a **new five-year housing plan**. We take delight in the prosperity and growth of the central area and lakefront communities that contribute greatly to Chicago remaining a vital city. As longtime neighborhood developers, it is our goal to use the planning process to ensure that the city's precious financial resources are used where they can do the most good, making every neighborhood a viable place for families to live, work, learn and play.

*David Doig is president of **Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives**, Bill Eager is a vice president of **Preservation of Affordable Housing**, Ghian Foreman is executive director of **Greater Southwest CDC** and Richard Townsell is executive director of **Lawndale Christian Development Corp.***

More:

Meet the rebuilders of the Chicago Southland

House-flippers discover the South Side—and that's a good thing

Why I moved from the South Side to the North Shore
