



WOODLAWN NEWS HOUSING

How city officials propose to preserve Woodlawn's affordable housing

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A new ordinance aims to protect homeowners and renters

By **Sara Freund** | Feb 26, 2020, 2:24pm CST



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Since plans for the [Obama Presidential Center were announced](#), residents of Woodlawn have asked city officials for protections against displacement, skyrocketing housing costs, and developers trying to make a profit.

Median home sale prices almost doubled from \$92,000 in 2010 to \$175,000 in 2019, according to a report from Network of Woodlawn and AECOM. A study from DePaul Institute for Housing Studies shows that pending developments on the scale of the Obama Center have a high chance of increasing economic development and, along with that: more expensive housing, less affordable housing, and the displacement of low- and moderate-income households.

While an ordinance for a Community Benefits Agreement was introduced last summer by a group of aldermen—the mayor's office and the Department of Housing [proposed their own ordinance on Tuesday](#).

The draft of the Woodlawn Affordable Housing Preservation ordinance outlines ways to address the housing concerns of residents. In a [letter to Woodlawn homeowners and renters](#), released along with the draft, Mayor Lori Lightfoot said:

"We have heard from countless voices. Renters who want more and better affordable housing options, especially for those at very low incomes. Homeowners who want programs to help repair and maintain their homes. Residents who want a more comprehensive and coordinated effort to build more pathways to middle class homeownership and increase their property values," she said. "We want to be your partners in the journey ahead."

Primarily, the ordinance is an effort to give residents more of a say in what happens in their neighborhood. There are provisions that protect against displacement, maintains current affordable housing, and promotes a range of housing options.

It would impose an affordability requirement on all rental and for-sale housing developed on city-owned land. Specifically, all

for-sale single-family homes must be sold to owner-occupant households earning no more than 120 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) annually—that median annual income is around \$25,000.

Unlike other neighborhoods with rising housing costs, the city owns about 30 percent of the 1,200 vacant lots in Woodlawn. That's a good chunk the city has control, so if the city is successful, it could lead to the creation of more affordable housing.

Another goal of the ordinance is to make homeownership more accessible and grow programs like the Building Neighborhoods and Affordable Housing. There is more funding for price assistance to households who make up to \$106,000 for a family of four.

Homeowners who have owned property for ten or more years could get a grant of up to \$15,000 for home repairs through Woodlawn Long-term Homeowner Home Improvement initiative. That program would get an additional \$1 million in funding through the ordinance.

Under the Right of First Refusal Program, renters in buildings with 10 or more units would get an opportunity to make an offer on the property prior to another sale. Plus, the Preservation of Existing Affordable Rental program would get \$1.5 million in funds. This program helps apartment building owners refinance which could help keep rent affordable.

Overall, the ordinance dedicates \$4.5 million and leverages \$5 million in loan funds to programs like these and others that will assist with the rehabilitation of existing affordable housing.

The organizers of [CBA Coalition](#) criticized the ordinance in a statement to the [Hyde Park Herald](#), saying it “falls extremely short,” and that it wouldn't stop displacement.

Alderman Jeanette Taylor (20th), the Woodlawn neighborhood is in her ward, told [Block Club](#) “there's room to negotiate” and that she would respond in a statement on Monday.

Much of the ordinance is focused on growing homeownership, likely because about 60 percent of Woodlawn residents are renters, according to Chicago Metropolitan Agency of Planning [data](#). [Homeownership is a way of increasing](#) net worth, and making it more accessible to low-income residents can help a neighborhood thrive.

It's unclear if this ordinance was drafted to replace the earlier CBA that was introduced last summer. However, the mayor's office wants to implement policies quickly—her administration is looking for feedback from the public by March 6. Stay tuned for updates.