Written Testimony of Janne Flisrand
On behalf of Neighbors for More Neighbors

United State Senate Subcommittee on
Housing, Transportation, and Community Development
September 12th 2023

Thank you, Chair Smith, Senator Lummis, and all of the members of the Housing, Transportation, and Community Development Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify about Minneapolis' trailblazing housing policy. My name is Janne Flisrand, and I am a co-founder of a local advocacy group called Neighbors for More Neighbors (N4MN). We stand up for secure, abundant homes for everyone in Minneapolis. We envision a future where we all find secure, affordable homes in neighborhoods we choose. We want those neighborhoods to provide easy access to jobs, amenities, family, and friends. We want our neighborhoods to have all kinds of homes so that as our needs change, we can stay in the communities we love. We imagine a day where this is true for everyone: owners and renters, and people of all ethnicities and income levels.

Nationally, we have a 4 million home shortage. In Minnesota that is about 95,000[i] unbuilt homes. In Minneapolis alone, we need 4,000 new homes a year to house our growing population and fill our housing shortage. Thanks to recent policy changes, in Minneapolis we are starting to get them built.

Starting ten years ago, people in Minneapolis recognized that our zoning and permitting process was in the way of us building the homes we needed. City leaders began re-aligning these policies that match our stated values: affordable, inclusive, and climate-friendly. Volunteer advocates like me pushed to shift regulations away from arbitrary, discretionary, project-by-project, approvals. Those regulations favored the unaffordable status quo. To fix those rules, we had to think differently about our cities. Making this change took three groups of people working together. The first group is community members like us. We used humor, art, social media, and blogs to focus attention on the problems and demand solutions. The second group is city staff, who brought data and designed a planning process that made space for more voices to weigh in on our land use plan. Finally, elected leaders had to respond and vote to adopt - and implement - the plan.

Our city planners re-envisioned community engagement to our collective values and our vision for the future that shape the plan. They made space for people whose second-shift jobs and lack of child care don't usually let them attend public meetings. They invited people into the conversation with fun, food, and innovative questions - it felt more like the Minnesota State Fair than a shouting match. And, they got different results. They brought in thousands of people, including younger, lower-income residents and interest groups who don't usually think about land use.

As advocates, we engaged with this process at every turn and contributed some research of our own. When powerful people defended single-family-zoning by distributing hyperbolic "Don't Bulldoze our Neighborhoods" signs, we biked every block of Minneapolis mapping the signs, and found that the opposition was concentrated in neighborhoods that had benefited the most from redlining and other exclusionary practices. We turned residents out to the City's events, we tabled, we talked to our family, our friends, and the media.

We called for a predictable set of rules that lets us build more homes, more types of homes, and less expensive homes.
A series of zoning changes has made this possible. The most important changes are ending our apartment ban and eliminating parking minimums. Our city has built an average of 3,740 homes each of the last four years, close to that goal of 4,000 a year. We are still short of the homes we need, but building these homes has put rent increases in check. They are a key reason why our metro recently recorded the lowest rate of inflation[ii] in the country.

Zoning is a locally controlled issue, but there is a role for national policy to incentivize these local changes, subsidize new homes, to stabilize construction boom and bust cycles, and to reimplement long-abandoned federal low-interest loan programs for affordable housing urban and rural communities. Passing and funding this work at the federal level could play a major part in ensuring we have enough quality homes for all our neighbors. For today, I want you to know that there are people like me, groups like Neighbors for More Neighbors, all over the country. We are fighting to create communities where homes are abundant and affordable, where our neighborhoods are stronger because we welcome new neighbors instead of keeping them out.

Having Abundant Homes Helps:

Address our Housing Crisis

Minnesota, like many states, has a housing shortage. In Minnesota there are an estimated 95k more households than there are homes for them. This means people with wealth outbid those without for the homes we do have. The larger the home shortage, the more people experience longer commutes, cramped co-living, and unhoused homelessness. Neighbors for More Neighbors organized in response to this shortage and the opportunity to help shape the response to it. We saw the need to build a movement of neighbors affirming that our communities are better when we have more neighbors. We support building more homes so that everyone can have a place to go home to here in Minnesota.

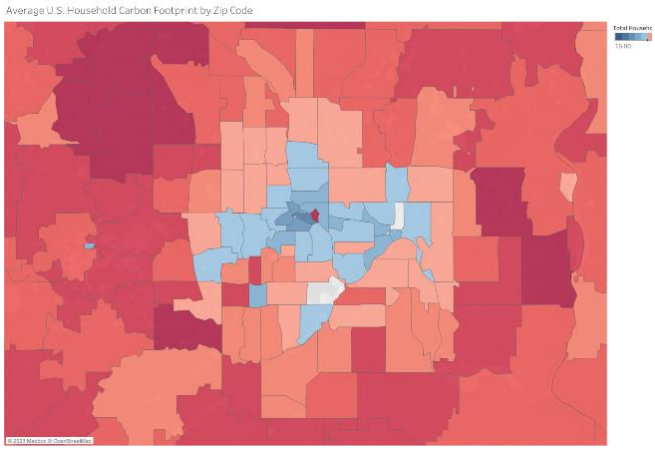
Slow Climate Change[iii]

Where we put homes, shops, and jobs determines how we get from one to the other. Shorter distances between home and where we need to go lets us walk, roll, bike, and drive in smaller amounts that are less harmful to the environment. As the climate continues to change, complete neighborhoods will allow us to be better stewards of our resources and to allow for a brighter future for the kids we love. Complete neighborhoods keep people from using as many resources to travel within and outside of the city, lowering our carbon emissions.

Create Complete Neighborhoods

Complete neighborhoods create the community that people and the planet need to thrive. Complete neighborhoods have all the pieces that a healthy urban community needs. The balance of a variety of housing, green spaces and businesses creates a human-scale economy where people can flourish. Complete neighborhoods are hubs of people and energy, places feel activated and people are connected. Incomplete neighborhoods— places that lack shops, cafes and walkable streets— leave us isolated and take dollars out of our community.

Carbon Emission Map of Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro



https://coolclimate.org/maps

How did N4MN help Minneapolis change zoning and build more abundant homes?

Neighbors for More Neighbors focuses on ending the many exclusionary policies that let accessible and livable neighborhoods escape making space for more neighbors. This is the story of how an all-volunteer group of advocates helped Minneapolis shift regulations away from unpredictable, discretionary, project-by-project, approvals. Again, that process favors people who have the time, wealth, and expertise to navigate an inaccessible system to protect their privileged interests, it protects the unaffordable status quo. We helped our city shift to predictable rules that let us build enough homes, more types of homes, and less expensive homes. And I want to be very clear about the limitations of ending single family zoning - that is not the one change that will fill the home shortage in any of our communities.

The battle over single-family zoning is a proxy for power, for who gets to decide what - and who - is allowed in our cities. When someone purchases property, what rights do they have to say what happens on their neighbor's property? Certainly some rules are necessary, because some land use harms residential neighborhoods. But Neighbors For More Neighbors argues that the government policies should not be hijacked by a vocal few who leverage process to claim veto power over everyone else. In Minneapolis, Neighbors for More Neighbors organized to end our city's apartment ban. We work for policies that make it possible to build less expensive homes. We work for the kinds of neighborhoods that make our communities wealthier, healthier, and happier.

This is the story of how we ended our city's apartment ban as part of our city's most recent comprehensive plan, Minneapolis 2040. To do that, we had to make two things that are invisible visible. We had to reveal the way that zoning was first used as an instrument of racial segregation and the continuing legacy of those actions today. And we had to have a very public power struggle to show that the political will exists to create a different, more just future.

The outlines of Minneapolis history are familiar to anyone who has studied American urban history. On land stolen from the Minnesota Tribal Nations, American settlers harnessed the Mississippi River's power to grow a logging and milling powerhouse in the late 1800's. As our streetcar suburbs grew in the early 1900's, racially restrictive covenants segregated the city. Racially biased federal lending practices and episodes of terroristic violence reinforced that segregation.

Urban renewal and the construction of interstates 94 and 35 further divided the city and decimated Black communities which lay in the path of the federal bulldozer. White flight hollowed out the tax base. Our history is typical of US cities, structured and segregated by an accumulation of explicitly and functionally racist policies.[iv] Today, while white Minneapolis self-identifies as a progressive city, we have done little to reckon with these ugly parts of our history. As a result we have racial disparities that are by some measures the worst in the nation.

That's where Mapping Prejudice, a group outside government based at the U of M, comes in. Launched in 2016, they engaged 2,924 of volunteers to comb through 177,343 historic documents, uncovering the history of how Minneapolis became segregated. They were searching for racial covenants, and found about 30,000 of them.

110 years ago, Minneapolis wasn't segregated. Then, in 1909, an African American couple, Madison and Amy Jackson, bought a house in Prospect Park. Soon after, they helped their friend, William H. Simpson, who was also African American, built a house nearby. In response, a crowd of more than a hundred showed up to protest their new neighbors" in a conflict that a local paper headlined a "race war in Prospect Park."

In Minneapolis, the first racially-restrictive deed appeared one year later in 1910. Covenants created demographic patterns that remain in place in Minneapolis today. People who tried to challenge this system were often met with similar mob violence, such as when Arthur and Edith Lee, a Black couple, faced a mob of 4,000 White people demanding that they leave the home they had purchased in South Minneapolis in 1931. Over time, residential segregation reinforces other disparities in employment, education and health care to create inequalities that seem like they always existed. In fact, these inequalities were created deliberately by actions at a specific place and time.

Mapping Prejudice created an animated map of racial covenants. It shows how these deeds sprouted and spread across the city and county. Their research also showed the City of Minneapolis response after the 1953 MN Legislature prohibited the use of racial covenants. Minneapolis adopted exclusionary zoning which kept wealthy, white neighborhoods from changing. Today, this research has prompted many white Minneapolitans to reflect on how, while we didn't create it, we benefit from this unjust system.

People don't know about racially-restrictive deeds or that zoning is systematically exclusionary. You have to connect the dots.

In Minneapolis, we're consistently fed the story of our exceptionalism. We're near the top of all the lists. Best park system. Best biking city. Turns out we also top the list of the biggest racial disparities - in one example, 3 of 4 White families own their homes, but only 1 in 4 Black families do.

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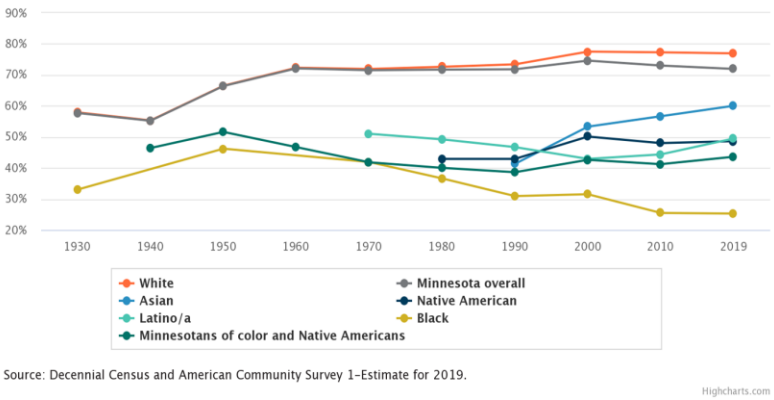
Homeownership rates have fallen for Black and Latino/a households in Minnesota



Source: Decennial Census and American Community Survey 1-Estimate for 2019.

Highcharts.com

At the same time, people working inside City Hall began to recognize both this reality and City government's role in preserving the segregated status quo. When city planners started the comprehensive planning process in 2016, data and stories from Mapping Prejudice were at the core of their thinking.

This coincided with the emergence of other key groups working on housing issues, such as Renters United for Justice, or IX, a tenant organizing dynamo. Their work revealed the reality of what renters face in Minneapolis. They've focused on organizing some of the most vulnerable renters in our city, often immigrants who have very low incomes and limited legal resources.

In 2018 a renter named "Vanessa Del Campo Chacon told her story to MinnPost. Once, a teacher pointed out that her daughter never crawled, and Vanessa realized it was because she felt anxious about leaving her on the floor, given her worries about mice and insects."

A renter named Timothy Brown told his story in Shelterforce “My house isn’t weatherproofed for the winter, which is unbearably cold in Minneapolis. Last year, I lived through the entire winter without heat because my landlord refuses to fix the house and the heating system.”

IX organized renters to fight and share these stories in the news at the same time rents were increasing rapidly, and renters had few options to move. Without IX telling these stories, most Minneapolitans couldn’t imagine what low income renters in our neighborhoods face. They and their allies made tenants’ rights, affordable housing, and displacement a central theme in local elections.

Finally, there was a community of volunteers writing and thinking about local government and what kind of city they wanted to live in. It coalesced around a group blog called streets.mn, the bicycle advocacy organization Our Streets Minneapolis, and an unconventional news source called WedgeLIVE, founded by a local renter named John Edwards.

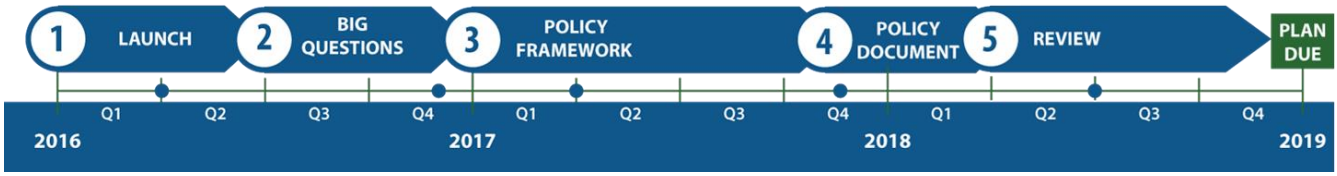
John first became involved when he attended a neighborhood meeting for a proposed apartment building. He’d expected the proposal to be a slam dunk, an obvious asset to the mostly renter neighborhood. Instead he discovered neighbors who opposed the building. They used language that dehumanized renters and dismissed renters' need for homes. He saw hyper-local meetings supposedly representing the community were dominated by small cliques. He decided the whole community needed access to those conversations. He began to live-tweet his neighborhood organization meetings and over time expanded to Planning Commission meetings.

It was in this context that the city’s long range planning staff started work on Minneapolis 2040, our city’s land use plan.

The City of Minneapolis was two miles into a marathon to eliminate racial disparities, strongly supported by then-Mayor Betsy Hodges and the City Council. Outside of city hall, advocates focused the conversation on how building abundant homes, and in particular abundant cheaper homes, were one key part of addressing historic wrongs. Throughout the process, Neighbors for More Neighbors worked hard to make the processes of local government more accessible. City staff like the long-range planners knew this plan was critical and the opportunity of their careers. The planners also had experience that had taught them how political this work was going to be.

The stage was set to not just acknowledge our history but also to wrestle with its implications for city policy today.

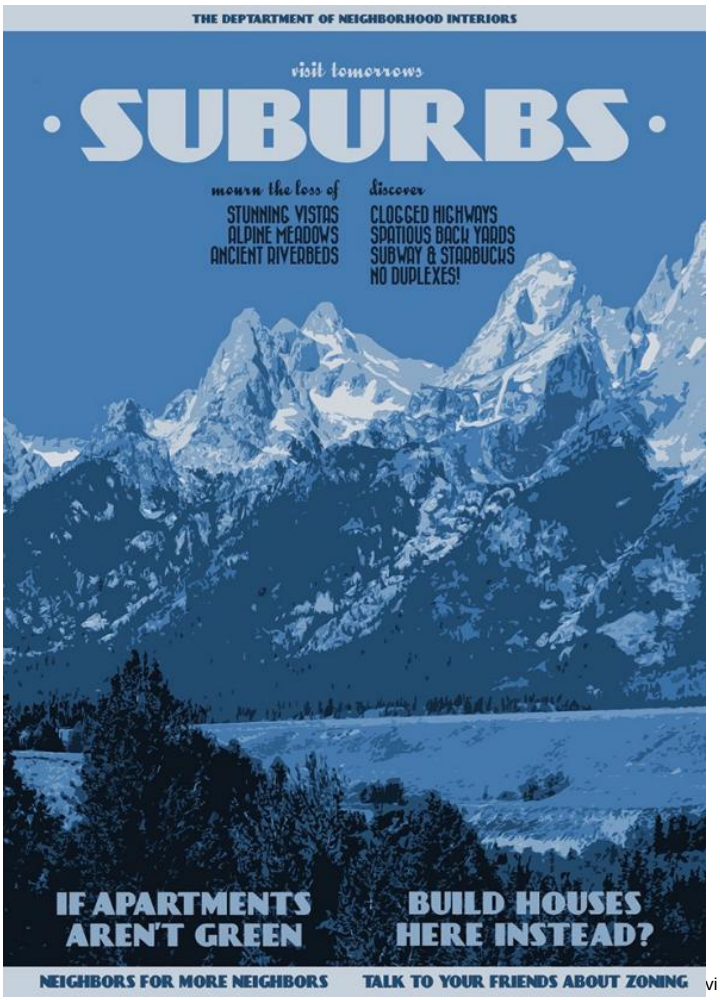
The planners started their process by naming a historic problem with government-run public engagement: “Historically people of color and indigenous communities (POCI), renters, and people from low-income backgrounds have been underrepresented in civic processes.” In response, city staff specifically designed the plan to address underrepresentation. They pitched and secured a significant budget for community engagement from the City Council.



That gave the planners resources to host a totally different kind of process, and the space to document support for a different kind of plan. The three-year engagement process focused on the voices of people who don’t typically participate. Early phases, before the process was public, included community dialogues hosted by typically underrepresented cultural communities, like the East African community, and the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors. They also showed up at every cultural and neighborhood festival asking big questions, like, “How will your housing needs change between now and 2040?“

This same year, John Edwards and a friend named Ryan Johnson began to joke about the meaningless word-soup group names of various Facebook pages that sprung up to oppose specific developments. One of them came up with the joke name “Neighbors United Against Having More Neighbors.” That’s when it crystallized for them that what they were fighting for was More Neighbors. That became the positive, sincere name of our group, “Neighbors for More Neighbors.”

Neighbors for More Neighbors began as a humorous art campaign[v] about why building more homes was important. The art went viral on social media. As their following grew they began posting action alerts for apartment projects that needed support. That made projects like the apartments for youth aging out of foster care that’s now a couple blocks from my home. Their following showed up to advocate for new homes the Planning Commission, making a pro-homes case it had rarely heard before.



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Meanwhile at the staff level, the engagement shifted to a new, more public phase. At these open events, they framed up activities by reminding us of our values and the data-supported challenges we face. They asked us big questions, things we could answer, like How do you get around the city today? How do you think your transportation needs will change by 2040?"

They hired artists to design engagement activities at formal events. For example, TV2040 was a fake television program being recorded live in 2040. Staged as a game show, meeting attendees were recruited as contestants and asked trivia about how the city had changed. In another example, poets with manual typewriters asked attendees question prompts, for example about their housing needs in 2040, and then wrote poetry on the spot capturing their answers. Every event was full of kid-friendly activities, play doh, scissors and art projects, drawing, adults taking their opinions and questions seriously, and the meetings were full of engaged kids.

Images - 1 Minneapolis 2040

Images - 2 Minneapolis 2040

From mobile-friendly commenting to fun events with free food, they re-envisioned public engagement to feel like the State Fair, not like a shouting match. They invited us into the conversation, and you could tell that they were taking our ideas seriously. The poems, drawings, sculptures, and quiz show answers are part of the formal public record. At every meeting, they reflected back to us what they had heard us say. Our ideas became part of the plan. Because it was fun and we could see we were heard, thousands of new people showed up - and the input was different, supporting change. As a result, planners proposed big, exciting ideas that motivated people to come out in support.

In the Minneapolis' 2040 draft, the long-range planners cited Mapping Prejudice and connected the dots of how history created segregation and racial housing disparities today.

The plan identified how every part of the city has a role to play in dismantling those systems. This was the first time we called on the most exclusive parts of Minneapolis to be part of the solution, beyond paying taxes. This was the first step in dismantling exclusionary zoning, where the status quo was put in historical context and explicitly challenged. This call to action in the 2040 draft primed the engagement process to make something else that typically is invisible visible, showing that there is political will for a different future.

This is the part of the story you may have read about, where the controversy erupted over specific parts of the plan. One of the hundreds of ideas in the plan was allowing 4plexes on any lot in the city. Someone who'd attended the private City Council briefing leaked the "fourplexes anywhere" headline weeks before the plan was formally released. Given how common 4plexes are in Minneapolis and given how fondly Minneapolitans remember their own years renting in a 4plex, I'm still surprised what happened next.

That leak drew all attention around the plan, it set the terms of the coming debate, and it triggered an extraordinary amount of opposition. Many people came out to defend single-family-zoning. They distributed lots of apocalyptic red signs, saying "Don't Bulldoze our Neighborhoods." One of their core organizers included a sitting elected official - and she used her bully pulpit every chance she got. Another organizer was a former city council member, who once chaired the zoning committee. These were folks who knew their way around City Hall and processes, who had lots of influential connections, and who were used to getting their way.

> **"Racial disparities persist in all aspects of housing. Until the 1960s, zoning regulations, racially discriminatory housing practices, and federal housing policies worked together to determine who could live in single-family houses in "desirable" neighborhoods. These determinations were based on race and have shaped the opportunities granted to multiple generations of Minneapolis residents."**
>
> — Minneapolis 2040 Draft Plan

This is where our local social media celebrities who came up with the Neighbors for More Neighbors name applied their humor and skill. They informed the public, organized advocates, and battled back. Through his WedgeLIVE account, John Edwards, offered well-researched tweets and blogs to advocate for the comprehensive plan and rebut opposition arguments. One tidbit he unearthed was that the leader of the group behind the "don't bulldoze our neighborhood" signs had bulldozed his own house to build a bigger house.

Ryan Johnson, our other local hero, organized volunteers who biked every single block of Minneapolis to map red bulldoze signs. He superimposed this data on top of old federal redlining maps and property value data. He showed that where historic policies created racially concentrated areas of affluence were also the places with the strongest opposition to reform in the present. Ryan and John led our social media campaign around 2040.

Neighbors for More Neighbors also launched a traditional organizing approach, beyond Twitter. We drew in hundreds of volunteers, and it's important to take a moment to talk about who these volunteers were. They included folks administering Section 8 programs whose clients couldn't find places that will accept their vouchers because of the tight market. They included seniors who want different kinds of options in their neighborhoods for themselves and for their grandkids. They included small landlords - like me - who want the opportunities we had to be available for younger generations. Our supporters were more likely to be people whose voices are usually missing in these conversations; young people, transplants, and renters.

And we organized! As Neighbors for More Neighbors, we had to let people know what the comprehensive plan is, and that it was important to show up, that their voice mattered. We had to let them know when, where, and how to show up. We reminded people to ask that neighborhood zoning re-legalize the kind of homes, that exist now, to allow more homes close to useful things, to eliminate parking requirements, to re-legalize single room occupancy apartments, as well as expressing support for fourplexes.

We held "Meeting in a Box" comment parties to make the comment process more accessible. One of our members, a woman of color, is uncomfortable attending a public meeting because she's experienced harassment at public meetings in the past. She could comfortably participate at the events we hosted. We also sent out instructions on how to comment from home. Bikers could help with mapping or deliver yard signs to supporters. Extroverts could table at Open Streets events, where we learned that the Bulldozer sign people helped us. It was common for someone to come up and ask us, "Are you the opposite of those red sign people?" and walk away from our booth with a Neighbors for More Neighbors yard sign and having signed up for our email alerts.

Everyone could participate in the Walk and Talks we organized with council members - where we made sure to point out the existing fourplexes in their wards that many had never noticed. Activists reached out to their networks of likely allies working on labor, transportation, and climate issues. We wrote blog posts and pitched our friends and neighbors, and we talked to the media. We flogged every public meeting. And, people showed up, hundreds of people! We could see how our engagement shaped the plan. It was rewarding to see your own words, or the themes you'd offered, show up in the revised plan draft.

Despite all this organizing, and the welcoming process city planners had created, there were plenty of people who still didn't show up to this more traditional "comment" part of the engagement process. Yes, the public meetings had food and childcare and translators and fun activities and the people who showed up reflected that effort. And, it was still true that fewer disabled people, Black and Indigenous people, people who speak Spanish or Somali at home, people who work lower-paid service and second and third-shift jobs attended than live in Minneapolis. The planners had prepared for this. Starting with intentional, invitation-only outreach to these communities early on, and using festivals that reached a more representative audience to define community values - that was critical. They included the input from those meetings in the formal record. Most importantly, when the Council adopted the values reflecting that early input as organizing principles for the plan, those perspectives were the structure holding the Minneapolis 2040 plan together.

By the end of 2018, as we neared formal passage of the plan, the activities shifted to the more traditional public engagement theater familiar to civically engaged folks. There were countless meetings in churches and park buildings where people shouted at the then Director of Long-Range Planning. Neighbors for More Neighbors kept organizing because we found widespread support for making space for more people in Minneapolis. We made it our job to turn these supporters out. We found that this broad support was more of a "yeah sure sounds good to me" kind of a support, rather than a, "I TOTALLY WANNA TESTIFY IN FRONT OF CITY COUNCIL ABOUT THIS!" support, but oftentimes the system only hears the latter kind of public response.

So, we recruited people to testify at the City Hall hearings. One volunteer had the insight that going down to City Hall to testify is intimidating if you haven't done it before. He knew that one thing that can make it more comfortable is if you can find your people. That's why we encouraged people to wear purple and he took a roller bag with extra purple sweatshirts to hand out.

We made a party, a community organizing party, out of both multi-hour testimony events, as our members waited to be the 100th person to testify. An older volunteer brought a purse full of snacks. We sat around clustered on the floor in the halls, watching testimony on the monitors and in the overflow room. When that elected official who was the self-appointed leader of the opposition tried to persuade a Neighbors for More Neighbors supporter she was wrong and should speak against 2040 plan, we were there to support her. (That harassment was actually what persuaded her to sign up to testify, as she'd only come to watch and support her boyfriend.)

And in the end, while the local media portrayed the story as contentious, at least the triplex part, with more anti- than pro-feedback, our voices were heard. But for that, we needed that third group, beyond the outside-of-city-hall folks, beyond a smart planning staff. We needed the elected officials on our City Council.

In that 2017 local election a year earlier, voters elected a new and forward-thinking city council.

During the election, organizers had made affordable housing the big election issue.

Just as helpful, there was the champion on the City Council who spent three years setting the stage for the vote. Lisa Bender was Chair of the Planning and Zoning committee in her first term, where she laid the foundation for Minneapolis 2040. She built consensus for reforms that legalized Accessory Dwelling Units throughout the city in 2014. She secured votes to reduce parking requirements near transit corridors in 2015. These earlier changes had jump-started more housing construction. They showed that the changes in Minneapolis 2040 would create gradual but meaningful change. We had tangible examples of what change would and wouldn't look like. She shepherded through that pre-election vote formally adopting the set of values Minneapolis 2040 was built around. That locked in the work completed before the 2017 election, no matter the election results. She became City Council President in her second term and continued to bring her colleagues along.

Images - 3 Photo by Tony Webster

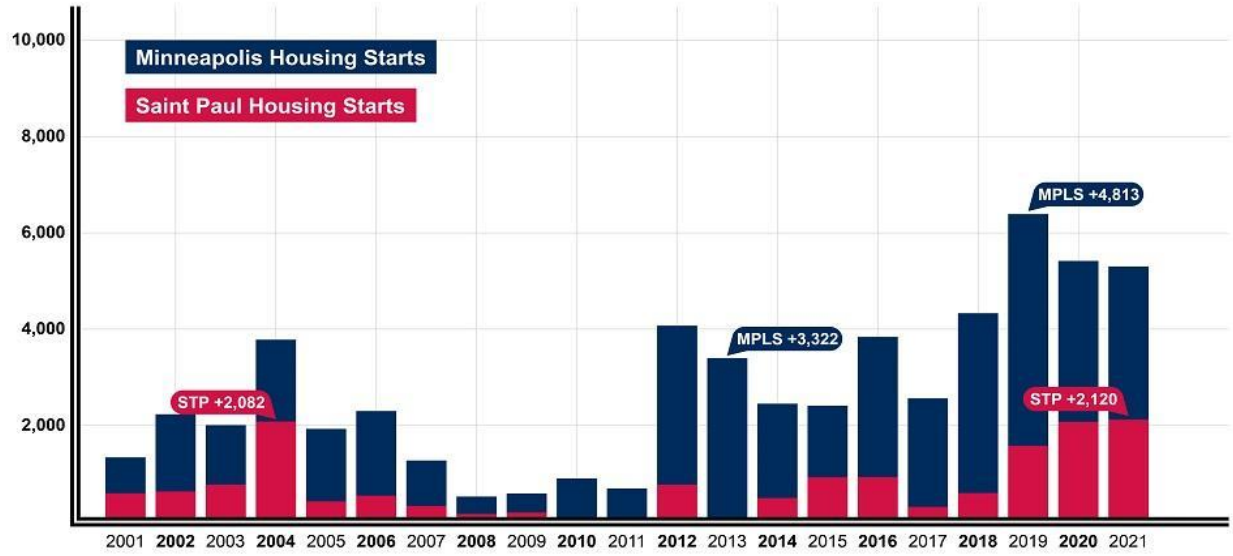
Lisa Bender
Minneapolis City Council President (2018-2021)

After seeing the stories from Mapping Prejudice, joining Neighbors for More Neighbors on walk and talks, and working with city staff, after 2 years of council discussion and skilled negotiating by Council President Bender, the City Council understood why it was important to support this big plan. After a year of sitting behind that imposing Council dais, they had seen that people opposing things show up and people supporting them don't -- and yet with this plan we did. They needed -- and saw -- that they had community support. The vote on the plan was hard, and most of our elected leaders took that hard vote. The remarkable 12-1 vote in favor of this bold Minneapolis 2040 plan that eliminates many pieces of our exclusionary zoning was a big step towards building a better future for Minneapolis.

It wasn't easy, and we're not done. Passing Minneapolis 2040 didn't change the underlying zoning or any regulations. It merely obligated the City Council to do that in the coming years, thanks to Minnesota state law which gives the comprehensive plan precedence over the zoning code. Neighbors for More Neighbors shifted our focus to ensuring the city implemented the zoning and parking reforms.

It's been a few years since the plan passed, and we're starting to see changes. As predicted, the changes with the greatest impact had nothing to do with ending single family zoning, although that remains an important symbolic step.

The first change from Minneapolis 2040 is a response to the debate rather than the substance in the plan. Adopting 2040 signaled what Minneapolis wants to see. It told developers that we want more homes, lots more homes. Builders heard that signal. The year after the plan passed, we saw a jump in the number of homes proposed in Minneapolis. The Planning Commission approvals leaped from 2,600 units in 2015 to 5,077 units in 2020. Reforms adopted before Minneapolis 2040 passed made these homes possible, but the plan approval prompted investment.



Graphic: 1 by Alex Schiefferdecker

The first zoning update was legalizing up to three housing units on any lot in the city. However, that didn't include any changes to make it easier to fit those three units into a building. That is a main reason we've seen so few new triplexes built. We also passed inclusionary zoning, and lifted anti-roommate zoning rules. In 2020, our members led advocacy updating zoning code "built form regulations." We also led advocacy to update zoning code "land use regulations" in the last year.

Building more homes is reducing housing costs in multiple ways.

First, when we have enough homes for everyone, people who want nicer, newer apartments can find them. In turn, they stop bidding up rents for older, more affordable apartments. This ensures they are available for the people who need them, and are not flipped to offer to people who can afford higher rents because there aren't other options.
Second, regulations play a big part in whether we build enough homes. In Minneapolis, two key policy changes prompted increased housing construction. The two changes were removing the apartment ban in the zoning code and removing parking mandates. Ending the apartment ban makes it legal to build the homes, and this included allowing apartments along bigger streets. Ending parking mandates makes more construction financially possible because housing cars takes a lot of land and space in a building - space that can't then house people. It also removes a major and previously mandatory cost in new developments, costs that get passed on to tenants as rent.

This work got a bit more size flexibility for triplexes and a few more low-key uses so people have better access to services and groceries. After eliminating parking mandates, developers provide parking to match the market rather than meet a mandate. This change has led to more smaller apartment buildings both on corridors and on smaller lots. Builders can add Single Room Occupancy units for the first time in decades. People who want to add an Accessory Dwelling Units (also called mother-in-law suites or granny flats) have more flexibility. The financing system and builders for triplexes and ADUs has yet to catch up with the changes. Still, the numbers are growing, with duplex, triplex, and fourplex construction adding 50-60 units in each of the last three years.

The last time the zoning code was comprehensively revised was 1999. The final zoning changes identified in the Minneapolis 2040 plan were adopted in 2023 with a unanimous City Council vote. Implementation took five years for a plan that took more than three years to build. Nearly a decade after the first planners held the first meetings, we've updated our zoning regulations. While we're already seeing some results, because it takes years to build a multifamily building, we will know if we did enough to secure housing affordability and stability for all Minneapolitans in a few years.

We're working on tenant protections and helping people pay for what housing costs, too. Minneapolis has adopted tenant screening rules and caps damage deposits. The city has increased its subsidies to affordable housing developers, funds vouchers to families in the public school system at risk of homelessness, and passed a $15 minimum wage that helps low-income workers pay for housing.

So, what are the results? In Minneapolis alone, a planner and Neighbors for More Neighbors volunteer calculated that we need 4,000 new homes a year to accommodate population growth and fill our housing shortage. We've built an average of 3,728 homes each year the last five years. We saw advertised rents drop starting the year before the pandemic. Today, as rents rebound after the pandemic in other large metros, advertised rents in Minneapolis are largely flat. The impact of each policy change -- starting with ADU and parking reforms passed prior to passage of the Minneapolis 2040 plan – layers on top of the others, and the first homes allowed explicitly because of Minneapolis 2040 are just coming available now.

These buildings, those zoning updates, that progress won't be undone. We have more work to do, though. The same crowd who fought against passing Minneapolis 2040 brought a lawsuit against the city to stop the plan, and that battle continues in the courts. Minneapolis still has building size regulations like required yards, floor-area-ratio limits, and 2.5 story height limits that make it nearly impossible to build triplexes on an average city lot. Other outdated building codes drive up construction costs with mandates for excessive hallway space[vii] in mid-sized apartment buildings.

The battle over single-family zoning is a proxy for power, for who gets to decide what - and who - is allowed in our cities. We're excited to see states like Washington, Montana, Oregon, and Vermont are also doing the hard work of land use reform. This isn't just a local and state issue. There is a role for national policy that builds subsidized homes, stabilizes construction boom and bust cycles, and updates long-abandoned federal low-interest loan programs for affordable housing in all sorts of communities. Passing and funding this work at the federal level could play a major part in ensuring we have enough quality homes or all our neighbors.

Neighbors for More Neighbors' work to end Minneapolis' apartment ban was just one step, albeit an important and meaningful one, in our fight to create a city where homes are abundant and affordable and our neighborhoods are stronger because we welcome new neighbors rather than keeping them out.

Sincerely,

Janne Flisrand *Neighbors for More Neighbors*

Assisted by N4MN Volunteers: Brit Anbacht, Zachary Wadja, and Alex Schieferdecker

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[i] Estimated homes shortages are courtesy of Up for Growth and account for both unhoused shortages and households which share a home and would otherwise be separate. https://upforgrowth.org/apply-the-vision/housing-underproduction/

[ii] Recent articles in Bloomberg Minneapolis Controls US Inflation With Affordable Housing, Renting - Bloomberg and local NBC outlet KARE 11 Twin Cities inflation rate among lowest in the country | kare11.com put MSP metro inflation at 1.8% compared to 3.2% nationally.

[iii] Carbon footprint on a per capita level is much lower in compact cities. See https://www.businessinsider.com/carbon-footprint-maps-2014-1 and https://coolclimate.org/maps

[iv] Information about the racist history of zoning is primarily found in "The Color of Law" by Richard Rothstein. Available in a short version from Shortform: The Color Of Law Book Summary by Richard Rothstein (shortform.com)

[v] Slate wrote an article which includes several more of the early 2018 shitpost art installments. "Talk to Your Friends About Zoning": A PSA Campaign for Your NIMBY Neighbors. (slate.com)

[vi] The text here says "The Department of Neighborhood Interiors. Visit Tomorrows Suburbs. Mourn the loss of Stunning Vistas, Alpine Meadows, Ancient riverbeds. Discover Clogged Highways, spatious back yards, Subway & Starbucks, No Duplexes! If Apartments aren't green, build here instead? Neighbors For More Neighbors. Talk to your friends about zoning."

[vii] Double egress requirements from the International Fire Code