

Community Issues Forum Focuses On Cincinnati's Affordable Housing Crisis - Part I Examines The Need And Part 2 Features The Charter Amendment To Fund The Trust Fund  
(by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

The Community Issue Forum began a two part series on Cincinnati's Affordable Housing Crisis on April 8th. Realizing that voters in the May 4th Primary will decide the fate of a City Charter Amendment proposal to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, Forum planners saw this as an appropriate time to inform people about this worsening crisis. Starting on the 8th with presentations on how this situation impacts the lives of thousands of individuals and families with children, the Forum will then focus on the proposed Amendment itself on April 22nd.



Past Forums have dealt with the research documenting the lack of affordable housing units in Cincinnati such as the recent LISC-study revealing the need for 28,000 affordable units. The goal of the Forum on the 8th was to go beyond the numbers to put a human face on this crisis. The speakers, Mary Burke Rivers, Executive Director of Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, and Stacey Burge, Executive Director of the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati, did just that.



eviction or homelessness.

In her opening remarks, Mary Burke Rivers, began by talking about the number of full time workers who lack the income to pay the average rents in their neighborhoods. She showed a chart revealing the average hourly salaries for occupations such as health care workers and pre-school teachers and compared them to the average rents for two bedroom apartments. This comparison revealed a situation where thousands of local workers fail to earn incomes that provide them with the wherewithal to afford both their rent and other basic needs. This fact keep so many families on the edge of

Burke went on to discuss the costs and other fiscal complexities that builders or rehabbers confront that make it difficult for even organizations like hers to keep rents low enough for underpaid workers to afford. Non-profit development corporations like Over-the-Rhine Community Housing face a series of daunting fiscal issues when building and maintaining their housing, according to Burke, and the current limited supply of money from government grants and programs makes it impossible to even make a dent in the growing need.

Stacey Burge reinforced Mary Burke's point that so many people do not earn sufficient salaries to afford this city's current housing market. It is what keeps so many of IHN's clients in a permanent state of "housing insecurity." Although IHN assists its homeless families to find places to rent, Burge emphasized that the choices are often far from ideal in terms of needs and costs. These insecure situations often lead again to homelessness or eviction.

Stacey Burge told Forum attendees about a trend that points to the worsening nature of

Cincinnati's affordable housing crisis. On average, it used to take twenty-eight days for IHN families to find housing that would allow them to leave a homeless shelter. That number has now more than doubled to fifty-eight days. Burge noted how difficult it now is to find even far from perfect affordable housing options for their clients.

The fact that IHN-families and clients of other homeless shelters are now remaining in these facilities for much longer periods creates an additional crisis. It means that new homeless families and individuals are often unable to find available shelter beds. Although an effective group of shelters and services have developed since homelessness became a major problem in the 1980s, this emergency safety net is not meant to replace permanent affordable housing as the solution.



The presentations of Mary Burke Rivers and Stacey Burge sparked some lively commentary and questions from the Zoom-Forum participants. Although the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Amendment will be the focus of Part II of this series on April 22nd, the April 8th participants kept bringing up the proposal. One person suggested a huge pro-Amendment March comprised of all the occupation groups that would benefit from more affordable housing. A discussion also took place about how to deal with all the misinformation now circulating about this proposal on the May 4th primary ballot. Nobody who took part in this event voiced any doubt about the critical need for additional funding to create affordable housing in Cincinnati.