



Heritage Hill

HOUSING DISCUSSIONS

Sessions: 11.1 & 11.4.2023. Report: 12.18.2023

Heritage Hill Density Discussion Summary

In the fall of 2023, the Heritage Hill Association and the Heritage Hill Association – Land Use Committee received numerous inquiries and questions from Heritage Hill neighbors about a series of zoning amendments being discussed by the City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission. These inquiries and the larger context of the national housing crisis prompted the Heritage Hill Association - Land Use Committee (the Land Use Committee) to discuss the need to facilitate a neighborhood-wide discussion on housing, housing density, and the proposed zoning amendments.

On Wednesday, November 1 from 7 pm – 9 pm and Saturday, November 4 from 10 am to 12 pm, the Heritage Hill Association (the HHA) hosted housing and housing density discussions at the Central Reformed Church. To advertise the discussions to the neighborhood, the HHA posted invitations on social media and mailed postcards to each household in Heritage Hill. Roughly 150 people attended the two sessions.

Sessions began with a presentation, given by a member of the Land Use Committee, on planning, the Grand Rapids Master Plan, zoning, and the relationship between the Master Plan and zoning ordinance. The presentation included some background on the current housing crisis, defined relevant housing terminology, and provided some examples of what housing density looks like in Heritage Hill. The presentation concluded with an overview of the five proposed zoning amendments and the information presented to the Planning Commission on each of the zoning amendments by the City of Grand Rapids Planning Department. Attendees were given an opportunity to ask questions about the proposed zoning amendments and members of the Land Use Committee answered the questions that they were able to answer. Ryan Kilpatrick, of Housing Next, was in attendance on the Wednesday session and was able to answer some attendee questions.



Attendees of the Wednesday Session

In the second hour, attendees were asked to work in small groups and discuss the benefits of housing density and their concerns about housing density. Each group was given sheets of paper to record their thoughts. After roughly 30 minutes of group work, attendees reconvened as a larger group and each small group reported their top three benefits and top three concerns.

At the Wednesday session, given the larger number of people and time constraints, only concerns were shared in the larger group. If there was time at the end of the session, members of the Land Use Committee fielded additional questions from attendees. All papers with recorded comments were collected at the end of the session so the input from attendees could be compiled, analyzed, and included in this summary report. Members of

the Land Use Committee digitized and grouped comments around major themes. The analysis for the following two questions: “What are the benefits of housing density?” And “What are your concerns about housing density?” is below. The full text of the comments is at the conclusion of this report.

Attendees asked the Land Use Committee to include information about how to contact the Planning Commission and Planning Department to provide input on housing, housing density, and other topics. Contact information for the staff liaison to the Planning Commission and planning staff can be found on the City of Grand Rapids’ Planning Commission webpage. Additionally, each regular meeting of the Planning Commission is open public comment.



Multi-Family Building on Cherry St SE

“What are the benefits of housing density?”

Economic Development (20 comments).

The most prevalent theme that emerged in the comments was economic development. Comments mentioned that housing density increases the city's tax base, property owners can make more money from the property, area businesses benefit from the additional people, and the density of people may attract new businesses.

Housing Availability (17 comments). Comments relating to the availability of housing touched on increased housing density adds more housing units and therefore increases the availability of housing. Comments also touched on providing spaces for multigenerational households, non-traditional family households, and increasing housing options.

Community (8 comments). Attendees remarked that housing density increases community connectedness, there are more neighbors to interact with, and talking to neighbors builds community.

Affordability (8 comments). Comments relating to affordability mentioned that housing density might reduce housing costs, provide more units at lower costs of housing, and other cost-sharing benefits.

Walkability (6 comments). The theme of walkability emerged through comments that housing density encourages walkable neighborhoods and breaks car dependency.

Access (5 comments). Several attendees wrote that a benefit of housing density is the proximity of goods and services to the places where people live, improved educational access for children in stable housing environments, and overall increased housing access for unhoused individuals.

Other themes that emerged through the comments include: more neighborhood diversity (4 comments), improved safety (4 comments), better public services (4 comments), three commented that there are no benefits to density (3 comments), better usage of public transportation (3 comments), and neighborhood vibrancy (2 comments).



Attendees of the Wednesday Session

“What are your concerns about housing density?”

Parking (18 comments). The most commonly mentioned concern about housing density was parking - specifically, the potential for increased parking needs, the current lack of parking, and parking congestion on the streets.

Community (11 comments). “Community” comments referenced the loss of families in the neighborhood, the loss of the sense of community in the neighborhood, and the lack of connections between neighbors.

Absentee Landlords (10 comments). Comments expressed concern that density will increase absentee landlords, shift HH to an investor-owned neighborhood, and foster corporations buying up all of the housing stock.

Maintenance (10 comments). Those who mentioned maintenance as a concern cited a deterioration of building exteriors and yards, an increase of trash and rodents, and a lack of maintenance on non-owner-occupied properties.

Noise (8 comments). Comments that mentioned noise touched on the noise from increased traffic, parties, and noise generally.

Traffic (6 comments). Concerns regarding traffic mentioned the increased speeds, higher volume of cars, and traffic safety.

Safety (6 comments). Several comments mentioned concerns about crime, security, car vandalism, and the need for more public safety.

Infrastructure (5 comments). Infrastructure concerns referenced a lack of adequate services, over-extended utilities, and potential strain on existing systems.

Renters (5 comments). “Renter” comments mentioned a decrease in owner occupancy/ownership, investor-owned properties, and frequent turnover of renters.

Other themes that emerged through the comments include increasing levels of unaffordability (3 comments), lack of enforcement for existing regulations (3 comments), lack of effective/efficient public transportation (3 comments), lack of neighbor voice in the planning/housing process (2 comments), and decrease of quality of life (2 comments).



Attendees of the Wednesday Session

Table 01: Raw Comments - Benefits

What are some benefits of housing density?
Accessible housing
Additional income for homeowners possibly supporting better maintenance
Address housing crisis
Allow for multigenerational housing
Allow for non traditional 'family' sharing
Allows younger residents potential
At a certain level, income from residents (tenants) can support the infrastructure of the building if the owner wants to maintain the building
Better economics for restaurants and businesses
Breaking car dependency
Bring in more money
City amenities like sidewalks, streetlights
City sidewalk plowing with increased tax revenues
Climate benefits
Close access to work
Close neighbors and friends
Common services, parks, pools, are used and enjoyed in high density neighborhoods
Co-ops more vested interest in the community than apts. have more coops?
Corporation and investment companies can make more money
Cost sharing savings
Diverse housing results in diverse pricing which allows for a diverse population
Diversity
Diversity - economic, racial, age
Everyone has a place to live
Helps the housing need
High density encourages small business and services development
High density encourages walkable neighborhoods
High density may discourage car ownership
Homes that can add living spaces (carriage houses)
Houses to serve the rent system
Housing more attainable
I don't see any benefit of increasing density in heritage hill
If its owner occupied and the property owner lives there, 6 roommates would be fine
Improve tax revenue (income + property) - more services

What are some benefits of housing density? Cont.

Improved education outcomes for children tied to stable homes
Income potential
Increase availability of housing
Increase economic activity in neighborhood
Increase in revenue for landlords
Increase of taxes for the city
Increase tax base
Increased diversity and vibrancy and less urban sprawl
Increased foot traffic makes for safer areas
Increased supply?
Increased tax revenue
Less reliance on
Less vacant lots
Lower overall housing costs
Lower rents?
Management company
Maybe on irregular lots - make the zoning
Meeting the demand for housing (living) in our neighborhood
Might attract larger retail amenities
Might reduce housing cost
Mobility needs/variety of transit
More affordable housing
More business for local businesses
More community connectedness
More diversity
More diversity - ages/stages/income/race
More housing the home industry
More housing types are available for more types of people and their needs
More neighbors to interact with
More options for housing
More people can live downtown
More people equals more tax revenue for the city
More people in an area draws more products and services (or it should)
More people move in to neighborhood so region prospers if right people are attracted and become more diverse
More people to care for each other

What are some benefits of housing density? Cont.

More small business close to your home
More support for businesses
More tax money for the city
Neighborhood vibrancy
Neighborhood vitality
None
Not a benefit - parking
Not penalizing potential ADU spaces for setbacks or sq. Ft. Minimums since they were already built before the results went into effect (they are not an acceleration due to historic requirements only for owner occupant ADUs)
Nothing good about density (overcrowding, crime, parking, issues, deterioration of the neighborhood and property values)
Occupants have more access to businesses
Only a benefit if owner occupied
Potential for more diversity
Potential to address supply issues
Preferential treatment to residents vs investors helps build community as this is the neighborhood we live in
Provides more units at lower costs of housing (more supply keeps housing more affordable)
Reduce costs
Reduce homelessness
Reduced sprawl throughout the county
Rules about the density of a neighborhood form the character?
Safer neighborhood
Safety - more inviting to others
Safety in numbers
Small businesses benefit from high density
Support public transportation
Tax revenue
This is already very dense
Transportation/services
Urban feel
Variety of housing/income levels
Vibrancy
Walkability
Walkability

What are some benefits of housing density? Cont.

Walkability proximity of services (schools, stores, libraries, etc.)

We love neighbors who talk to each other and build communities

Why not improve public transportation so people can be comfortable living farther and still be able to get to work/actives easily

You always have a neighbor



Multi-Family Building on Cherry St SE

Table 02: Raw Comments - Concerns

What are your concerns about housing density?
A landlord might be required to rent to six people (would be discriminatory to deny renting)
Absentee landlords
Absentee landlords - investment properties
Absentee owners
ADUs should be owner occupied
ADUs would also conversion of single-family housing to 2-family or reversion
Car vandalism
Cars/traffic/parking
Change of overall quality of life - re: existing neighbors
Changes climate of neighborhood
Changes don't help create affordable housing especially when landlords charge by the head
City isn't built to handle many more people (not enough land)
City not able to control the density issues
Congestion of noise (parking)
Corporate development /outside investors
Corporate/institutional buyers
Corporation buying up the neighborhood (absentee landlords)
Crime
Crime
Decrease quality of neighborhood
Decreased owner occupancy / ownership
Decreasing affordable single-family housing (developers)
Density doesn't lower cost, causes wear and tear
Destroys character of neighborhood
Destruction of preserved housing
Deterioration of exteriors and yards due to absentee landlords
Don't want any houses broken up further
Drawing in large commercial rental companies
Frequent turnover
Gentrification
Government main streaming no neighborhood voice
Harder to get city to address nuisance issues quickly
HH bears the weight of the necessary group homes because we have big houses need a distance requirement (double it to spurred across the city)
HH has come from a neighborhood of dilapidated housing stock and absentee landlords to the beautiful neighborhood that it is today why change policy that has worked so well

What are your concerns about housing density? Cont.

Inadequate RAPID routes
Increase in noise, crime, cars, impact on infrastructure - need more police
Increase of absentee landlords
Increase of trash and rodents
Increased demand on public transit
Increased density reduces relationships and community
Integrity of homes decreased
Investor owned
Lack of adequate infrastructure
Lack of compliance/regulation
Lack of infrastructure
Lack of parking
Landlords jacking up rent (not cost sharing)
Less attention to maintenance of houses
Lose families and owner occupants
Losing neighborhood character
Loss of character
Loss of community connections
Loss of community connections
Loss of families in neighborhood
Loss of residential quality of life
Loss of sense of community
Many home on NE side of HH are in decline + all are owned by investors out of state. Concern is that this would only add to the problem as there is no requirement to keep homes in decent condition it is just a source of income for them
More cars
Move to an investor owner neighborhood aka absentee landlords
Moving from 4 unrelated to 6 puts more cars on the street
No owner occupied development
Noise
Noise
Noise
Noise
Noise
Noise issues due to high congestion
Outside developers gaining the most benefit

What are your concerns about housing density? Cont.

Over extended utilities
Overcrowding
Overcrowding - lowers property values
Overcrowding causes disputes - no neighborhood police
Oversaturation
Oversight
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking
Parking congestion
Parking on streets
Parking, too many cars, speeding cars, dangerous to walk
Parking/traffic
Parties
People not using transit - not enough good transit
Possible decrease in property value
Potential for increased parking needs
Preferential treatment to investors (parking requirements)
Property maintenance
Public service requirements
Quality planning
Reinforce single type of development - right kind of development is needed grocery store etc. to reduce need for cars
Removal of voice of neighbors
Security
Security issues (perception)
Too many absentee landlords and private equity firms eliminating availability of home ownership - the very foundation of communities

What are your concerns about housing density? Cont.

Traffic increased speed
Traffic safety
Transients/less neighborly (traditional HHA)
Trash and dog stuff
Trash pickup difficulty
Turn-over neighbors
Unoccupied owners
Unrelated people usually don't have shared values and overuse facilities
Use the history of HH to see the negative impact over density, had + what it took to recover
Wall St investments vs. Main St investment - ownership



Duplex on Prospect Ave SE