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June 2, 2025

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**To the City Plan Commission, Common Council & Mayor**

On behalf of **Metcalf Park Community Bridges, Inc.**, the residents of **Metcalf Park**, and a growing coalition of community organizations across Milwaukee's North and South Sides, we submit this letter in **support of the revised Housing Element of the Citywide Policy Plan**. This letter serves as both a reflection on the community's sustained engagement and advocacy throughout the Growing MKE process, and as a formal endorsement, with important amendments and conditions, of the current draft plan under consideration by the City Plan Commission.

### **A Timeline of Community Leadership and Demands**

On **July 29, 2024**, community members from Metcalfe Park, Metcalfe Park Community Bridges, and organizations across the city, including hundreds of residents, gathered to deliver a clear and unified set of demands regarding the original draft of the Growing MKE Plan:

1. **Pause the approval process for the Growing MKE Plan.** Immediate action was necessary to prevent the disenfranchisement of the communities most impacted by zoning decisions.
2. **Initiate a comprehensive community engagement process**, co-created and co-led by community-based organizations, to ensure that at least **25% of Milwaukee's population** was engaged, especially those historically excluded from planning processes. This included revising surveys to reflect the specific impacts of the proposed changes, offering education sessions on the history and present-day realities of zoning, and ensuring that the **Department of City Development (DCD)** allocated a **budget to support community engagement**.
3. **Incorporate community feedback into a revised draft**, ensuring transparency and accountability in how feedback is reflected in the plan.
4. **Undertake a thorough harm and benefit analysis** of the original plan, including a clear assessment of potential adverse impacts on Black, Brown, and working-class communities, and actionable strategies to mitigate those harms.

## Wins Secured Through Community Power

As of **June 2, 2025**, we commend the City Planning Commission, The Department of City Development, with special thanks to Alderman Russell Stamper, Alderman Jose Perez, Alderman Robert Bauman, Alderwomen Sharleen Moore and Alderwomen Jocasta Zamarripa, and others for their leadership in ensuring that these demands were met to the best of their ability.

- The Growing MKE Plan was **paused for nearly 11 months**, creating the necessary space for deeper engagement.
- A **harm and benefit analysis** were conducted, addressing the community's call for accountability and transparency.
- **Expanded engagement efforts** were implemented, reaching broader and more diverse communities than the original plan ever envisioned. (These efforts could have been more robust, with an allocated budget)
- The "Repair to Grow" community feedback and ideas have been incorporated in this version of the plan.

While we still believe that the **Mayor's Office** and the **full Common Council** should have allocated **greater resources and a robust budget** to deepen community engagement, we recognize the progress that was made through collaboration between DCD, specific alders, community members and community-led organizations. This revised plan reflects far more engagement, care, and community input than the original Growing MKE draft, and we recognize that as a **victory for grassroots organizing, resident leadership, and community determination**.

## A Shift Toward "Repair to Grow Milwaukee"

This current draft reflects an important shift in narrative and intent. The community's consistent call for a **Repair to Grow Milwaukee** framework, one that acknowledges past harm, centers community voice, and prioritizes equity has been woven into this version of the plan.

Metcalf Park Community Bridges, the residents of Metcalfe Park, and community **support this revised Housing Element** as a foundational **blueprint for future zoning decisions and ordinances**. We believe it creates a framework for more equitable, community-centered growth.

## Critical Amendments for Final Approval

However, our support comes with **key amendments and considerations** that must be integrated into the final version before it advances to the Zoning, Neighborhoods, and Development (ZND) Committee and full Common Council:

### 1. Community Acknowledgment

- The plan must include a **Community Acknowledgment Page** that explicitly names and honors the contributions of community members, grassroots organizations, and residents who led the fight for deeper engagement and

equitable planning. This is a matter of respect, transparency, and historical accuracy. We simply would not be here without the will of the people.

## 2. **Historical Context and Harm Analysis**

- The plan must **update its maps and narratives to include the impacts of urban renewal**, explaining not just that 13,000+ homes vanished, but **why they vanished**—including the roles of historical harm and policies, redlining, disinvestment, and targeted demolition. This historical truth must be named as part of any plan for equitable growth.

## 3. **Clarification of Scope and Process**

- The plan must clearly outline its purpose: it is a **blueprint for future zoning decisions related to housing**, not a zoning code rewrite. This distinction must be explicit, along with a transparent explanation of how this plan will inform future ordinances, and how community engagement will be integrated into those future processes.

## 4. **Support for Local Developers**

- The language in the plan must be revised to ensure that **local, small-scale developers**—such as **Acre graduates and community-based developers**—are prioritized **equally or above** large, out-of-state developers when it comes to city resources, land access, and development opportunities. This is critical for ensuring that housing development transforms communities from the inside out, not through external extraction.

## 5. **Call for Broader Systemic Solutions**

- While this is a housing element plan, it must also **name the broader conditions required for housing justice**—including but not limited to the need for **living-wage jobs, increased minimum wage, grocery stores, improved public transit, and community amenities**. Housing cannot be addressed in isolation; the plan must call in other departments and leaders to co-create holistic solutions.
- The sale of **City-owned land and property** must prioritize **current Milwaukee residents**, particularly **Black and Brown community members**, community-based organizations, and land trusts.
- A **First Right of Refusal policy** must be implemented, ensuring that residents, community organizations, and land trusts have the **first opportunity to purchase City-owned land and property** before it is offered to developers or external investors.
- The **City of Milwaukee's vast portfolio of vacant land and homes** is a critical resource that, if used properly, it can **decrease speculative development and limit the influence of out-of-state developers** who extract wealth from our communities.
- Prioritizing **local ownership and community control** is essential to reversing the long history of disinvestment, displacement, and racialized harm in Milwaukee's Black and Brown neighborhoods.

## 6. **ADU Protections and Community Control**

- We continue to support **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) (We also Support Single Family homes, Duplexes, & Cottage Courts)** as a critical housing solution for Black and Brown communities, where multigenerational living is a

survival strategy against systemic harm, displacement, and wealth extraction. However, we insist on the following protections:

- **Owner-occupancy requirements** must remain, ensuring that ADUs benefit residents, not out-of-state investors or absentee landlords.
- **Internally integrated ADUs** (such as basement units **(not attics)**) must be prioritized, as they are the most cost-effective and accessible option for residents.
- The plan must acknowledge that ADUs may not be suitable for every neighborhood, but they are essential for highly populated Black and Brown communities that face systemic barriers to housing access.
- Plumbing needs to be separated but there needs to be an incentive with resources to help reduce this major cost to build detached ADU's.

#### 7. **Protecting Co-Living and Co-Ownership Models**

- Language around **owner-occupancy** must remain clear and consistent. Additionally, the plan should explicitly support **cooperative ownership models**, recognizing them as a vital tool for building community wealth and resisting displacement.

#### 8. **Resource Future Engagement**

- The **Mayor's Office, Common Council, and DCD** must commit to **allocating resources in the 2026 budget** and beyond for a robust, community-led, and co-created engagement in future planning processes. The lessons from Growing MKE must inform us how we move forward as a city, ensuring that engagement is not an afterthought, but an integral part of planning from the start. A few 2-hour meetings, mailers and an advisory committee are not deep community-led and co-created engagement. The Department of Community Development with the support of our Elected officials, must prioritize co-created community-led development moving forward.

#### 9. **Prioritize Formerly Incarcerated, Immigrant, Houseless, Youth, and Aging Community Members**

- This plan must explicitly **center and prioritize** the needs, leadership, and voices of **formerly incarcerated individuals, immigrants, houseless residents, youth, and aging populations**. These communities are often the most impacted by displacement, gentrification, and systemic barriers, and yet are too often left out of planning processes and solutions.
- To move beyond surface-level inclusion, the plan must include **bold, specific strategies** that stabilize and uplift these communities, including:
- **Free transitional housing programs** that offer immediate, accessible housing options for those returning from incarceration, those experiencing homelessness, and those aging out of foster care or transitional services.

- The designation of some **vacant lots as "Free Home Parks** “community-controlled spaces with multiple quality prefabricated homes that create stable, supportive housing solutions for community members at risk of displacement and homelessness.
- A commitment to **community-led development models** that center these populations as co-designers and beneficiaries of housing solutions, ensuring that housing is not just built for them, but **with them, by them, and alongside them.**

## 10. Overlay Zoning Education and Support

- The **Department of City Development (DCD)** must provide **ongoing education, technical assistance, and capacity-building support** for community members, grassroots organizations, and neighborhood leaders who are exploring **overlay zoning** as a tool to strengthen their neighborhood goals.
- Overlay zoning has the potential to serve as a **powerful mechanism for communities to advance protection, preserve cultural identity, and implement tailored solutions that reflect their unique needs.**
- However, without dedicated education, resources, and technical support, many residents and community organizations, especially those in Black and Brown neighborhoods, will continue to face barriers to accessing and utilizing this tool.
- The city must commit to ensuring that overlay zoning is **not just a theoretical concept, but a practical, accessible pathway for communities to co-create solutions that protect and build their neighborhoods.**

## 11. Assess and Evaluate Existing Housing Initiatives and Data

The plan must include a **critical assessment of current housing initiatives and tools** mentioned, including, but not limited to, the **Anti-Displacement Fund, Tax Incremental Districts (TIDs)**, and other city-supported programs.

This assessment must ask:

- What is working?
- What is not working?
- Who has access to these tools—and who does not?
- What communities have been left out?
- Where are the gaps?
- How must these tools evolve to meet the scale and urgency of the housing crisis?

Without a clear, data-driven understanding of the **impact, limitations, and effectiveness** of these initiatives, we risk repeating the same mistakes while communities continue to be displaced, disenfranchised, and denied equitable housing opportunities.

Additionally, the plan must commit to developing **new housing initiative** designed in partnership with community residents and organizations—that directly address the unmet needs and systemic inequities that current programs fail to resolve.

Finally, we must prioritize the use of **Milwaukee-specific data** moving forward. Milwaukee is unique in its history, demographics, and housing challenges, and we cannot rely on generic, one-size-fits-all data sets that fail to capture the realities on the ground. **Data collected by community organizations, such as the Ron Coalition, and neighborhood-based efforts must be recognized and centered as essential sources of knowledge**—because the communities most impacted have the deepest understanding of the issues and solutions.

Milwaukee deserves a housing plan grounded in truth, equity, and the lived experiences of its people.

## **A Path Forward**

This plan is a necessary step forward, but it is not the end. The real work lies ahead in monitoring how the plan is implemented, ensuring that the future **zoning ordinances reflect the community's needs**, and building collective power to hold decision-makers accountable.

Metcalf Park Community Bridges and the residents of Metcalf Park stand ready to continue this work. We are committed to building Milwaukee where housing is a human right, where Black and Brown communities can thrive without displacement, and where community self-determination is the foundation of growth.

We urge the City Plan Commission to approve the **revised Housing Element**, with our amendments, and move it forward (with these amendments) to ZND, ensuring that the people's voices remain at the center of every decision.

**Metcalf Park Community Bridges, Inc.**  
**Metcalf Park Residents**  
**Community Members** (Signatures attached)

Sincerely,

Metcalf Park Community Bridges Inc.