

Statement for City Planning Commission – June 2nd, 2025

Bill Schmitt, Executive Director, Rooted & Rising – Washington Park

Good afternoon, Commissioners.

My name is Bill Schmitt, and I'm the Executive Director of Rooted & Rising – Washington Park, where we work every day to build housing stability and opportunity for the individuals and families that we are blessed to serve.

The reality is simple and stark: Milwaukee does not have enough quality, affordable housing, particularly in north side neighborhoods like Washington Park, where more than 18% of the parcels are vacant lots, reflecting a legacy of disinvestment. Because of this shortage, too many families are stuck in substandard housing with rents they can't afford. And the power imbalance in the rental market gives far too much control to landlords, including some who take advantage of the situation.

At Rooted & Rising, our 72-unit supportive housing program is at full capacity. We get dozens of calls and emails each week from families searching—often desperately—for a safe and stable place to live. We do our best to refer people to other resources, but the truth is: there just aren't enough options.

That's one of the important reasons why this zoning plan matters. It opens the door to more housing—diverse in type, responsive to neighborhood needs, and built in partnership with communities.

We are energized by the growing momentum and collaboration around providing viable pathways to homeownership to more hard-working families throughout Milwaukee, and we're thrilled to be a part of the coalition that is building new single-family homes that will be sold to early childhood educators, including hopefully some of our own teachers. At the same time, our experience as a mission-driven, supportive housing provider has demonstrated that there is still massive unmet demand for safe, quality and affordable rental options, and we need to be able to do both while providing individuals and families with better options.

I want to acknowledge and appreciate the team at DCD and the City for facilitating and listening to community input, responding meaningfully to constructive feedback, and developing a plan that creates opportunities to address the serious housing challenges that our city faces and that aligns with the City's goals for housing affordability, choice and anti-displacement.

Thank you for your time and your public service.

Sincerely,
Bill Schmitt