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OP-ED

Unlocking Milwaukee's Potential Through Smart Zoning Reform

Improving Milwaukee's zoning code would yield a more prosperous, inclusive and vibrant city.

By Ariam Kesete - Jul 5th, 2024 09:44 am



Milwaukee is at a crossroads. As our city grapples with stagnant population growth – and concomitant revenue stagnation – we face a critical need to expand our tax base to maintain and improve essential services. One proven way to achieve this is by reforming our outdated zoning laws, which currently function as significant barriers to development, economic growth, and housing affordability.

The Economic Impact of Outdated Zoning

As a community developer delivering needed affordable housing, I've seen how zoning regulations can increase development costs by as much as 20%. This added expense is passed on to renters and homebuyers, inflating rents and sale prices. This is not just a burden on developers but also on Milwaukee residents who are struggling to find affordable housing. By modernizing these rules, we can reduce these costs, stimulate development, and make housing more accessible to everyone ([Urban Milwaukee](#)).

Empowering Emerging Developers

One of the most exciting aspects of [Growing MKE](#) is its potential to empower emerging developers, particularly those from underrepresented communities. The current system favors established players with deep pockets, but these reforms will create opportunities for new developers to start small—with duplexes or other small housing types—and gradually build their portfolios. This incremental approach not only diversifies our development landscape, but also fosters local entrepreneurship and economic resilience.

Addressing Gentrification Concerns

Some residents are understandably concerned about the potential for gentrification if their neighborhoods are allowed to grow. However, it is the lack of growth and options that often enable unscrupulous landlords to exploit the system. By snapping up dirt-cheap properties and neglecting maintenance, they can charge above-market rates without providing quality housing. This phenomenon is a direct result of artificially constrained housing supply ([Strong Towns](#)).

Allowing for a diverse range of housing options and encouraging responsible development can mitigate these issues. With more competition and better-regulated growth, we can ensure that all Milwaukee residents have access to safe, affordable and well-maintained homes.

The Path to a More Prosperous Milwaukee

Milwaukee's zoning reforms are not just about bricks and mortar; they are about creating a more prosperous, inclusive and vibrant city for all its residents. We cannot allow artificial constraints on a proven method of lowering housing costs to continue stymieing our progress. By embracing this legislation, we are taking a significant step toward a future where our city thrives both economically and socially.

This is a call to action for all Milwaukeeans who envision a better future for our city. Let's support smart zoning reform to unlock Milwaukee's full potential and ensure a brighter, more prosperous tomorrow for everyone.

Ariam Kesete, *President of AK Development.*

From: [Ariam Kesete](#)
To: [Oeth, Amy](#)
Subject: Please include Ariam(AK) op-ed
Date: Monday, July 22, 2024 1:41:16 PM

Hello Amy, Happy Monday, I wanted to connect and let you know that I would love it if the op-ed was included in the overall plan. Thank you for your time.

Thank you,
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