

To: **Mayor and City Council**
Through: **Ryan Schroeder, City Manager**
Ben Boike, Assistant Comm. Dev. Dir.
From: **Melissa Sonnek, Comm. Dev. Coordinator**
Date: **August 12, 2019**

Housing Plan Review

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

An initial review of the Housing Plan was held during the Open Council Work Session on May 13th, 2019. After the Council held a brief discussion with Staff and recommended some changes to the plan language, it was recommended that the plan be sent to the Planning Commission for review. The plan has since been updated to reflect the changes recommended by City Council.

PLANNING COMMISSION:

The Planning Commission reviewed the Housing Plan during two meetings due to the length of the document; during the second review by the Planning Commission on July 16th, 2019 it was voted 7-0 in favor of moving the plan forward to City Council with some additional comments and recommended changes added to the plan.

Some of the comments and recommendations made by the Planning Commission were already in place, or have since been implemented into the plan. Therefore, Staff is recommending that the City Council adopt the plan with the incorporated items and then continue to review the remaining items recommended by the Planning Commission as needed.

ATTACHMENTS:

Housing Action Plan
Draft Resolution to Adopt

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Review the attached draft plan and associated recommendations, consider adoption of the plan, and review remaining recommendations as needed for future consideration and/or implementation.

PLAN AMMENDMENTS/ADDITIONS:

- Consider creating/incorporating a policy to support affordable housing and offer incentives such as waived/reduced fees.
 - City Council has already begun to set aside funding to be used toward housing rehabilitation efforts through an allocation of TIF revenue stream from the DARTS project. We would propose the same from future similar projects. A legislative priority has been identified to

pursue state funding for housing rehab programs. Fee waivers would result in a general fund expense.

- West St. Paul's existing housing stock is already considered largely affordable, with 89 percent of the units be affordable to populations at or below 80 percent of the area median income. These numbers have already met and exceeded the minimum number of affordable units required by 2040 by the Metropolitan Council's Comprehensive Plan process.
- Consider establishing a Housing Trust Fund, possibly through fees charged when a new development does not include any affordable housing.
 - See above comments.
- Consider establishing an Emergency Repair/Code Compliance Program to offer funding to critical issues and/or properties in non-compliance. This initially smaller fund could eventually grow into a larger fund that could offer funding for a wider variety of items.
 - See above comments.
- Explore Inclusionary Zoning policies that offer waived/reduced requirements or financial incentives.
 - City Staff presently works with developers and applicants on this on a project-by-project basis to obtain available funding through multiple sources, such as federal, state, and local grant opportunities.
- Explore the implementation of an ordinance that offers additional protection to tenants of rental properties, such as limiting negative impacts on the tenant(s) when the landlord is non-compliant.
 - Presently the City Code requires landlords to notify tenants if/when a license is being reviewed, and in the very few situations where a landlord's rental license is suspended or revoked, the City has worked with the tenants to give them notice and allow adequate time for them to relocate if necessary.
- Review the possibility of establishing a Renter's Advisory Committee to provide added resources to tenants and provide a forum for landlord/tenant issues prior to going to City Council.
 - Said resources are already available to renters and landlords through multiple third party resources, such as the HOME Tenant hotline and the Minnesota Multi-Housing Association.
- Give consideration to the implementation of a pro-active rental inspection program.
 - City Staff presently performs interior inspections of all rental properties on a rotating schedule.
- Consider including language that HOME Line is the official city tenant resource and is advertised on our website. Perhaps require landlords to post the resource in their buildings as part of their license to bolster awareness of the program.
 - The plan presently outlines multiple resources for both tenants and landlords.
- Incorporate future information, such as the Maxfield Study on the Need for Senior Housing, into the plan. This would help provide additional information (such as the number of units needed) for potential projects and avoid anecdotal opposition to a project.
 - Staff agrees, any relevant future data is to be added to the Housing Plan.
- Market and advertise the Housing Plan to inform property owners and renters of the programs available to them and how to use them.
 - Staff agrees, marketing of the plan is one of the methods to educate residents on the options available to them.

ITEMS FOR ADDITIONAL REVIEW:

- Consider the removal of the rental density ordinance, described on pg. 28. As this could be considered contrary to some of the goals listed later in the plan.
 - City Staff believes that the current ten percent rental density maximum has been well received among residents; however, if the City Council would like Staff to re-evaluate this, additional evaluation measures can be taken.
- Incorporate the positive impacts that affordable housing has on communities, such as added money into the local economy, decreased homelessness, reduced demand on social services.
 - Staff does not presently have sufficient data on this matter, but it can be further discussed if so decided by the City Council.
- Include action ideas specifically for affordable housing, such as educational opportunities for the public, establish a committee/task force to provide community engagement opportunities.
 - See above comment.
- Propose moving from a complaint-based system to a proactive code enforcement system. It sounds like we have somewhat of a hybrid system already, but if the recommendation in the Plan is more staff, then that more staff should be part of an official policy change to a proactive based system.
 - Staff recommends that this item continue to be discussed on an annual basis based on budgetary allowances.
- Consider increasing Police Department involvement and public engagement in rentals to establish a pro-active approach to issues rather than re-active. Consider additional public engagement options involving both property owners and tenants.
 - See above comment.
- Consider bolstering the importance of welcoming and educating new homeowners/residents of West St. Paul about events, code/building requirements, inflow and infiltration requirements, public and neighborhood meetings, etc.
 - See above comment, review on a regular basis as budget allows.
- Include that WSP should consider reducing or eliminating commercial parking requirements or establishing parking maximums city wide to increase land available for housing.
 - Staff is presently reviewing other communities' parking requirements, to be discussed at a later date.