

Naperville City Council “Virtual” Candidate Forum



Naperville

The April 6th election will include 11 candidates including incumbents John Krummen and Dr. Benny White; and challengers Mark Urda, Vincent Ory, Jennifer Bruzan Taylor, Vasavi Chakka, Ian Holzhauer, James Haselhorst, Paul Leong, Allison Longenbaugh, and Lucy Chang Evans, vying for one of the four available seats at the City Council dais. In an effort to better know and understand those running for this important office, the Confederation reached out to these candidates and asked that they provide a written answer to a single question. Just as in our traditional candidate forums, the responses of the candidates would be limited to a set amount (in this case 250 words), managed at the discretion of the Confederation. The question we asked the candidates was:

Per the Illinois Housing Development Authority, Naperville does not have a sufficient stock of affordable housing options. Potential remedies to this may include: Zoning changes, mandated inclusion of affordable options in new developments, financing assistance for buyers, developer incentives, and other options. Do you believe that this is a problem that should be addressed by City government, and, if so, how would you, as a City Council Member, approach it?

Ian Holzhauer: The affordability of Naperville is a crucial issue. Fundamentally, we are pricing out young families, nursing assistants, teachers, small business owners, and retirees who comprise the vibrant city we love. Too often in our political rhetoric, there is a false choice between affordability and quality. To me, an example of a Naperville neighborhood where we’ve successfully integrated a wide-ranging mix of housing options at different price points is the Brookdale subdivision. Not only is it a wonderful, walkable, beautiful subdivision, but there are apartments, duplexes, single family homes, and senior living all in one place.



Naperville’s Human Rights and Fair Housing Commission issued eight specific recommendations for improving Naperville’s affordable housing stock. Of these recommendations, I am particularly interested in the idea of creating a housing trust fund, which could prevent Naperville’s existing affordable housing stock from falling into disrepair.

In exploring one of the Commission’s other recommendations, City Council directed staff to look into options for an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance, which, if done right, could provide incentives for developers to include affordable housing in the mix of offerings in new subdivisions (i.e. the Brookdales of the future). However, given Naperville’s few remaining open parcels, we need to think beyond just this ordinance. One option is potentially changing the current zoning requirements to allow accessory dwelling units (a/k/a In-Law Apartments) for seniors to age in place, close to family, as opposed to being forced out of Naperville. An affordable community is a healthy community.

James Haselhorst: Yes, local government needs to address this, if it does not then the county and IHDA will implement a solution without our city’s say or input. A solution we will then have no choice but to live with.

I am not in favor of mandates or zoning changes which have too great a chance of resulting in a “low income” or “poor side” of town. Concentrating the solution to this housing shortage to one part of the city or certain areas of the city will stigmatize this housing and makes it that much more likely to fail and negatively impact surrounding properties. Whatever the solution it needs to make affordable house part of a diversified housing plan for new developments or re-developments in all parts of the city.



Financial assistance does not fix the problem either; it only subsidizes high-cost housing for people that can't afford it making its "availability" subject to anything that can affect the funding for this type of program (economics, demand, political "winds", etc.).

Incentives for developers have helped with the senior housing issue in Naperville so it seems a reasonable solution to try. I would also suggest talking to nonprofits that work with affordable housing in our area and see what suggestion they might have, for example Habitat for Humanity.

Whatever the final solution it needs to be one develops can accept and live with in order of it to have a chance at succeeding.

Allison Longenbaugh: Naperville should be a place where people can afford to live from childhood through retirement. Current housing stock trends force out people who have lived or worked here for years but cannot afford Naperville. This won't be easy to solve, as we face quite a few constraints. For example, limited land availability, defining what "affordable" means and what groups to target, and ensuring that any development fits with nearby neighborhoods. This will be an important consideration when we discuss the update to the Master Plan. Neighborhoods that are currently R1/R2 should not be rezoned to include multi-unit apartment buildings (affordable or otherwise) that are out of character with the surrounding homes.



While our options are limited, here are a few ways City Council could address the shortfall. We could require a percentage of new development and redevelopment be set aside for affordable housing. At the January 6 meeting, Council approved a move to preserve Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH), and was successful in converting an old motel to 110 micro apartments on Naper/Ogden. They are also starting to work on an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance (IZO).

It is important to note that Naperville is currently out of compliance with Federal housing regulations. Solving this problem ourselves is preferable to having a federal decree imposed on us. For example, in 2019, suburbs in the North Shore of Chicago were required to submit plans to the IHDA for being under the required 10%.

Mark Urda: Yes this is definitely a problem that must be addressed by City Council and I support recommendations made to City Council by Human Rights and Fair Housing Commission in December 2020 City Council meeting;

1. Develop plan to preserve naturally-occurring affordable housing
2. Identify additional resources to assist populations with housing needs
3. Establish revolving rehabilitation loan fund targeted to low-income seniors
4. Develop working relationships with affordable housing developers
5. Develop strategy to leverage publicly-owned land
6. Implement an inclusionary zoning ordinance
7. Establish housing trust fund targeted towards helping veterans, seniors, special housing needs populations, and first responders in purchasing a home
8. Create housing-specific staff position(s) within city government or non-profit organization



John Krummen: Naperville has a portfolio of housing needs. The needs of a young professional just starting out in life are one set of needs. A young couple starting a family have another set of housing need, as do growing families, maturing families, empty nesters, retirees, seniors who simply want to downsize, and seniors who may need a little extra help to get through the day. So, if Naperville has a portfolio of housing needs, we must have a portfolio of housing solutions.



I have worked alongside Dawn DeSart, DuPage County Commissioner, and together we have conducted community town halls to hear from the community about attainable housing. Personally, I live by myself in a single family four-bedroom house. I want to stay in Naperville, but most options for downsizing include up budgeting. I, like many others would like to downsize and down budget, but Naperville offers few options. So attainable housing for our seniors, young professionals starting out, and for our teachers and first responders is paramount to keeping Naperville a strong community of Neighbors helping neighbors.

Vince Ory: As a candidate I want to become involved in the decision-making process. To find a place in Naperville for affordable housing. There are many places available but the council does not bring them up because we are always devoted to high end development. I believe that as a victim of high-density housing.



We get the feeling that we are better than those that have less than us. I am not better than those people and I want to be a community that wants to share.

Paul Leong: As a Naperville City Council member, I would support affordable housing and work toward achieving compliance with federal and state laws. I have only been exposed to small amounts of the existing legislation and regulation (mostly from watching Naperville City Council meetings), but what I have seen is very complicated and appears to be geared to a “one size fits all” approach, into which it is hard to shoehorn a city such as Naperville. My approach would be to review all options and to prioritize communicating with stakeholders in advance. By bringing developers and residents together early in the process, stakeholders could be heard and opportunities for compromise might be realized. My preference would be to select options through the lens of financial responsibility and sustainability to minimize additional burdens on taxpayers. I would ensure that city staff explores receiving financial support from county, state, and federal sources. This would not be a one-time quick fix. A more cautious and gradual process would allow our leaders to gather more data, make adjustments, and integrate improvements as we address issues that arise.



Jennifer Bruzan Taylor: “Balance” is what we need for all solutions presented to Council because we want to ensure we do not discourage development, but at the same time we have significant housing needs. For example, we have seniors, like my parents, living on fixed incomes and trying to pay for the upkeep of their house. They want to downsize in Naperville, but cannot find something that costs less or even equal to what they are currently paying. The Housing Advisory Board’s (HAC) suggestions include providing loan assistance to help seniors age in place, working with developers who specialize in building affordable housing, leveraging city owned land, as well as preserving smaller homes that typically would be torn



down. I support these ideas, and we also need to explore incentives that encourage developers to work with the City to solve this issue. We can look to reduce or eliminate the permit and impact fees typically charged in exchange for providing attainable housing. We also can create a “fast pass” system where developments that provide attainable housing get their permits and plans approved faster than normal. They still go through all the proper channels, but they get to skip ahead of other developments. Phoenix, Arizona already does something similar. At the end of the day, there is not one simple solution to fix our housing needs, and so all ideas should be fully researched and explored to ensure our housing issues are solved, while at the same time still attracting new development to Naperville.

Lucy Evans: Affordable housing should be addressed by the City government because changes in housing prices, supply, and demand affect everyone. One way to increase affordable housing inventory on a community level would be to allow zoning changes to commercial properties for Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). A PUD is a designed grouping of compatible land uses such as retail, office, and residential. Water Street is a PUD. Currently, there is an increased inventory of vacant commercial properties and there is a high cost to redevelop those spaces. PUDs can address immediate community & environmental needs, with the foresight to evolve more efficiently and address changes in the future.



I support the Council’s recent decision to draft an inclusionary zoning ordinance, but the challenge will be funding. While the city should subsidize plans that include affordable housing, land developers should provide affordable housing units or fees-in-lieu as well. Additionally, I would further explore other funding sources from state and federal grants and city taxes.

I believe preference for affordable housing should be given to Naperville residents that are in need. Demand for affordable housing will always exceed supply, so the City should establish a scoring system for the subsidized units. Naperville’s Public Housing Agency has the discretion to establish local preferences to reflect the housing needs and priorities of its particular community. For instance, a senior citizen who has lived in Naperville for 40 years and thus paid into Naperville taxes should be given priority over a person from outside Naperville.

Vasavi Chakka: My goal as a city council member is to be the strongest advocate for Naperville residents and listening to their recommendations and concerns will be a priority of mine. My husband and I moved to Naperville over 16 years ago because we knew this community was the best place to raise our children.



Naperville continues to attract families from all walks of life because of the great school systems, employment opportunities, and amenities. This creates housing challenges for our growing community. Currently, Naperville has a 7.5% affordable housing rate, just under the 10% state-mandated municipality rate. To bridge the gap, I strongly believe that we must look at ways of balancing the affordable housing shortage with responsible development so it does not burden our current infrastructure and school districts. More input from stakeholders is required to strike a balance and ensure we create more opportunities for those seeking affordable housing options.

One of the popular proposals is a planned unit development. It is a type of building development with a regulatory process to address the need for affordable housing. This type of building development groups both varied and compatible land uses to provide housing, recreation, commercial centers, and industrial parks, all within one contained development or subdivision. If implemented mindfully, small businesses can benefit greatly by increasing employment.

Benjamin White: Many of the wonderful people who work and visit here cannot afford to call Naperville home. I am committed to mitigating this issue. Although we have made some strides in this area, there is a great deal of work still to be done. I understand the need to work with developers who have the expertise and experience to increase our workforce/attainable/affordable inventory without isolating it to a specific area of the community. We need to explore innovative methods that share the financial burden across multiple entities so the business opportunity for developers is more appealing and we can make attainable and affordable housing a reality. Housing choices for seniors continues to be a challenge. Many of them have lived here for decades but no longer wish to stay in their homes as they have become too big or too difficult to maintain. The City has made strides in this area but we must continue to increase these housing options so we can retain this wealth of knowledge and experience within our community. This also indirectly affects younger families as well because an increasing number of seniors are staying in place as the cost of “downsizing” is a more expensive option. As a result, the housing inventory for younger families has slowly diminished.

