



News Release

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CHICAGO METROPOLIS 2020 RECOMMENDS SOLUTIONS TO SHORTAGE OF WORKFORCE HOUSING

Citing the lack of a comprehensive plan to create sufficient housing for workers, Chicago Metropolis 2020 has issued a 40-point Workforce Housing Action Agenda aimed at helping the region meet the demand for attainable housing.

“One out of every four families in Metropolitan Chicago – 730,000 families – are under financial pressure because they are spending more than 30 percent of their income on mortgage or rent payments. 100,000 of these families are under even greater stress because they are spending one-half of their income on rent,” said George A. Ranney, Jr., President and CEO of Chicago Metropolis 2020. “The growth of rental housing, the first choice of many working families, has not kept pace with job growth, and there has actually been a decline in available rentals in some parts of our region.

“By the year 2020, another 1 million to 1.2 million people will be added to the region, creating a strong demand for housing for moderate income families,” Ranney said. “Unless we change current housing trends, this region will not meet that demand and will suffer the consequences of lost economic growth.”

The Workforce Housing Action Agenda published by Chicago Metropolis 2020 details specific steps which need to be taken by local, state and federal governments, as well as by the business community.

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The action plan calls for local zoning reforms and increased emphasis on building code enforcement and property maintenance by local governments; increased state government assistance and rewards to communities that create a broad range of housing; expansion and improvement of federal programs to increase affordable housing options; and more corporate action to create workforce housing.

“Members of a typical working family with a moderate income too often find it impossible to live close to their jobs,” said King Harris, former President and CEO of Pittway and current Senior Executive at Chicago Metropolis 2020. “As a result, our highways are more crowded, families have less time together, and employers lose money due to a turnover of workers.

“For a variety of reasons, suburbs have encouraged the development of upscale, expensive single-family homes as opposed to moderate income housing, and little attention has been given to rehabilitating older homes and the construction of multi-family housing,” Harris said. “As a result, the people who work in those suburbs – the teachers, the nurses, the firefighters, the factory workers – cannot afford to live in the same community where they earn a paycheck.”

The complete text of the Housing Workforce Action Agenda is available at the Chicago Metropolis 2020 web site (www.chicagometropolis2020.org).

Key action steps recommended include the following:

- Reform of zoning and development regulations that too often discourage attainable workforce homes through large lot size and low-density requirements.

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- Creation of pro-active housing code enforcement programs which, at a minimum, inspect all rental property once every five years and require that the property be kept in acceptable conditions.
- Expansion of housing rehabilitation programs run by experienced not-for-profit organizations.
- Development of statewide community-based planning legislation and guidelines requiring local governments to establish policies leading to a broad range of housing.
- Creation of incentives to encourage local governments to implement housing plans that work toward the development of attainable workforce housing.
- Provision of additional state funding for housing preservation and rehabilitation and expansion of state subsidies to construct rental housing.
- Establishment of a statewide housing rehabilitation code.
- Reform of the state's educational funding system so that clear majority of school funding comes from sources other than local property taxes.
- Completion of federal funding of the Chicago Housing Authority's Transformation Plan.
- An increase in the number of housing choice vouchers in the region.

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- Increased financial support from the federal government for programs which produce more affordable rental housing.
- Business support for the Metropolis Principles, a corporate code of conduct that puts a priority on locating or expanding businesses in communities that have an adequate supply of attainable workforce housing, especially housing near mass transit lines.
- More participation in employer assisted housing programs on the part of businesses and large not-for-profit organizations, such as hospitals.
- Strong business support of local government efforts to increase the supply of attainable workforce housing.

Chicago Metropolis 2020, which was created in 1999 by The Commercial Club of Chicago, promotes innovative solutions to long-term challenges facing the Chicago region. In addition to CEOs and senior executives, Chicago Metropolis 2020 includes representatives of labor, government, faith-based groups and other civic organizations.

Later this year, Chicago Metropolis 2020 will unveil the Metropolis Plan for Growth and Transportation, which will illustrate how the actions of government, businesses and residents can shape regional growth and provide a model of how the region might develop over the next 30 years.

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