

My name is Elliot Zashin; I am a long-time resident of Evanston and an active member of The People's Lobby and Reclaim Evanston, its local affiliate. Thank you for this opportunity to give community input provided by the Commissioners. We support the overall objectives of the Budget for Black Lives proposal; we are currently advocating for some same kinds of changes within our own city budget. I am impressed and troubled by the intensity of problems described by many of the speakers, and I hope my comments on another topic are no way taken to minimize their urgency. I have chosen to talk about the section of the proposal that deals with housing because the lack of affordable housing is a major long-term problem today for Evanston and for other communities in Cook County.

Evanston has long been a relatively diverse suburb with significant Black and Hispanic populations, but because the real estate market in the north suburbs is rapidly rising and property taxes are rising, because the income of people of color in the community is not rising in proportion, Evanston is losing its diversity and individuals and families who have lived here – some times for generations – are being forced to leave the community and find cheaper housing somewhere in the Chicagoland area. Obviously the pandemic has worsened this situation – but this trend was apparent 5 or more years ago. We know how disruptive such moves are for families struggling to make ends meet.

Many Evanstonians are distressed, but our local government has limited ability – and perhaps limited concern - to slow this process. Our city council has begun to consider using funds from the marijauna sales taxes coming to the city to provide rental and/or mortgage subsidies for some families that were specifically impacted by discriminatory housing and zoning policies of the past. But by this means, only a small number of families can be helped. So increased section 8 funds certainly would be helpful in the short-run. Ultimately, what we need is subsidies for constructing affordable housing and the County already has a major project for senior citizens in the works in Evanston. We need more of that because most developers who come before the Evanston Plan Commission are concerned only to construct or rehab buildings for upper-income individuals.

In general, the transfers of funds from the County's policing budget represent a small percentage of the County's total expenditures. Reclaim Evanston believes that we are in a unique time of need and a unique time of recognition that we collectively have not done nearly enough to assist Black people, other people of color, and low-income people in general. We urge the commissioners to adopt the proposal as fully as possible. Thank you.

Just a footnote: I am well aware – and support – the work of Connections for the Homeless in Evanston. What especially concerns me is that the pandemic is far from over so the need continues and it is not clear whether there will be additional federal funds soon. So once again county support and increased section 8 funds are vital.

Elliot Zashin

Reclaim Evanston