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Tri-Cities officials review housing recommendations

By Stephanie K. Baer, Tribune reporter

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Exploring employer-assisted housing options in St. Charles and expanding Batavia's crime-free rental housing program to include single-family residences are just two of several recommendations to come out of a months-long project aimed at considering future housing needs in the central Fox Valley. a d v e r t

Last week, officials in the Tri-Cities began reviewing draft recommendations from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Kane County Planning Cooperative as part of the Homes for a Changing Region study, which looks at future housing trends and offers recommendations on how communities might meet them.

In November, representatives from the two agencies met with officials and residents in Batavia, Geneva, St. Charles and North Aurora to discuss what kinds of housing and redevelopment they'd like to see in their communities. The draft recommendations are the result of feedback given at those meetings and in an online survey.

"Coordination of land use and transit is a big theme with all of the draft plans," said Kane County planner Brett Hanlon, noting that while each community will have its own plan to consider, recommendations "where the four communities can address some of the issues that they have in common" will be released in March and April.

According to Hanlon, more than 300 people responded to the online survey, including 117 responses from St. Charles, 77 from Geneva and 76 from Batavia.

"It would be nice if we had some more participation, but that doesn't invalidate what has been done so far," said Scott Buening, community development director of Batavia. "The conclusions that have come out of the study so far, I think, are very interesting and very telling about the community. It also does show how the community already does have a lot of diverse housing choices."

Besides expanding the city's crime-free rental housing program, the planning agencies suggested that Batavia consider creating a downtown arts and culture zoning district to promote living and working units and amenities that are attractive for young artists and professionals.

"It encourages what's been happening in our downtown and what's been happening in the community and that's what's unique about Batavia," Buening said.

Batavia's Plan Commission, which reviewed the recommendations at a meeting last week, was in favor of most of the ideas, according to Buening. On March 18, the City Council's committee on the whole will review the draft.

In St. Charles, aldermen will review the city's drafted recommendations at the Planning and Development Committee meeting March 10. Ideas include increasing residential density in the downtown area and creating more workforce housing along major transit corridors, like Randall Road.

"I don't think anything was surprising. ... There's some policy questions in there that the council will want to look at," said Matthew O'Rourke, city planner. "This is really the starting point for conversation more than anything else."

Based on an analysis by the Chicago agency, St. Charles could see an estimated 4,010 new households by 2040. Forecasts for Geneva and Batavia show an increase of 3,768 households and 3,573 households, respectively.

Draft recommendations for Geneva will be available on the city's website early next month. The Geneva Housing Task Force will review the recommendations at its March 13 meeting, according to Kevin Stahr, communications coordinator for the city.

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