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Batavia residents, aldermen weigh in on housing needs

Discussion is part of a regional effort

Stephanie K. Baer, Chicago Tribune reporter

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Though few Batavia residents participated in a public workshop last week to discuss housing development in the city, those who attended said the discussion was a productive beginning to envisioning the city's future. advertisement

The Batavia workshop was the second of three in the Tri-Cities region and part of the "Homes for a Changing Region" study, which looks at future housing trends and offers recommendations on how communities might meet them.

Based on analysis by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Batavia could see an estimated 3,573 households by 2040.

Mark Allen, a Batavia resident and real estate broker in the Fox Valley, attended both the Batavia and Geneva workshops and said that despite the smaller turnout, the "quality of input" was better at the Batavia meeting.

"It had aldermen present and (city) staff and so there was a lot of table discussion that impressed (the study organizers)," Allen said. "We have a very good distribution presently of all styles of housing, and I was glad to see that."

Representatives from the Chicago agency and the Kane County Planning Cooperative have been [working with public officials and residents in St. Charles, Geneva, Batavia and North Aurora to conduct the study](#) and help guide municipal leaders as they determine housing policy for future development in their communities.

At the Batavia workshop, Kane County planners presented data that showed a deficiency in rental housing units — something that professionals have known for years, Allen said.

"It's not new news, but it's important for people to recognize that we need rental housing work all over the Fox Valley," he said.

Resident Don Murphy, who has lived in Batavia since 1971, said at the workshop that he was concerned he won't be able to afford to live in Batavia much longer.

"I'm afraid we're going to see the senior population leave this community," said Murphy, 66, adding that a lack of affordable housing has made it difficult for younger generations "to buy into this community."

The city staff and aldermen recognized a need to make an extra push to encourage residents to participate in

[an online survey that mimics the workshop exercises](#) because of the poor turnout.

"I think we were expecting more turnout," said Scott Buening, community development director for Batavia. "It's a little disappointing."

Buening said the city will continue to send out email blasts and advertise the survey on the city's website and through social media.

Within the first two weeks, more than 100 people responded to the online survey for the four communities, according to Drew Williams-Clark, a CMAP principal.

Whereas most workshop attendees have been 45 years and older, Williams-Clark said the majority of online respondents have been "under retirement age."

"This at least gives people a convenience of being able to weigh in whenever they have the bandwidth to do so," Williams-Clark said. "I would say it's looking good."

In coming weeks, the planning agencies will analyze the data and community feedback from the online survey and workshops to come up with a preliminary list of recommendations to distribute to city staff and elected officials before presenting a full draft of recommendations in February.

"It was a good start to a discussion that Batavia needs to have about our housing needs. There's a lot more work to be done, but I'm excited about it," said Ald. Lucy Thelin Atac, one of several aldermen who attended the workshop. "I'm looking forward to seeing the report and I'm looking forward to discussing it with the community again."

The third and final workshop for the central Fox Valley subregion was scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 20, in St. Charles.

Residents who have not been able to attend the workshops can complete the online survey through the end of the month.

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