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Housing study workshops wrap up in Tri-Cities

St. Charles final stop for area 'Homes for a Changing Region' project

By Stephanie K. Baer, Chicago Tribune reporter

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Public workshops to discuss future housing needs in the central Fox Valley wrapped up recently advertisement in St. Charles, where residents and staff expressed a need for more varied housing to accommodate current and future homeowners and renters of all ages.

On Nov. 20, two aldermen and about 10 residents, all of whom were 45 and older, attended the St. Charles workshop — the final 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.

An analysis by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning estimates that St. Charles will see 4,010 new households by 2040, while neighboring Geneva and Batavia could see an increase of 3,768 households and 3,573 households, respectively, according to the analysis.

Rita Tungare, community development coordinator for St. Charles, said the study will prepare the city to respond to future housing demands and determine policies that allow for "resiliency and flexibility."

"It's going to be extremely important to keep an open mind to the changing demographics and lifestyles," Tungare said. "We can't assume that what's conventional now in terms of housing preferences (and) commute times is going to stay the same."

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 developments in their communities.

Though turnout at the workshops was lower than some officials said they had hoped, participation in the online survey, which mimics the exercises in the workshops, has been relatively high with about 250 responses and 700 page views three weeks into the process, said Berenice Vallecillos, outreach and community engagement specialist at CMAP, comparing the numbers to that of the last subregional study in the northern Fox Valley.

Ald. Rita Anne Payleitner, also a member of the study's steering committee, said at the workshop that she would remind residents to go online before Nov. 30 to give their feedback on the project.

"This is very user-friendly," Payleitner said. "There's still time to put your two cents in."

Payleitner, who has five children between the ages of 20 and 33, said one of her sons is adamant about renting his entire life and St. Charles needs to consider similar perspectives to prepare for future residents.

"He doesn't want the maintenance, the tax bill," she said. "My generation bought a starter house. That's not the case (anymore)."

During a mapping exercise, participants laid down chips representing new households on a map of St. Charles to give their own ideas about where and how many new households could be developed in the city's current capacity.

Residents were then asked to focus on five parcels along Randall Road between Route 64 and Bircher Road.

City Planner Matthew O'Rourke said those sites were chosen for the study because of county plans to create a bus rapid transit line along Randall.

"That's where the development pressure's going to be," O'Rourke said.

Once the online survey closes at the end of this month, the planning agencies will analyze the data and community feedback from both the survey and workshops to come up with a preliminary list of recommendations for city staff and elected officials.

Planners hope to present a full draft of recommendations in February to be reviewed by officials and residents before finalizing the plans in May.

"Nobody has a crystal ball," O'Rourke said. "A plan like this will hopefully give us some overarching guidelines within the framework that the community wants."

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