

The Right to Stay Put in Nashville

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The recent [NashvilleNext](#) community survey revealed *affordable living* tops Nashvillians concerns for the future, and data suggests these fears are not unwarranted. There are approximately 259,000 households in Nashville, and almost one third of these do not earn enough to afford the market rate housing available in our city. That means that each month, nearly a third of all households make difficult decisions between paying for housing and meeting other basic needs.

Decisive leadership and research-based policy solutions are critically needed to support equitable and inclusive development for all.

As Nashville enjoys its “It City” status, the demand for urban living has pushed housing prices up and out of reach for many low and moderate-income residents. Take the 12th South neighborhood: Between 2000 and 2010, housing costs jumped 269% while the Black population decreased by 58%.

Proponents argue that gentrification is transforming these inner city neighborhoods from unhealthy areas of concentrated poverty into diverse mixed-income neighborhoods, yet what we find is growing enclaves of concentrated affluence. This not only affects current residents in inner-city neighborhoods, who are pushed out for upscale development, it forecloses the possibility that affordable housing options will ever be available in these newly revitalized areas.

Over time, gentrification reproduces economic and racial segregation; while the neighborhood schools, transit, services, and greenspace might improve, they only benefit those who can afford to live there. Without concrete tools to ensure affordable housing choices throughout Nashville, the city will continue to experience unjust segregation and more households will face a staggering cost burden, displacement and exclusion.

What Can Nashville City Officials Do?

Luckily, tools do exist, and across the country many local governments are using public policy to achieve equitable development. This means incorporating affordable housing as part of a holistic approach to improve the quality of life for residents of *all* incomes by also stimulating economic development, increasing access to family-supporting jobs, supporting local businesses, and improving educational access.

For example, the City of Austin recently passed a \$65 million bond to provide assistance to low-income renters, homebuyers, and homeowners and to support affordable housing development, neighborhood and commercial revitalization, and small business incubation. Other cities in our region, including Charlotte and Chicago, are increasing construction of affordable housing by offering cost-

offsets/incentives to developers in return for their contributions to affordable housing. While there is no one size fits all approach, these cities have taken real steps to make affordable housing a reality for many families.

How We Can Support an Equitable Nashville

Public concern for affordable housing in Nashville is growing. Two groups, [*Nashville Organized for Action and Hope*](#) and [*A Voice for the Reduction of Poverty*](#), are mobilizing thousands of people to demand our government officials take immediate action to build, preserve and retain affordable housing throughout the city. If you care about building a city where everyone belongs, we urge you to join these efforts and make it clear that our government must act now.

Market forces will not create housing choice throughout communities, produce or preserve affordable housing, or protect vulnerable residents. These tasks require government intervention and citizen support. If we do nothing, we have made the choice to continue to promote racial and economic segregation. If we act now, we can create vibrant neighborhoods where residents of all incomes can thrive.

For more information, see our report on equitable development that was commissioned by Nashville's Metro Planning Department at [NashvilleNext](#).