

# The Buffalo Common Council

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June 27, 2017

Gerard Chwalinski, City Clerk  
64 Niagara Square, Rm 1308  
Buffalo, NY 14202

Re: Buffalo News Editorial: Buffalo needs affordable rent

Dear Mr. Chwalinski:

Please late file the attached editorial from the *Buffalo News* for today's Common Council Meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christopher P. Scanlon".

Christopher P. Scanlon  
President Pro Tempore  
South District Councilmember

A handwritten mark or signature in the bottom right corner of the page, possibly initials "DJA".

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## Editorial: Buffalo needs affordable rentals



*Carmen Brooker packs for the move to a lower-income apartment in a new building on Best Street. High demand for affordable housing means there is now a waiting list for apartments in the building. (Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News)*

**By News Editorial Board**

**(<http://buffalonews.com/author/newseditorialboard/>)**

Published Fri, Jun 23, 2017

There should be no argument that Buffalo needs to help its many poor residents find affordable housing. The city's renaissance can be wholly virtuous only if it ensures that rising prosperity

doesn't leave behind those who can't otherwise afford the increasing rents.

Unfortunately, that circumstance is exactly what appears to be happening, as waiting lists appear for subsidized housing. "The market has changed here," said David Alexander, a principal with SA+A Development, which develops affordable housing. "We have over 500 units in Buffalo, and we are 100 percent occupied. We didn't have waiting lists before. Now we do."

That, at least in part, is because rents are rising faster than inflation even as the census shows the number of low-income residents increasing in recent years. That's a crisis equation, one that Buffalo needs quickly to recalibrate.

The good news is that there are several ways to begin addressing those conditions, although one of them, known as inclusionary zoning, could well threaten the city's expansion. It's not the best way forward.

Inclusionary zoning is a policy that requires developers of higher-end, market-rate apartment buildings to include some units that low-income people can afford. It sounds fair and its goals are surely worthy, but while the policy has had some success in areas with economic forces that are different from Buffalo's, in this city it could have a destructive impact.

In San Francisco, or New York City, such a policy can work because populations are growing and land values – and thus rents – are high. Buffalo may be growing again, based largely on its influx of refugees, but it's not exploding and, while land values and rents have risen here, both are still moderate compared to other cities. In addition – and critically – construction costs in Buffalo are high.

Thus, developers pay more to build here but command rents lower than other regions, and there is no substantial population gain.

To add into that delicate balance the requirements of inclusionary zoning would almost certainly be self-defeating. Developers would look to build in other municipalities, providing less new space for everyone in the city, regardless of income.

The policy has advocates in the city but, fortunately, Mayor Byron W. Brown seems to understand the pointed threat that inclusionary zoning would pose to the city's revival. Meanwhile, Common Council President Darius G. Pridgen, while acknowledging broad support for the policy on the Common Council, also said that developers need to be among the stakeholders involved in determining how best to move forward.

There are other possibilities. Developer Nick Sinatra, for example, acknowledged that there is “a huge demand for affordable housing not being met,” but suggested an alternative way of meeting it.

~~“Let’s look at ways to allow for more public funding to build new units and renovate underutilized projects,”~~ Sinatra said, suggesting up to 15 projects of at least 100 units each in coming years. “That would make an impact,” he said. To create a similar number of low-income units under inclusionary zoning would require more than 5,000 units in private developments. “Not happening,” he said.

He’s right. The unintended consequences of inclusionary zoning are too risky for Buffalo. If that conclusion is wrong, it may be proved in Hamburg, which recently enacted such a policy but which has no record yet to examine. Even then, Hamburg’s realties are different from those in Buffalo, the third-poorest city in the country.

It is clear that Buffalo needs to do more to meet the surging demand for housing for its low-income residents. It would be intolerable not to act as waiting lists grow and people of this city have increasing trouble finding a place to live.

But the way forward needs to be scouted out better than it has been so far. There isn’t time to delay, but time must be made to do this right.