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City Council must present full picture of city's proposed zoning reforms | Opinion

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Cincinnati Mayor Aftab Pureval would like City Council to approve his proposed zoning reform before they adjourn in June. That is too soon. The West Price Hill Community Council almost voted to oppose the plan at its last meeting. The proposal seems very deadline-driven. The motion to oppose was withdrawn after assurance from council members Jeff Cramerding and Anna Albi, who attended the meeting, that the city was still open to community input.

The proposal is called "Connected Communities." The city developed [a website](#) for the proposal which is very well done and has established a good record of community engagement. But the information provided by the city is all one-sided. Without a "pros and cons" approach to the information presented, efforts such as the website, basically come across as another sales job, not the full picture.

A term that is not mentioned in the discussion of "Connected Communities," is the term "upzoning." Upzonings, which increase allowable densities often by relaxing the zoning code's height and bulk requirements or increasing floor area ratios, aim to encourage denser development, increase housing supplies, and thus improve housing affordability. This is very odd because "Connected Communities," is squarely an upzoning proposal.

Upzoning is being tried in several cities, but the jury is still out as to whether it is having its desired effect.

Urban Affairs reported in 2019, that "Chicago upzoning efforts served only to increase prices of existing housing units and found "no impact of the reforms . . . on the number of newly permitted dwellings over 5 years."

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In 2021, Brookings, a Washington, D.C. think tank, published, "[The double-edged sword of upzoning.](#)" It warned of gentrification as a negative consequence of upzoning.

In 2024, the Pew Charitable Trust, referred to the upzoning reforms by Minneapolis as a "blueprint." However, it also reported that housing in Minneapolis grew between 2017 and 2022 but that the growth was primarily based on an 87% increase in buildings with 20+ units. That is not the "middle-housing" units envisioned in "Connected Communities."

One investment website called upzoning a "hot topic." You would never know it based on the presentations by the city. We were not told about upzoning as a framework. We were not given both the pros and cons of upzoning. There is no disclosure that aspects of upzoning are heavily influenced by ideological beliefs surrounding climate change, for example, that may or may not be shared by the property owners directly affected by the proposal.

For example, statements made publicly by the mayor and those of a central planner during a public engagement session, make it hard to tell whether they want to eliminate parking minimums to reduce costs to developers or because the mayor wants us to "change our relationship with parking so that it is a factor in building, but not what we're building for."

In his 2022 State of the City address, the mayor said, that he "wants to make development less car-centric and ensure parking lots don't create problems for pedestrians."

At one of the virtual public meetings, one of the city's central planners quoted Jen Gehl, a giant in urban planning. The quote begins, "If you invite more cars, you get more cars; if you make streets better for cars you get more traffic," etc. In a nutshell, that is where the central planners are coming from, i.e., cars are bad.

The city administration has failed to give us the full picture of this proposal. The career professionals should be non-partisan and non-ideological in their work products. They are obligated to objectively give policy makers and the public both sides of a debate the

best they can. City Council should require that before they vote on "Connected Communities."

Todd Zinser lives in West Price Hill and founded Citizens for a Transparent Railroad Vote. He retired as the inspector general of the U.S. Department of Commerce after 31 years of conducting audits and investigations of federal officials, programs and operations and remains a certified fraud examiner.