

Images of the affordable forever housing for River Forest seniors similar Evanston development. The River Forest development would have been built in prairie style. These images were given to the village administrator in May 2023.



River Forest blows golden opportunity

As the oversized 72-unit development for Madison and Ashland glides through its preordained approval process, River Forest's village board has squandered a golden opportunity to actually serve the village's seniors who made River Forest so great.

Our village leaders surely know that it's important to 78% of current seniors to remain in River Forest (*Age Friendly River Forest: Creating a Livable Community for All*, 2023). And they should understand that some of the village's seniors – who made this town so desirable – need housing affordable, accessible, and appropriate to their stage in life as they further age and can no longer remain in their houses.

Our village leaders should be well aware that some of these seniors won't be able to continue to live here due to the lack of affordable, accessible, age-appropriate housing.

With just two vacant sites in town, you'd think that our elected leaders would jump at the opportunity to devote the site the village owns to develop forever-affordable housing for these seniors when handed to the village on a silver platter.

But not River Forest. Back in May 2024, a developer did approach the village with a very preliminary proposal to build 15 to 18 detached prairie-style homes as a senior community on the village-owned Madison and Ashland site – the site where village officials are now approving an oversized 5-story apartment building with 72 “luxury” rentals, largely targeted to out-of-town, upper-income singles, for whom there is a plentiful supply of housing.

The initial price of each senior house would have been around \$350,000, which even lesser-income River Forest seniors could afford and still have funds left over for heightened senior needs. To keep them forever affordable to the same income group as initially targeted, they would have been organized as a limited-equity cooperative or mutual housing asso-

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One View

ciation with the underlying land sold at a discount to a community land trust. This combination would keep the dwellings affordable in perpetuity. It's a mechanism commonly used throughout the nation to build forever-

affordable housing without continuing subsidies.

That's what a good government would do. Since this entire development process has been cloaked in unnecessary secrecy, we'll probably never know if it was President Adduci or most of the village board that summarily killed off this proposal.

Instead, our village leadership squandered a golden opportunity to meet many adopted village aims including:

“Encourage new residential development that provides for the needs of the village's population.”

“Protect residential areas from the encroachment of incompatible land uses and the adverse impacts of adjacent activities. [Comprehensive Plan, page 11]

The summarily rejected preliminary proposal would have kept the housing affordable to current and future generations of River Forest seniors or, if not restricted to seniors, enabled to move here some of our teachers, librarians, village employees, non-profit workers, middle management, as well as our children who can't afford the high price of River Forest houses. It would have kept the property in harmony with the adjacent single-family neighborhood.

Instead, the village board opted for a massive incompatible development that runs afoul of many adopted village goals and objectives, notably failing to address the housing needs of River Forest residents, especially its more vulnerable seniors.

That's quite the opposite of responsible, responsive good government. River Forest's seniors – and all its residents – deserve better.

Lauber is a 38-year resident of River Forest and a city planner and land-use attorney.