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Focus PAGE B3



Focus
PAGE B18

Get Out Guide.

Focus PAGE B1

EDUCATION
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The cost of a home

Searching for
affordable housing
in Minneapolis

By Michelle Bruch / mbruch@southwestjournal.com

Aaron McLaurin hopes three jobs will be enough to rent his own place.

McLaurin, 20, said he's looked for housing "everywhere" in Minneapolis for three years, using a couple of apps to check criteria for credit scores, income thresholds and deposits. His main holdup is income requirements that demand prospective tenants earn twice or three times the cost of rent.

So he's working mornings, second shifts and night shifts as a personal care assistant, park employee and downtown security guard while also playing semi-pro football with the St. Paul Pioneers.

"I should be making enough now to do what I need to do," he said. "... I hope so."

SEE THE COST OF A HOME / PAGE A12

▲
James Calhoun and his daughters Ashley and Brittany are looking for affordable housing.
Photo by Chris Juhn

Noor trial set for April 1 start

Ex-officer faces murder charges in July 2017 shooting

By Dylan Thomas / dthomas@southwestjournal.com

The criminal trial of former Minneapolis police officer Mohamed Noor is scheduled to begin April 1 in Hennepin County District Court.

Fourth Judicial District Judge Kathryn L. Quaintance set the trial date during a Sept. 27 omnibus hearing in agreement with Noor's defense team and prosecutors from the Hennepin County Attorney's Office. Quaintance also ruled that there was probable cause to try Noor on charges of third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter, denying requests from Noor's attorneys to dismiss the charges.

On July 15, 2017, Noor shot and killed 40-year-old Justine Damond in the alley behind her Fulton neighborhood home. Damond, also known as Justine Rusczyk, had called 911 just before 11:30 p.m. to report a possible sexual

assault and was shot as she approached the police vehicle driven by Noor's former partner, Officer Matthew Harrity.

Noor has not entered a plea in the case, but his attorneys have said he intends to plead not guilty.

Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman announced the charges against Noor in March. Noor was fired from the police department that same month.

His attorneys, Tom Plunkett and Peter Wold, filed motions in August to dismiss the charges, claiming prosecutorial misconduct on the part of Freeman and a lack of probable cause.

The claim of prosecutorial misconduct stemmed from statements Freeman made during a September 2017 community meeting

SEE NOOR / PAGE A10

A second pass at the city's plan for growth

City releases revised Minneapolis 2040 plan

By Michelle Bruch / mbruch@southwestjournal.com

After sifting through nearly 10,000 comments submitted to the City of Minneapolis, staff members are in some areas scaling back the density they're proposing in a new plan for city growth.

The revised Minneapolis 2040 plan would allow triplexes in neighborhoods that are today zoned mainly for single-family homes, a step back from an earlier version of the comprehensive plan update, which proposed opening much of the city to fourplex development. The revisions also lower the proposed height limits for new development on transit corridors outside of the downtown core.

City staff said a team of people read all 10,000 comments, but they did

not attempt to classify the types of comments received, citing the massive undertaking that would entail.

The group Neighbors for More Neighbors is encouraging people to show up at the Minneapolis 2040 public hearings to express support for adding homes.

The group Minneapolis For Everyone, meanwhile, held a press conference to say they feel their concerns have been ignored. The new draft contains meaningless tweaks "while remaining tone-deaf to what is really causing the discord they have sown in the community," resident Lisa McDonald said in a statement.

Areas that were downzoned in the

SEE 2040 PLAN / PAGE A17

Currently living at Rita's House in East Isles, he's taking the same approach to housing that he does to jobs: If he gets five job interviews at once, he takes them all.

"If they call me back and say you got the house or apartment, I'm going right in," he said. "My mama always told me don't be picky about what you get."

Affordable housing is at the top of the agenda in Minneapolis. Any delay would be "too damn late," according to Mayor Jacob Frey, who dedicated \$40 million to affordable housing in his proposed 2019 budget, more than triple the level of past city investment.

Affordable housing is an easier pitch than in years past. Lydia House was picketed 15 years ago and challenged in court, but the supportive housing complex is now poised to double in size with the blessing of the Stevens Square Community Organization. The North Loop Neighborhood Association is supporting Great River Landing, an apartment project for single men that comes with a job the day they leave jail.

Involved in both projects is Lee Blons, executive director of Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative. She said the public is more empathetic today about the need for affordable housing, and non-profit housing developers have a proven track record.

What still isn't understood, Blons said, is the scope of the problem.

Tip of the iceberg

For 100,000 Twin Cities households who are paying more than half their incomes on rent, all it takes is a car repair or an illness to put housing at risk, Blons said.

The Metropolitan Council forecasted a need for 52,000 new affordable units in the Twin Cities region between 2011 and 2020, and as of December 2017, about 7,000 affordable units were added. The region is also losing affordable housing, according to the Met Council, as rents rise in the tight apartment market and affordable properties age out of their subsidies and opt to become market-rate.

The issue became more visible last summer through an encampment of people in tents near Franklin & Hiawatha.

"Just about everybody will ask, 'What happened? Why? Why did the camp spring up?'" said Patina Park, executive director of the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center.



Do you know how hard it is for a single dad to find any housing to keep this family together? There is none. There is nothing out there. ... There has to be more help out there.

— James Calhoun



Aaron McLaurin has searched for affordable housing for three years. Photo by Michelle Bruch

"This is a fraction of the ... homeless in the city. You can see them, and that upsets people."

"When people are saying the encampment is just the tip of the iceberg, it's not just a theoretical number," Blons said.

The Office to End Homelessness reports there are currently 1,421 single adults and 51 families seeking housing help through the county's Coordinated Entry System. Director David Hewitt said people with the lowest incomes, 30 percent of the area median income or less, face a shortage of more than 32,000 affordable units.

Screened out

James Calhoun is thankful to be out of the Harbor Light shelter downtown, where his cell phone was snatched from the pillow under his head. Now he is sleeping at churches and getting assistance from Families Moving Forward while he searches for a home for himself, his daughter Brittany, 15, and daughter Ashley, who at age 17 is fighting leukemia. They were evicted from a St. Paul apartment in March after health issues set them back.

Calhoun said he recently had a good week. He found a job at an auto center in Uptown, and a good boss who gives him leave to take Ashley to the hospital. But he's tired of repeatedly paying \$40–\$50 housing application fees only to find he doesn't have the right credit score or will need to pay a double damage deposit due to the prior eviction.

"Do you know how hard it is for a single dad to find any housing to keep this family together? There is none. There is nothing out there," said Calhoun. "... There has to be more help out there."

The time to act

Housing advocates say now is the time to invest in affordable housing, before costs rise to the point where public officials decide it's too expensive.

Twenty years ago, cities like Seattle, Port-

land, Denver and Minneapolis all had similar home values, according to Jeff Washburne, executive director of the City of Lakes Community Land Trust. Today, while Minneapolis' median home value is \$250,000, it's jumped to nearly \$700,000 in Seattle and close to \$400,000 in Portland and Denver.

"We don't have oceans and we don't have mountains, but it's not hard to believe that home values are going to continue to go up and more and more folks are not going to be able to withstand the pressure, whether rental or ownership," he said.

Washburne told North Side residents at a July community meeting that he brought a "message of urgency."

"I ... have this huge concern that five or 10 years from now, North Minneapolis, not only economically but racially and culturally, is going to feel very, very different," he said.

The Land Trust interviewed nearly 1,000 African Americans in North Minneapolis about five years ago. Seventy percent said they wanted to buy a home on the North Side, while about 60 percent earned less than \$24,000 a year.

"When a significant portion of the community does not have that property control, they're left vulnerable to market forces," said Gretchen Nicholls, program officer for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a national organization that aims to bring economic opportunity to residents.

She said she's hoping for a cooperative housing solution at the 3100 block of 22nd Avenue South, where a landlord lost a rental license and tenants said they were asked to leave by the end of September.

At a protest Sept. 30, one resident of 23 years said he lived in the neighborhood back when there wasn't a gym and there wasn't a light-rail train.

"We are this neighborhood. We belong here and we plan to stay here," he said.

Jose Cruz has lived for 10 years at his 22nd Avenue apartment.



When people are saying the encampment is just the tip of the iceberg, it's not just a theoretical number.

— Lee Blons, executive director of Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative

"That's my house," he said. "... I'm trying to look for a different place, but it's too expensive right now."

One Bancroft homeowner at the protest said she's worried about gentrification where she lives near 38th & Chicago.

"Lower-income people like ourselves have a harder time living there," she said.

One of her neighbors learned their apartment building had been sold and they had a month to leave. She watched another neighbor go through divorce, become financially strained and enter foreclosure; a buyer flipped the house and sold it for a high price, she said.

More than 500 apartment properties changed hands in Minneapolis from 2000 to 2017, with a spike last year, according to the Minnesota Housing Partnership. Nearly 20 percent of those sales were concentrated in Uptown and Whittier. Sales tend to correspond with higher rent increases, according to the agency.

A path to homeownership

Some groups see affordable homeownership as another solution. The Kingfield neighborhood recently allocated funds to help the City of Lakes Community Land Trust rehab a house at 210 W. 46th St. The land trust will retain ownership of the land and sell the house separately to a new homeowner.

That's how dance and pilates instructor Jessica Cressey purchased her home on Blaisdell. With the help of the land trust, she bought her house about 10 years ago for \$147,000. Houses around her have started selling for more than \$370,000, but she knows her house will remain permanently affordable as part of the land trust, even if she decides to sell. Now she's aiming to open a studio out of her home early next year.

"I don't think it's any coincidence that my business has grown and become more successful in the 10 years I've been a homeowner," she said.

James Calhoun meets with staff at the county's Coordinated Entry System in October, the first step in a process to get help with housing. He did find a nice house for sale while walking with his daughters near the Chain of Lakes. They checked the price: \$2.4 million.

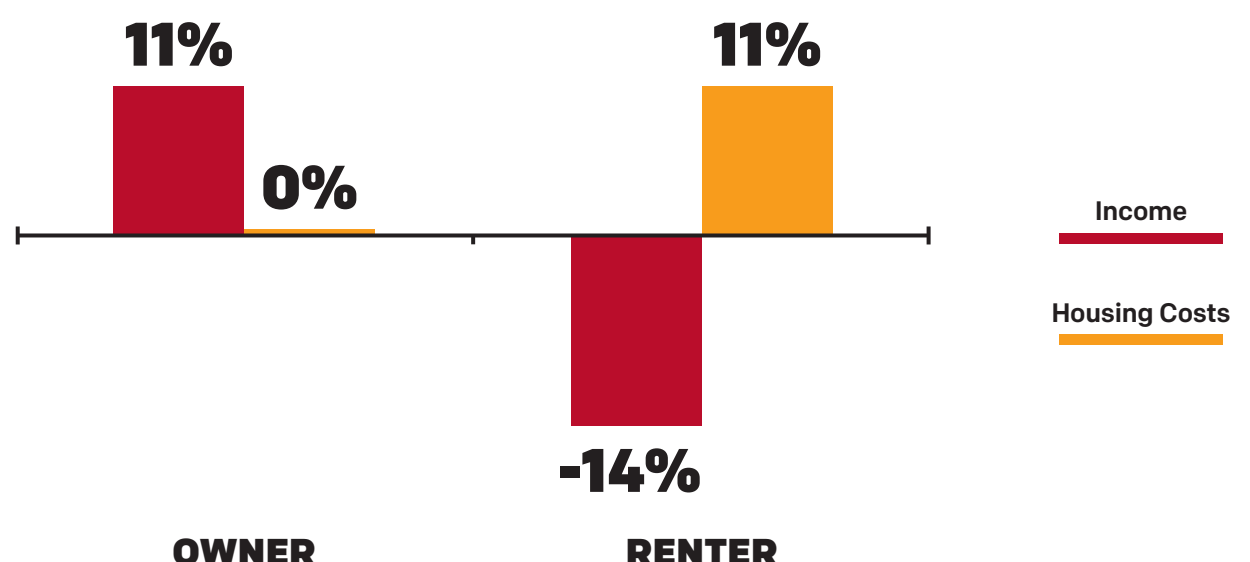
"Someday, honey," he said to his daughter. "No day," Brittany said in response.

Although hundreds seek housing help, Calhoun is optimistic their family will receive priority in line.

"We try to keep the jokes going through all this," he said. "You got to stay positive, that's the biggest thing. Just stay positive. Keep moving."

CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD INCOMES AND COSTS

% change in median income and median housing costs by owner/renter status, Minneapolis, 2000–2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, City of Minneapolis