Over-the-Rhine Comprehensive Plan: Evaluation of NorthPointe Plan

Shown in italics are excerpts from the 2002 Over-the-Rhine Comprehensive Plan, the city’s official document created to guide development in Over-the-Rhine. We used the standards of this document to assess of NorthPointe’s proposal, laid out by the relevant goals and recommendations it names.

*“Improvements in the “Rothenberg Area” will center around a newly renovated Rothenberg elementary school. This will include expanded green space and parking of the school. This area is also targeted for housing renovation and in-fill development. Housing developments undertaken nearby Rothenberg school should incorporate larger units to accommodate families with children.” (p. 4)*

*Housing Goals (p. 7)*

*1. Encourage and welcome new investment at all income levels of the housing market and ensure the long-term sustainability of enough affordable housing to house current residents*

*2. Provide appropriate housing-related services for all residents*

*3. Protect, preserve and enhance the significant landmarks and areas of OTR’s historic, architectural and cultural heritage without displacement*

*Key Recommendations (p. 7)*

*1. Establish the Mixed Income Housing Model that provides for balanced housing opportunities*

*2. Give priority to Mixed Income Projects.*

*3. Provide homeownership opportunities at all income levels*

*4. Support the rental housing market by upgrading rental housing*

*5. Create larger family units at all income levels*

*6. Project Improvements · Vine Street - 1200 block · Vine Street - 1300 block ReSTOC · Pendleton Mews · Melindy Square · Washington Park · Mulberry/Rothenberg Area infill · Findlay Market Area Housing*

**X** NorthPointe estimates the cost of the 21 future single-family homes on their lots to be $400,000 - $600,000—a price only affordable to residents who earn well above 100% of Area Median Income (AMI) for Hamilton County. The additional city-owned and subsidized building that NorthPointe plans to incorporate would offer 8 units of “workforce housing” that are not large enough for families with children. By NorthPointe’s estimation, these one-bedroom units wouldn’t be affordable to anyone earning less than 70% AMI.

At Rothenberg, 99% of students qualify for free lunch, which means that their families all earn less than 45% AMI. Housing that is affordable to these families is rapidly disappearing from the neighborhood— around 73% of the housing in the 0 – 30% AMI range that existed in 2000 has been lost. Nothing about this proposed development centers around the needs of the kids and families in this, the only public neighborhood school left in Over-the-Rhine. To date, the developer has not approached school administrators to discuss the project.

*Quality of Life Goals (p. 11)*

*1. Create and maintain open space and green space that serves the whole community*

*2. Establish parks and recreational areas and centers that are accessible, well maintained and meet the needs of the community*

*3. Establish OTR schools as community anchors that provide outstanding educational opportunities that meet the needs of all residents, young and old*

*4. Encourage and support a diverse mix of cultural organizations and destinations*

*5. Create a clean visually appealing neighborhood*

**X** NorthPointe’s plan begins with the decimation of the recreational and green space already utilized by the existing community. Parents without backyards feel safe letting their children play in this highly visible space at the entrance of the school. The current community garden has been developed for 18 years with the help of community organizations, neighborhood youth, and countless volunteers. Pressured by outcry from the community, NorthPointe has begun to privately discuss an option to relocate two of the half-courts around the corner—out of sight of the development. A new, smaller private garden in their design has also been upheld as collateral. But it is not acceptable to overtake public community assets, destroy them, and offer a manufactured package of lesser value in return. This plan reinforces the message far too often communicated to low-income families by our current development models—that in order for beautiful amenities to exist in their neighborhood, the things they use (and by default they themselves) must first be removed. Along with the pain of classism and racism in these plans comes a deep sense of disillusionment that makes community engagement feel useless. Diversity and cultural mix is a far cry from this result.

This NorthPointe plan may appear to be just another opportunity for growth in a sea of Over-the-Rhine development deals, but the land in question is unique. An area of 76,000 square feet of public, taxpayer-owned land offers a valuable opportunity to incentivize intentional, holistic development that models community goals—*especially* those that the market alone can’t offer. We can’t afford to turn our public resources over to any actor that does not plan for equitable development!