

## A MORE INCLUSIVE ST. LOUIS THROUGH BETTER LAND USE

By John Cruz

As the American landscape has changed, planning for communities has had a wide array of challenges that make looking ahead decades into the future increasingly difficult. Influenced by national and local policy, changing priorities by the next generation of adults and all the rapidly evolving factors that alter the way we live, work, play and learn, we are quickly realizing that the world can change without our even realizing it. The society we live in today is very different than the one we grew up in.



This is what makes planning for communities problematic, and why it is important to recognize that even though St. Louis will continue to move forward, there are many long standing societal inequalities that must be altered in order to achieve a just society. We have finally reached a point where we are able to recognize these inequalities and prejudices in order to take steps necessary to rectify them.

Our predictive models are better, our statistics more comprehensive, views into other cultures have gained greater depth, and new policy recommendations more reflective of overall realities instead of something that only works for one group of people. As a result, while planners cannot predict every coming change for a community, we now have the tools needed to fix many of these issues and start making society better for all residents. This is the path that equitable community development must take to be successful.

A substantial part of the American democracy and free market economics experiment was that each person as a sovereign individual can achieve as much as they permit themselves, and that we can break away from tired titles of nobility granting power and fortune to the heirs of land barons. Yet in many ways we have failed, and a person's success is largely determined not by how hard they can work but by where they were born, how they grew up, and what the social class of their parents was. Upward mobility is difficult, and it is something easy for many people to lose sight of.

Through better policies addressing the proper use of land and the preservation of affordable housing, we can take steps towards making our society more equitable. Affordable housing in and of itself necessary to create strong cities, where people can thrive without a severe rent burden, avoid automobile ownership to cut down the transportation burden, and have nearby many employment opportunities to lessen the burden of finding and keeping a job that is a poor fit. This creates residents that are happier, healthier, and better able to avoid the toxic stresses that substantially impact their lives in profound negative fashion. By addressing other aspects of land use, we can keep communities unique and allow them to retain their character that attracts people to them.

For a more inclusive St. Louis to strengthen their communities, and not simply displace existing residents, addressing land use and affordable housing should be, without exception, non-negotiable.