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Letters: To stave off gentrification and thrive, Pilsen needs expansion of TIF district



Commuters exit the CTA Pink Line station on 18th Street in the Pilsen neighborhood Sept. 18, 2024. (E. Jason Wambsgans/Chicago Tribune)



By **CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

PUBLISHED: October 5, 2024 at 5:00 a.m.

I have lived in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood for more than 50 years and have witnessed the neighborhood's evolution. It has always been home to working-class immigrants, shifting from Eastern European to Mexican in the 1960s and '70s, becoming the city's first majority-Mexican/Latino community.

Gone are the days of gangs controlling our streets, too many bars causing havoc, overcrowded schools and poor housing options. Today, Pilsen is recognized as having "one of the coolest streets" in the world. While this perception should fill us with pride, we are at a crossroads. Alongside this recognition are the increased pressure of gentrification, the deterioration of infrastructure, escalating property taxes and declining school enrollment.

The majority of residents here want a safe, thriving and healthier neighborhood with the opportunity to determine its future. Communities will continue to evolve, and Pilsen is no exception. Balanced development would allow long-term residents and stakeholders to benefit from the neighborhood's growing prosperity while welcoming newcomers. By amending the local tax increment financing district, resources would exist to directly implement strategies identified in Pilsen's Quality of Life Plan, including more affordable housing, home repairs for long-term property owners, support for local businesses, access to transportation, resources for seniors to age in place, and repairs for the library, public schools and sidewalks.

Opponents are stirring fear in residents by saying that an expanded TIF district would create displacement and raise property taxes directly. Opponents have no plan or vision for Pilsen's future. We currently have unchecked gentrification that could forever change the community's culture, character and vitality. Yes, property taxes will rise, as they do across the city. Pilsen property owners already pay more than their fair share of taxes to public coffers and will continue to do so. However, by amending the current industrial TIF district to expand its boundaries and uses, the increment generated by the change would be invested in residential and commercial areas to tackle displacement, not accelerate it.

Pilsen has unique challenges with a 100-year-old vaulted sidewalk system, sections of the oldest lead pipe water system in Chicago and one of the oldest housing stocks. Pilsen is eligible to amend the TIF district according to the Chicago Department of Planning and Development.

The mistrust surrounding use of TIF funds is understandable, but proponents, the Pilsen Preservation Collective and others will hold public officials accountable for the allocation and disbursement of resources to ensure balance development — prosperity without displacement.

— *Raúl I. Raymundo, co-founder and CEO, The Resurrection Project*

University protest guidelines

The revised guidelines for protests at universities are intended to protect free speech, not to hinder it. The guidelines restore the viability of free speech without favor to one group or point of view. The right to free expression has never been limitless; that is what makes it endure as a cornerstone of our democracy. Debate and dissent can and should continue, but not when they cause harm and violate certain rights and freedoms of others.

Protests that involve the takeover of university property and the intimidation of other campus groups cross the line from free expression to harmful disruption. This principle applies to all protests.

— *Rachelle Gold, Chicago*

Bravo to Chicago lawmakers

Last year, an African serval cat escaped from a home in Vernon Hills, and while thankfully no humans were injured during the escape and recapture hours later by law enforcement, the serval died from its injuries.

Wild animals are wild by nature and pose serious threats to the public, law enforcement and themselves when unqualified private owners keep them.

The welfare of our animals is a priority for many Chicago voters, who expect their lawmakers to cast votes in support of animal protection.

Earlier this year, the Illinois House of Representatives raised two crucial bills for votes. One would prohibit the private possession of certain dangerous wild animals including servals, caracals, kangaroos and wallabies. The other would ban cruel, wasteful “wildlife killing contests,” in which cash or guns are awarded for killing the most, largest or smallest animals. It wasn’t easy, but each one passed the Illinois House.

These victories were made possible by the Chicago lawmakers who chose to stand up for wildlife. These representatives each scored 100% on the [Humane Society Legislative Fund's 2024 Illinois Humane Scorecard](#), which we encourage voters to use to inform their decisions at the polls.

It says a lot about a candidate the way they perceive animals. We urge other lawmakers to look to these allies' examples and our star Chicago legislators to continue to speak for those that cannot speak for themselves.

Chicago has always been a force at the Illinois Capitol protecting animals, and we look forward to working with these lawmakers over more progress next session.

— *Marc Ayers, Illinois state director, Humane Society Legislative Fund, Springfield*

Cats, dogs used in research

Americans may laugh about false stories of Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, eating pets. But would they laugh if they knew, or cared to acknowledge, the number of cats and dogs, to say nothing of monkeys, that have been cruelly used in research, often in facilities affiliated with universities, such as the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and funded by federal agencies using taxpayer dollars?

Nonanimal research methods are available and must become standard.

— *Shannon Zalinski, Chicago*

Height zones at concerts

I recently attended a concert of one of my 1990s feminist icons, PJ Harvey. I was looking forward to seeing her live, finally. I still am.

I was there, I heard her, but I could get only fleeting glimpses of her careening around the stage. At first, I was about 30 yards from the stage, but three songs in, tired of staring at the back of the head of the man in front of me, I moved to the back of the auditorium where I still couldn't see a thing. The clearest glimpses I got of what was happening on the stage were through the cellphone camera screens of tall guys around me enjoying their uninterrupted sight lines. Cool.

The Salt Shed is great acoustically but not for sight lines, or, I should say, for sight lines for people under 6 feet tall in a mixed group. Unless you spring for the higher-priced premium seats, you're out of luck.

The whole experience got me thinking: Why are tall people still choosing to stand near the front at concerts? Actually, I know the answer to that — because they can. OK, so why is that still permitted?

Awareness of women's perspectives is increasing in our country, but in the realm of live concerts, we are in the stone ages. The live performance of a feminist icon should be the first place you see equitable standing areas. Why not have a separate standing area for people — women, men, whoever — who are under 5 feet, 8 inches so they are in front of all the taller others? That seems fair and reasonable. I'm calling on all performers and venues that support women to demand height zones at their general admission live shows.

I remember Bikini Kill frontwoman and human dynamite stick Kathleen Hanna chiding the tall males in the front during their shows, demanding that they move to the back to allow the women to see and enjoy the show in the front. She was a pioneer.

It's too bad there's no one following behind her.

— *Kym L. Fraher, Chicago*

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