

League of Women Voters of Dane County Forum

Where We Live: Equitable and Sustainable Neighborhoods

May 11, 2023, 6:30-8 p.m.

Location: Via Zoom



Panelists

- **Alexis London** - Executive Director, Bayview Foundation
- **Robert Pierce** - Executive Director, Neighborhood Food Solutions
- **Yesianne Ramírez-Madera** - Supervisor, Meadowridge Library
- **Valerie Renk** - CEO, Habitat for Humanity of Dane County

Moderator

- **Jeannine Ramsey** - LWVDC Book Discussion Coordinator

Discussion Questions

- What characteristics does an equitable and sustainable neighborhood have?
- What strengths and challenges towards equity and sustainability does your community possess?
- What can you do to make your own community more sustainable and equitable?
- What barriers may you run into in creating change and what might you do to mitigate these barriers?
- What can the Dane County League do to help develop equitable and sustainable neighborhoods?

The League's Position

- Government at all levels should develop policies that will assure sufficient land at a reasonable cost on which to develop housing and that will assure fulfillment of other goals such as access to employment, preservation of open space, environmental cleanliness and beauty, and other aspects of a suitable living environment.
- Regional and metropolitan planning should be promoted to prevent haphazard urban growth, and housing for low- and moderate-income families should be

provided as a part of all planned neighborhoods or communities. ([Impact on Issues 2020-2022](#), page 141).

Development in Dane County

Dane County has grown significantly in the past five years and the growth is not expected to slow down. In Madison alone, the population is expected to grow by more than 100,000 between 2020 and 2050 ([Garfield, 2023](#)). Currently, housing growth is not fast enough to keep up with population growth ([City of Madison, 2022](#)). This shortage is most keenly felt by lower-income populations ([City of Madison, 2022](#)).

To support this growth, Dane County organizations have invested in housing and resource development through the lens of promoting social infrastructure.

What is Social Infrastructure?

Social infrastructure relates to policies and resources in communities that foster connections among people, such as public education, amenities like grocery stores, human services, and healthcare ([Gould-Werth, Abbot, and Openchowski, 2023](#); [Latham and Layton, 2019](#)). Social infrastructure influences our ability to interact with others in our community, which is especially important for people who are more restricted to their neighborhoods and homes, such as children, elderly people, and people with disabilities ([Palaces for the people: why libraries are more than just books | Cities | The Guardian](#)).

Examples of Social Infrastructure Include:

- Public: Libraries, museums, parks, plazas
- Commercial: Markets, shops, cafes, hardware stores, street vendors
- Entertainment: Gyms, basketball courts, swimming pools, cinemas
- Religious: Churches, temples, synagogues
- Transit-Oriented: Buses, bus stops, train stations, sidewalks, bike paths

([Latham and Layton, 2019](#))

Role of Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure fosters relationship-building, promotes health, and reduces crime ([Latham and Layton, 2019](#); [PALACES FOR THE PEOPLE: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life](#), p. 21). It also increases acceptance, as people are exposed to individuals with different political affiliations, cultures, and identities in spaces like basketball courts and playgrounds, which “spar[k] relationships that would never have formed,” because, in these spaces, “all participants have the same social status.” ([PALACES FOR THE PEOPLE: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic](#)

[Life](#), p.166-167). Klinenberg explains that “helping groups recognize their common humanity...pave[s] the way for more meaningful relationships” ([PALACES FOR THE PEOPLE: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life](#), p. 167) with those that are culturally different throughout someone's lifetime.

Another important benefit of social infrastructure is reducing isolation. Isolation has a profound impact on health, even greater than that of obesity and smoking. Since the number of older adults who live alone is growing, the necessity of social infrastructure is even more apparent ([Palaces for the people: why libraries are more than just books | Cities | The Guardian](#)).

Social infrastructure is also created through initiatives that may not initially have increasing social cohesion as a primary goal. For instance, community gardens not only improve the physical health of community members by providing nutritious food, but also provide a social environment and shared purpose that strengthens community members' relationships with one another ([PALACES FOR THE PEOPLE: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life](#), p.129).

Social infrastructure can be intentionally integrated into planning developments ([PALACES FOR THE PEOPLE: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life](#), p.17). Klinenberg describes daycare facilities that encourage parents to come into the center and wait for their children rather than having scheduled pickup times. He explains that while the latter improves efficiency (and is often favored by modern developments), the former promotes the community building that is essential for community and individual well-being ([PALACES FOR THE PEOPLE: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life](#), p.18).

Threats to Social Infrastructure

Modern infrastructure often prioritizes efficiency, which can limit the interactions among community members to the detriment of the health and well-being of communities ([PALACES FOR THE PEOPLE: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life](#), p.18).

Despite its importance, social infrastructure is often overlooked in budgeting decisions ([Palaces for the people: why libraries are more than just books | Cities | The Guardian](#)). Libraries specifically, which abound in community resources and opportunities for

community relationship-building, have been negatively impacted by budget cuts. In 2021, Madison Public Library's budget was cut 2% ([Thibert, 2021](#)).

How Are Decisions About Neighborhood Development and Resource-Allocation Made?

County-Wide

Zoning ordinances outline regulations regarding planned developments within a specific zoning district. Zoning ordinances can be enforced at the county, city, and neighborhood levels and are developed by county or local governance. To learn more about county-wide planning, see [Dane County Wisconsin Comprehensive Plan](#).

Madison-Specific

In Madison, zoning ordinances are developed and revised by the Madison City Council. Housing developments permitted by the zoning ordinance do not require public review if the development does not violate codes and ordinances. In this case, the development may be approved by the city without review by city boards ([City of Madison, 2022](#)). Other developments may need to be reviewed by city boards. In Madison, these boards include the Plan Commission, Urban Design Commission, Landmarks Commission, and/or Common Council.

How You Can Get Involved

Below are various government and community organizations that play a role in developing equitable and sustainable housing in Dane County. So that you can keep up to date on housing developments and opportunities to provide feedback, sign-ups for updates are included in the list below.

County-Wide

Dane County Regional Housing Strategy

Municipalities included:

Fitchburg, Madison, Middleton, Monona, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Verona, Deerfield, Rutland, Springfield, Vermont, Cottage Grove, Cross Plains, DeForest, McFarland, Oregon, Waunakee, and Windsor

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Middleton-Specific

[City of Middleton Workforce Housing Strategy Recommendations](#)

Madison-Specific

[Learn about Current Development Proposals](#)

- [Plan for East Madison Presentation](#)
- [Plan for West Madison Presentation](#)
- [Madison-Area Developments to Watch](#)

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Neighborhood Food Solutions

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Additional Information on Social Infrastructure

[Palaces for the People summary](#)

Want to Learn More?

Books

[Palaces for the People](#) by Eric Klinenborg

[Political Determinants of Health](#) by Daniel Dawes

Articles

[2022 Dane County Housing Snapshot](#)

[Dane County Housing strategy](#)

[A new model for city planning in Madison](#)

[What is social infrastructure?](#)

[The importance of libraries](#)

[Social infrastructure and the public life of cities: Studying urban sociality and public spaces](#)

Videos/Podcasts

[Podcast episode explaining the role of Alders](#)

[Recordings of past neighborhood planning development meetings](#)

Resources

[First-Time Homebuyers Education and Resources](#)

[Grants for Developers](#)

[Home-Buy the American Dream | Community Development, City of Madison, Wisconsin
Madison & Dane County Movin Out](#)

[Home Ownership Program | Urban League of Greater Madison](#)

[Home Ownership Program | Common Wealth Development](#)

[Own It – Building Black Wealth](#)

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