

Memo

To: City Council

From: Bryan Myrkle, Community Development Director

Date: February 6, 2020

Re: Request for consideration of rezoning in the RT Two-Family Residential District

Included on your council agenda is a request from property owners and residents of a portion of East Lovett Street and Pleasant Street that their immediate neighborhood be rezoned from RT-Two Family residential to R-1 Single Family residential.

The number and quality of rental units in the City of Charlotte has been a topic of discussion for many years. It is commonly believed that residential rental units, especially those created from what used to be single family homes, are often neglected or poorly maintained. It is also commonly assumed that too much rental housing is disruptive to neighborhood cohesion and has a negative effect on neighborhood quality.

Our own research, conducted locally about 10 years ago, did not support the idea that rental units were necessarily neglected from a property maintenance standpoint. We found that owner-occupied homes were just as likely to suffer neglect.

However, my department has not conducted any research on multi-family rental houses and any associated social, economic, financial or legal issues and impacts.

As you may know, many (if not most) of these converted multi-family rental units were created in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s as a way to preserve the market viability of large, order homes in the central part of the city. That was an era of suburbanization and subdivision-style housing development, when older homes were not as desirable. However, times have changed and so have the associated economic pressures and market dynamics. Today, there is a greater value placed on historic preservation, and a wider interest in home renovation and remodeling.

I do not agree with the way this request from residents was worded, nor some of the conclusions they have reached. However, I do believe that these feelings are wide-spread in the community and have at least some degree of validity. Therefore, I also believe the request should be taken seriously and the issue fairly evaluated.

Unfortunately, this evaluation is not going to take place in a matter of a few days or weeks. Reducing or eliminating the ability of property owners to create this style of rental housing is a large-scale, long-term planning decision that, in our opinion as staff, should be addressed through our recognized and established community master planning processes. This should include inclusive and extensive community input from all stakeholders, including homeowners, renters, landlords, public safety, social services and similar. It might also need to include professional planning assistance, as this certainly is not an issue unique to Charlotte, and we may want to look to the experiences of other communities as we seek resolution.

We also understand that this issue may elicit very strong feelings and opposing viewpoints, and taking a deliberate, inclusive and careful approach will be key to the community's eventual acceptance of any decisions or proposed solutions.

It is possible that the perceived need for this type of housing conversion has peaked, and it is time to let the pendulum begin to swing the other way. We are asking for time to explore that, so that the City can find an appropriate resolution to this issue; while at the same time responding to what has become a common message from residents in regard to rental housing.

Consequently, we are recommending that the City Council place a temporary moratorium on the conversion of any existing single-family homes (rental or otherwise) to multi-family residences. This would allay the immediate concerns of those residents opposed to rental unit conversions, while giving the City and community time to consider the issue for the long term.

It should be noted that this moratorium would not affect any multi-family units already in existence, nor would it prohibit the creation of new single-family rental units.