



THE EAST SIDE UNIFIED HOUSING JUSTICE JOURNAL

Published by the East Side Freedom Library

We welcome you to a new monthly update providing the East Side with the latest and juiciest news about the past, present, and future of housing justice in our community.

In this newsletter, you can discover untold stories of the East Side, learn about opportunities for activism, and find community resources.

East Side Housing Justice



In this Issue:

- The Saga of Swede Hollow
 - Zoning Law Changes
Influencing Community
 - Community Feature: Andria Fagge'Tt, Program Coordinator at Family Values for Life
 - Housing Justice Community Resources
 - Community Art by Keith Christensen
-

Swede Hollow: The Little Village That Became a Park



A home in Swede Hollow intentionally set aflame after the health department declared the neighborhood contaminated, 1956. Image: Minnesota Historical Society

by **Sophie Auerbach and Ben Werner**

Although the ravine played an important role in local history, many people are not aware of Swede Hollow's existence. The winding park is tucked into a valley on Saint Paul's East Side, accessible by a number of well maintained trails that lead underneath the Seventh Street Improvement Arches built by the Works Progress Administration. If you have heard of Swede Hollow, you might not know that the valley once contained hundreds of houses flanking Phalen Creek, which runs from Lake Phalen down to the river. For 117 years the area was a home to immigrants trying to make their way in a new country.

The Dakota people occupied the area surrounding Swede Hollow for thousands of years until they were forcefully removed by the United States (U.S.) government. After colonizers displaced the Dakota community, Swedish immigrants moved into the area. Beginning in the 1850s, they took refuge in abandoned shacks formerly used by fur trappers. It was first called *Svenska Dalen*, or Swedish Dale, claiming the legacy of the first Swedish immigrant settlement in St. Paul. The houses of Swede Hollow were built in a ravine and didn't have modern amenities like plumbing or electricity. The community used a spring for their water and the Phalen creek

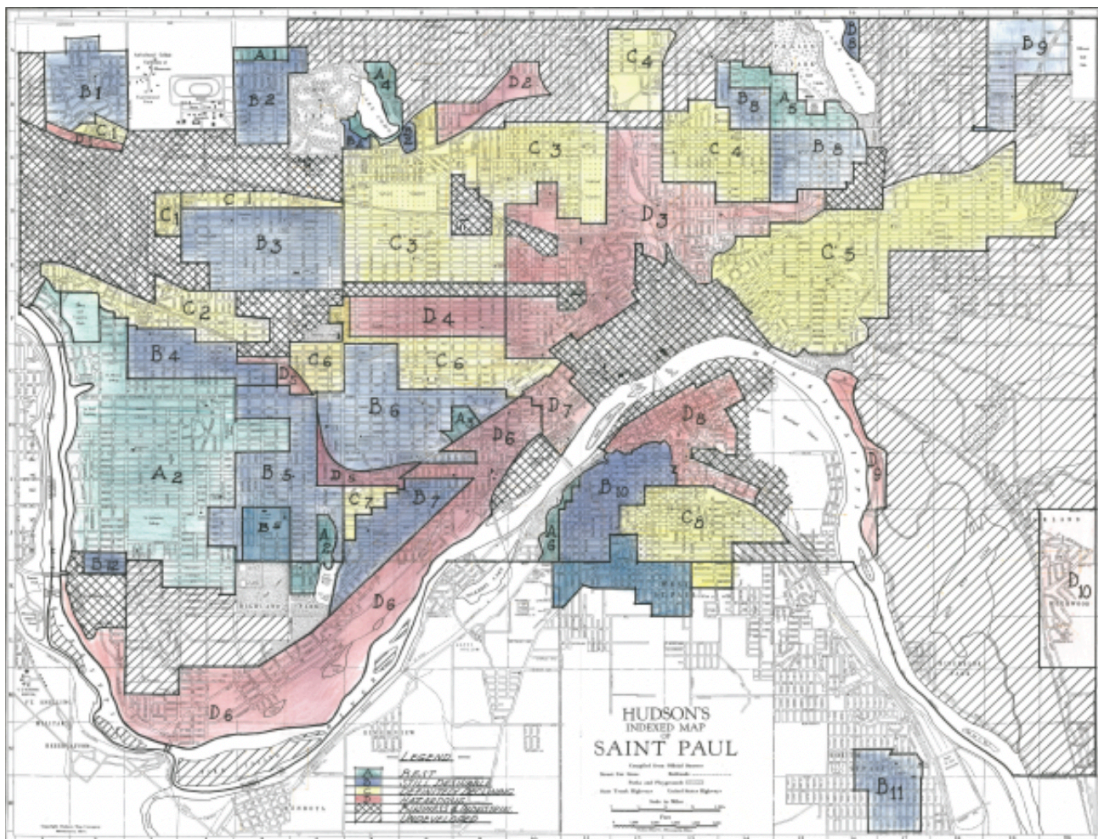
to dispose of their sewage. Many of the people who lived there had jobs in the milling and brewing industries at the top of the ravine, including at Hamm's Brewery.

The ravine was not solely occupied by Swedish Immigrants. In the 1880s, Irish immigrants moved in, followed by Italians in the 1900s. After World War II, Swede Hollow was primarily inhabited by Mexican immigrants. Following World War II, the U.S. launched an aggressive campaign of "Urban Renewal" designed to improve the quality of city neighborhoods. Without proper plumbing and sewers, Swede Hollow was deemed dangerous and unsanitary. On December 11, 1956, the city health department declared the spring contaminated.

Eviction notices were swiftly posted, and the 16 families that still lived in Swede Hollow, which totaled an approximate 86 people, were immediately displaced. When all the residents had moved out, the city fire department came and used gasoline to burn all the houses and structures to the ground.

After the Swede Hollow neighborhood was burned to the ground, it remained abandoned and was largely ignored by the city for two decades. In the 1970s, Swede Hollow was cleaned up and transformed into the 25-acre park it is today. While the history of European immigration to Swede Hollow has received more attention in recent years, few markers exist to tell the story of the Dakota people in the valley they originally called home.

Reshaping Zoning with Residents in Mind



Areas by Grade	
Area	Grade
13%	A "Best"
28%	B "Still Desirable"
31%	C "Definitely Decline"
27%	D "Hazardous"

Eighty years ago, a federal agency, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), created "Residential Security" maps of major American cities. These maps document how loan officers, appraisers and real estate professionals evaluated mortgage lending risk. Neighborhoods considered "hazardous" were often "redlined" by lending

institutions, denying them access to capital investment. Redlining practices have been enshrined in zoning laws throughout history. The HOLC deployed examiners across the country to classify neighborhoods by their perceived level of lending risk. Above is their classification of St. Paul. Image: Minnesota Historical Society

by Lena Abara

While municipal zoning processes are notoriously convoluted, a basic understanding of zoning codes can help communities collectively advocate for the wellbeing of their own neighborhoods. Zoning codes are municipal laws that determine how certain sections of land can be utilized. These policies do not get a lot of attention, but they are exceptionally influential in the affordability, accessibility, and cultural inclusivity of our neighborhoods.

The City of St. Paul uses an urban design code organized in categories from least to most in depth. The zoning districts are categorized according to the list below:

1. Residential districts - One Family
2. Residential districts - Two Family

3. Traditional neighborhood (Mixed-use districts)
4. Business districts
5. Industrial districts
6. Planned Development districts

Since the code's inception in 1975, there has been a separation of detached single-family housing from duplexes, triplexes, and other types. The decision to keep single-family districts intact in St. Paul has proved contentious, but has yet to change dramatically. Critics cite the discrimination and segregation catalyzed by zoning laws. Researchers across the political spectrum have found [exclusionary zoning laws](#) create walls between racial and socioeconomic groups, fueling the housing affordability crisis by artificially increasing housing prices.

Advocates for the maintenance of the current single-family zoning law portend its potential to help communities increase homeownership rates and build generational wealth. Political science professors, Charles L. Cochran and Eloise F. Malone, exemplify the centrality of home ownership to the American dream in their [collaborative work](#). They promulgate, "House ownership represents more than shelter: it has come to represent a means to financial independence... over 67% of U.S families own a home."

In 2019, the Minneapolis City Council [eliminated single-family zoning](#) to address inequality, urban sprawl, and pollution caused by the zoning limitations. Many community advocates believe it is time for St. Paul to follow suit. In 2018, St. Paul passed Resolution 18-1204, recognizing the need to create and maintain affordable housing, as well as address disparities in the market. The resolution was created in response to the housing crisis and population increase in St. Paul. Since the 2010 Census, the population has risen almost 7% and is currently estimated at 311,504.

Recent legislative changes to the St. Paul zoning codes were made allowing more medium-density housing in the city. The clause that required homes in residential districts to be at least 22 feet wide was removed, and medium-density housing was expanded as an intermediate solution to single-family homes and larger apartment buildings. The city also removed a 5,000 square foot lot-size requirement for dwelling units and the requirement for newly constructed units to be occupied by the property owner.

Included in the city's [2040 comprehensive plan](#) is a proposal for potential multi-unit building areas along transit routes and neighborhoods in single-family districts. The 2040 plan itself is a blueprint for development in Saint Paul over the next 20 years, but community members have not had significant

influence on important elements of this long-term agenda. Some of the plan's focus areas include: equitable cities, aging in community, public health, and economic development. Within the seven chapter document, which includes land use and transportation, there is an effort to enhance the cultural, historical, and economic prosperity of the area.

The evolution, maintenance, and reassessment of zoning laws in St. Paul will directly affect residents throughout the city. As the city continues to consider the efficacy of its zoning laws, it is imperative that community voices help shape these decisions. To encourage community participation and demonstrate transparency, St. Paul created a two-phase [1-4 Unit Housing Study](#). The first phase focused on small housing, accessory dwelling units, and small parcels. These amendments to the zoning code were adopted by the City Council in January 2022 and went into effect March 5, 2022.

The second phase is the broader and more in-depth part of the work, focusing on additional zoning flexibility to support greater housing diversity. During this phase, the city is studying the potential to allow multiplex housing in more places, change sizing and standard to increase housing options, and allow more types of single-family homes. St. Paul is currently in the technical analysis and community engagement stage of this phase.

If you are a St. Paul resident, you can visit the city's designated [engagement site](#) to contribute your ideas and sign up for [email updates](#) on the project.

Community Feature



Andria Fagge'Tt (middle) with colleagues at Family Values for Life's I Heart Mom Event, May 2022. Image: Family Values for Life

An ESHJ Interview with Andria Fagge'Tt

This month we had the honor of speaking with Andria Fagge'Tt. She coordinates a program called “Jumpstart to The New You” at Family Values For Life, an East Side organization founded by Miss Alfreda Flowers over 20 years ago. The organization, formerly known as Youth Values for Life, is housed at First Covenant Church of Saint Paul. Family Values For Life (FVFL) has earned its spot as a pillar of the East Side, with unequivocal devotion to the community and a commitment to supporting single-parent households in physical fitness, spiritual empowerment, mental alertness, and financial stability.

Andria draws inspiration for her work from her parents, who have roots in the community. Andria shared with us, “They were always out helping people, growing up, you know, we went to church, we did a lot of volunteering, at the nursing homes, and food shelves. And so my parents instilled in us to have that mindset of giving back.” Throughout our conversation, Andria touched on the collective trauma induced by housing insecurity, which is currently exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic. The present conditions of our world, explained Andria, intensify the anxiety, uncertainty, pressure, and feelings of isolation caused by housing insecurity. FVFL aims to combat those conditions with a holistic approach.

For Andria, finding work at FVFL has been both rewarding and fulfilling. When the pandemic reached Minnesota in 2020, Andria reflected on the

meals she prepared for her community. In one day, she and her mother made 50 meals and distributed them to folks staying at a homeless encampment in the neighborhood. She lauded, “This organization is in alignment with my life - their values and what they stand for align with my beliefs. This is really good work that we're doing. Our mindset is just to keep growing, to keep working with families to serve the community.”

Andria described FVFL as an organization with a serving mentality. She explained, “We take extra classes, and we educate ourselves, so that way we can give the best to the people that we work with. It's also important to connect with others, nonprofits, other businesses, and people who are doing good work in the community so that Family Values can get out there even more.”

FVFL primarily serves the East Side of St. Paul. But by hosting events online, they have been able to engage with folks across the United States. They boast a modest, yet mighty staff who support programming designed for a variety of ages and purposes. [Jumpstart to The New You](#) focuses on empowering women in becoming their best selves, [Beauty for Ashes](#) provides grief and trauma counseling, and [U-Turn 180](#) empowers youth through after school and summer programs. Andria proudly shared the success of FVFL’s 2021 youth reading program, which resulted in improved reading levels for all participants. She expressed her elation and proclaimed the program’s success as a victory worth celebrating.

When asked what community means to her, Andria provided an answer that reflects her values and commitment to service. “I think it means working together for the greater good of everybody,” she said, “That's what I see as community.”

While Andria and the small FVFL team pack a big punch, their work is never complete. FVFL is truly a community-based organization providing an incredible platform for interdependence, support, and collective empowerment. If you would like to be involved in FVFL, visit their [website](#), [Facebook page](#), and [Instagram account](#), or send an email to info@familyvaluesforlife.org.

Community Resources

HOME Line

HOME Line provides free and low-cost legal, organizing, education, and advocacy services so that tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems.

For assistance, you can [send an email](#) to a HOME Line attorney or call 612-728-5767.

Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)

SMRLS provides free, high-quality legal help to low-income people in critical civil matters, like securing food, shelter, and safety.

For assistance, call 1-888-575-2954 or [apply online](#).

Affordable Homeownership Pilot: Local Housing Incentives Account (LHIA)

The LHIA Affordable Homeownership Pilot will provide grants to support affordable homeownership development, including acquisition and rehabilitation, for projects that best meet the following two priorities:

- **Racial Equity Priority:** create homeownership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and other ethnic or racial groups that own homes at disproportionately lower rates than white households in the region; and
- **Geographic Choice Priority:** create affordable homeownership opportunities in parts of the region where it is most challenging to do so.

To schedule a meeting for more information, [click here](#).

St. Paul Foreclosure Prevention Program

The City of St Paul has partnered with the Minnesota Homeownership Center to offer the St Paul Homeownership Preservation Program (SPHPP). The program provides support to homeowners within the city limits of St Paul who are experiencing difficulty paying their mortgage or other housing expenses. SPHPP offers foreclosure prevention advising and limited financial assistance.

To learn about the program, call 651-236-8952 or check out their [eligibility tool](#).

Home Help MN

HomeHelpMN is offered through Minnesota Housing to help if you have fallen behind on your mortgage or other housing-related expenses due to the pandemic. Whether it's providing financial assistance or guiding you to

trusted resources, they can get you the help you need, at the time you need it most.

To apply or learn more about the program, call 1-800-388-3226 and check out their [application preparation resource](#).

Educational Resources

Audio

Learn how Minneapolis ended single-family zoning [here](#).

Reading

Learn about a first-hand account of life in Swede Hollow [here](#).

Video



Learn from ESHJ about the racial homeownership gap.

Community Art for Justice

Call for artists!

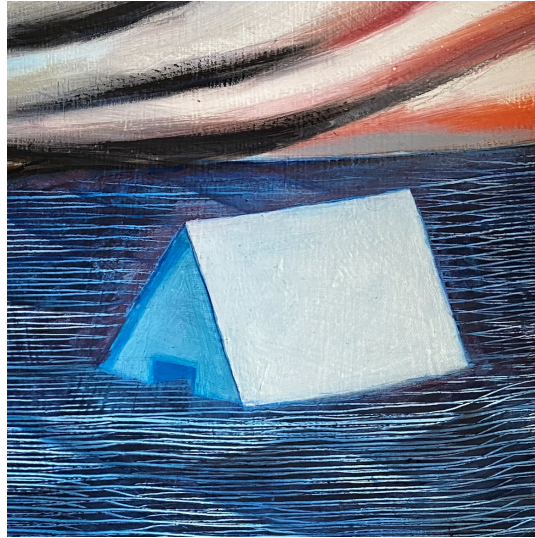
The East Side Freedom Library believes in the power of community art to fuel our fight for justice, and we want to promote your work. If your art speaks to the soul of our community and you want to share it with the people, please send it our way.

Email us at
media@eastsidefreedomlibrary.org

In each publication, we will feature a new artist in our newsletter.

This month, our featured artist is Keith Christensen. Keith is an iconic collaborator at ESFL, a former professor of art at St. Cloud State, and a lifelong activist.

Check out more of Keith's work [here](#).



Art by Keith Christensen

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