

COPS Metro Urges Mayor to Ramp Up Implementation of Affordable Housing Policy

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A community coalition wants to see more aggressive implementation of policies aimed at preventing housing displacement in San Antonio. During a meeting Monday night among more than 100 members of **COPS Metro Alliance** and Mayor Ron Nirenberg, he said, “I’m listening to you.”

Under Nirenberg’s leadership, San Antonio has for the first-time prioritized housing in the City’s annual budget. The mayor established a task force to recommend affordable housing policy measures that [City Council adopted](#) last year, but COPS Metro wants to see stronger action from the mayor and Council to prevent people being priced out of their homes or apartments – not just mitigate such displacement.

A displacement policy is slated to be completed in 2020 after a significant amount of research and data collection, Nirenberg said. In the meantime, a \$1 million risk mitigation fund has been established for residents experiencing housing vulnerability, he said.

“When I walked into the mayor’s office we had \$7 million going to housing in the city of San Antonio, today we have \$25 million,” Nirenberg said. “Nobody was talking about ... the priority of affordable housing.”

“Except COPS Metro,” one audience member offered.

Nirenberg agreed.

“And I listened to you,” he said. “Are we doing everything right? Absolutely not. But we’ve set a foundation and an expectation that everyone deserves a fair chance at prosperity and deserves equity in this city and we’ve done that in less than two years.”

2020 is a long way away, said discussion moderator and a COPS Metro leader Pastor Joshua Snyder of the First Unitarian Universalist Church.



*Mayor Ron Nirenberg meets with members of the COPS Metro Alliance about the City's housing policy.
SCOTT BALL / RIVARD REPORT*

“When it came to getting developers their money, you operated with a great sense of urgency,” Snyder said. “When it comes to making sure that regular people aren’t getting displaced, you have no urgency.” The crowd erupted in applause.

The friction at the meeting stemmed from the passage of new rules to incentivize housing development downtown. City Council [approved an update](#) to the Inner City Reinvestment and Infill Policy (ICRIP) and Center City Housing Incentive Policy (CCHIP) to include stronger affordable housing requirements in December 2018.

The new CCHIP policy also redirects funds to the City’s Neighborhood and Housing Services Department that administers home rehabilitation, housing counseling, and other programs related to keeping residents in their homes.

“It will stay in housing, it’s not going to go anywhere,” Nirenberg said.

COPS Metro called for a more detailed account of where that money is spent in the department.

COPS Metro has successfully rallied for a number of policy initiatives in its 44-year history, including raising the City and Bexar County minimum wage, owner-occupied rehabilitation programs, workforce development programs, and resources for neglected neighborhoods. Affordable housing has long been a chief concern of the group, too.

“What’s very clear is that we need to do a much better job in communicating what the Housing Policy Task Force has produced,” Nirenberg said, as he pledged to find ways to better communicate with COPS Metro and the general public about the new resources available.

Father Larry Christian of St. Ann Catholic Church suggested several “quick wins” that COPS Metro believed could start helping people who feel burdened by housing costs, including a stronger awareness and education system about available resources such as property tax freezes for senior citizens and the risk mitigation fund, tax credits for homeowners that improve their homes.

Meanwhile, Nirenberg said he expects to attend an upcoming session in which COPS Metro asks mayor candidates to commit to supporting certain policies and ideals.

He’ll face the biggest challenge, out of a field of eight, from Councilman Greg Brockhouse (D6), who has criticized the nearly [\\$4 billion price tag](#) – from public and private sources – to fill the affordable housing gap in San Antonio.

“I need to hear these stories. You matter. And I’m asking you to hold me accountable for doing something about it – me and my colleagues,” Nirenberg said. “It would be very easy for me, as other politicians have done in the past, to skip the hard meetings. But these meetings are the most important ones.”

Linda Davila of St. Timothy Catholic Church said she thinks Nirenberg was being sincere.

“But what we didn’t get from him was that sense of urgency that we all have,” Davila said.

“I do feel a sense of urgency because people in San Antonio have waited more than a generation for housing to be addressed by the city,” Nirenberg said after the meeting. “We are now addressing it and we can’t move fast enough to effect change.”