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**MICHAEL J. MURPHY**  
ALDERMAN, 10TH DISTRICT

# **Article offers insight into how Milwaukee suburbs keep out affordable housing**

## **Statement of Alderman Michael J. Murphy August 19, 2020**

Back in 2017, signs stating “Save River Hills” started going up in the north shore community when news broke about a development proposal featuring 154 “apartments” that would be constructed in five three-story buildings along a mostly undeveloped stretch of W. Brown Deer Rd.

The ‘controversial’ project’s original developer dropped out and eventually the same proposal was put forth by the site’s owner. In May 2019, the Village of River Hills denied a comprehensive plan amendment, a zoning change and a special use permit -- all required for the project to proceed.

In November 2019, the property owner filed a \$3 million Federal Fair Housing lawsuit alleging that the village’s restrictive and exclusive zoning violated the rights of minorities, the elderly and disabled, as well as the property rights of its owner. The suit also contends the village violated the state’s “Smart Growth Law,” which seeks development of diverse communities, including minorities, the aged and disabled.

Fast forward to August 2020, and the August 15<sup>th</sup> Urban Milwaukee article written by Michael Horne (*River Hills Buying 55 Acre Lot to Settle \$3 Million Suit*). The article includes great detail, and – sadly – sheds all-too-familiar insight as to why it is extremely difficult for affordable housing units to get built in Milwaukee’s suburbs.

Interestingly, a response to a question posed by Mr. Horne to the village manager/clerk/treasurer came in the form of a statement prepared by Mueller Communications, Inc., whose owner was once chief-of-staff to urbanist and Democratic former Milwaukee Mayor John O. Norquist.

In this case, River Hills literally put out an ‘unwelcome mat’ that resulted in a federal lawsuit. In the end, their discrimination will likely stand when the ink dries on the \$3 million settlement with the plaintiff. As Mr. Horne cites in the article, the village “is known for housing landlords, not tenants.”

The “Save River Hills” story shows just how far suburban Milwaukee communities will go to keep poor, elderly and disabled people out.

And people wonder why big cities have problems on such a large scale, and why they often have hyper-segregation and extreme poverty.

It is due, in part, to the ability of wealthy suburbs to resist diversity by using discriminating and/or questionable zoning regulations, legal maneuvers and other measures with impunity.

And that is both saddening and maddening.

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