

Twitter Thread by Jerusalem



Jerusalem

[@JerusalemDemas](#)



For Black History Month, Vox is publishing a big series on rethinking policy for Black America.

I wrote 3,200 words on eradicating exclusionary zoning.

It's a 3 step formula: Persuade, incentivize, and if all else fails, SUE THE SUBURBS.

Thread

We know that exclusionary zoning is locking millions out of opportunity.

Work by [@OppInsights](#), Richard Rothstein, Ta-Nehisi Coates, [@nhannahjones](#), [@RickKahlenberg](#), Chang-Tai Hsieh, Enrico Moretti and [@ProfSchleich](#) details the economic impact of these discriminatory policies.

Exclusionary zoning laws essentially trap many Black families into low-income neighborhoods by pricing them out of richer ones.

Ending residential segregation would allow Americans to move from poor neighborhoods or cities to richer ones and allow lower-skilled workers to find better-paying jobs. To put a number on it, exclusionary zoning has artificially inflated the price of housing so much that **one paper** estimated that from 1964 to 2009, it lowered the aggregate growth by more than 50 percent.

51 years after the Fair Housing Act, it's never been seriously enforced. It's time to change that.

First things first, Biden has work to do to convince whoever can be convinced that there is a racial, environmental, and economic imperative to undo residential segregation.

Many of the suburbs Biden won in the 2020 election count themselves as socially liberal or even progressive. For example, the hippie-esque town of Takoma Park, Maryland, in the DC suburbs votes **overwhelmingly Democratic**. It's also almost **exclusively zoned for single-family homes** despite bordering the nation's capital.

I grew up in Maryland, in a town not far from Takoma Park, and I can promise you that it's one of the most outwardly progressive places I've ever been. Many of these suburbanites haven't made the connection between their personal views on racial, social, and economic justice and the zoning policies that dictate who can and cannot live in their neighborhoods.

This is why one of the most important aspects to ending exclusionary zoning is making people aware of its effects. As president, Biden could help draw the racial justice connection for these communities by alleviating their concerns about property values, pointing to the environmental impact of sprawl, and making it clear that banning multi-family homes is in direct opposition to progressive goals around equal opportunity.

Use whatever explanation works!

For sympathetic progressives Biden should link racial and environmental justice to ending exclusionary zoning.

For everyone else, he can simply make an economic argument.

<https://t.co/wHB6roD8nD>

Second, there are many tools to incentivize localities that rely on federal dollars to reform their zoning codes.

There is a ton of federal money that can be conditioned on reforming exclusionary zoning laws. [@ebwhamilton](#) has some good ideas on this front.

Emily Hamilton, a senior research fellow at the think tank Mercatus Center, is skeptical that the AFFH rule "was ever going to be a very effective tool" since it didn't require grantees to actually prove that they were increasing the number of low-income and minority households living in high-opportunity neighborhoods. Instead of just asking localities to come up with a "strategy" or a "plan" for how they're going to improve, she **suggested** tying funding streams directly to outcomes, which would force them to show real progress before receiving money.

But not everyone can be incentivized. As [@jenny_schuetz](#)' research indicates, the most exclusionary places don't rely on popular existing HUD grants.

<https://t.co/MLr9t7NN81>

As Sara Pratt, an Obama-era HUD official told me: "There's a group who ... embrace segregation and inequity, and they don't want to spend a dime in the Black community and they would rather have their Latino population move out of town..."
<https://t.co/wHB6roD8nD>

"...For those people, that's where enforcement becomes relevant — and good, strong enforcement."

It's time to sue the suburbs.

For what that could look like, check out the full piece below! <https://t.co/wHB6roD8nD>

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And my colleagues [@FabiolaCineas](#), [@annanorthtweets](#), and [@liszhou](#) who contributed amazing pieces to the collection.

More to come...

<https://t.co/4vSgnwAp8X>