



Human Rights City Alliance
Public Comment, Planning Commission
12/10/2024

The Human Rights City Alliance writes to support Mayor Gainey’s recommendations for changes to City zoning code that will expand inclusionary zoning and require affordable housing to meet needs of residents at 50% AMI and below.

International human rights law includes housing as a fundamental human right, and the United Nations has made clear that the obligation to uphold these rights is an obligation of governments at all levels.

Particularly relevant to the decisions being considered by the Commission today are recommendations from the most recent review of United States government compliance with its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. The review Committee’s [2022 report to the United States government](#) made it abundantly clear that federal, state and local governments must do far more to comply with treaty obligations, highlighting in particular concerns over:

the high degree of residential racial segregation, the persistence of discrimination in accessing housing on the grounds of race, colour and national or ethnic origin and the intersection with disability and gender identity, discriminatory mortgage-lending and “redlining” practices by private actors, and criminal records policies that can lead to homelessness. It is also concerned about exclusionary zoning and land-use laws and policies that perpetuate racial segregation. (Par. 37).

Similarly, in the 2020 United Nations Universal Periodic Review of the U.S. human rights record, the international community called for the U.S. to strengthen protections for people’s economic, social and cultural rights, with specific reference to the urgency of addressing homelessness and housing insecurity.¹

In 2018 and 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha, produced guidelines and principles to help local authorities implement human rights-based housing strategies.² And in response to the growing problem of corporate investments in residential housing markets around the world, Ms. Farha produced a set of

¹ See: [Report of the 46th Session of the UN Human Rights Council](#), 22 February-24 March 2021, (Par. 811-862).

² See [Rights Based Housing Strategies](#)-Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Adequate Housing, Feb-March 2018; and [Guidelines for the implementation of the right to adequate housing](#) (UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, 2019 [A/HRC/43/43]).

Directives on Financialization³ that provide concrete policies that can help public authorities protect local housing markets from speculative forces and improve their compliance with international human rights law.

Mayor Gainey's recommendations are a good step in the direction of bringing our city into greater compliance with international legal standards while also ensuring that the city's economic development doesn't come at the expense of the long-term residents whose families have contributed to the development of our communities over generations.

International human rights law can seem distant and abstract from our daily lives in Pittsburgh, but it is a useful tool and an important ethical compass for local policy. We owe it to ourselves and to each other to live up to these standards, and we urge the Commission to support the Mayor's proposals and thereby to affirm that the human right to housing can and must be realized in our city.

³ [The Shift Directives on Financialization and Human Rights](#) (June 2022)