



Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing

What is Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH)? This term usually describes rental housing with rents below the market rate but without government subsidies or restrictions in place to maintain affordability. Nationally, NOAH plays a larger role in "affordable" rental housing than homes with government subsidies, and this housing is key to safe, stable housing for low- and moderate-income people in communities everywhere.

What counts as NOAH in Greater Des Moines? The median gross rent in Polk County, Iowa is \$1060¹ and NOAH generally rents for significantly below this amount. NOAH units may house a full time worker earning \$15/hour who cannot afford more than \$780/month in housing costs. People on fixed or limited incomes often need even lower rents.

NOAH units are more affordable than other rental housing for one or more reasons. These homes are usually older and may be smaller, in less desirable locations, and *sometimes* in poorer condition than other rental housing.

What does it mean to "lose" NOAH housing? Generally this means units that used to rent for a below market price are no longer available, for example because:

- New owners buy a building and complete renovations resulting in higher rents.
- A building may be torn down or converted to a use that is not housing anymore.

Housing advocates estimate that **hundreds of NOAH units have been "lost" in our community in recent years.**

What can be done to prevent the loss?

- Housing funders like the Polk County Housing Trust Fund have sometimes provided funds to buildings being renovated so a portion of affordable units are preserved following a renovation.
- Cities like Des Moines have used inclusionary economic development agreements to require affordable rent in a certain fraction of units that are part of new apartment buildings in return for development incentives.

What are the consequences when this housing is lost? While it is sometimes necessary, the loss of NOAH housing can create major challenges for vulnerable community members, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, or families with children. Sometimes the renovation of older housing is needed to keep that housing safe and available, and funding that work can require increasing rents. At the same time, housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people is scarce, so changes in housing inventory with below market rents have serious consequences for people and families who depend on those rents.

All of us can support the development of additional affordable housing in the community to protect housing stability of low- and moderate-income people who call Greater Des Moines home.

Find more information on local housing topics at pcht.org/about-housing

¹ 2022 5-year American Communities Survey, US Census