

**ULI Chicago's "Front Stoop Series"
Density & Healthy Cities
June 18, 2020**

A Conversation With:

Jacques Sandberg, *Vice President, Affordable Housing, Related Midwest*
Dr. Rachel Weber, *Professor, Department of Urban Planning & Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago*

On June 18th, ULI Chicago members convened for the Front Stoop Series to discuss "Density & Healthy Cities." The discussion was led by Jacques Sandberg, *Vice President, Affordable Housing, Related Midwest* and Dr. Rachel Weber, *Professor, Department of Urban Planning & Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago*.

Three key takeaways jumped out during the conversation and were further elaborated on as listed below.

1. The concept of density is very nuanced.
 - a. People interact with density in different ways.
 - b. Density is measured at a variety of scales (e.g., building-level, localized, regional).
 - c. The concept is dynamic/fluid and changes with time.
 - d. Density and crowding are two very different concepts.

2. There is currently no empirical evidence linking density alone with health outcomes and virus transmission.
 - a. There are several positive characteristics of density that may counteract virus transmission – improved communication, access to shopping and healthcare, walkability, etc.
 - b. Other factors that interact with density are better indicators of health outcomes and virus transmission (e.g., poverty, race, and housing insecurity).
 - c. Lower density neighborhoods in the City have some of the highest infection and mortality rates from COVID-19, while extremely dense places like Hong Kong have low rates of transmission.
 - d. More data is needed regarding the link between density and virus transmission.

3. Cities are adaptive to density.
 - a. Architecture and planning innovations have impacted how people interact with density (mixed-use zoning, setbacks, etc.).
 - b. Zoning is tied to density - zoning changes can be made to address housing choice (and hopefully housing affordability over the long term).
 - c. COVID-19 has resulted in evolving concepts of personal space and response to health hazards (at least in urban environments).
 - d. It is currently unclear how views on density will change over the long-term due to COVID-19.
 - i. How will people continue to interact with density?
 - ii. How will building and neighborhood design evolve?
 - e. More work needs to be done to address the relationship between density and poverty, race and housing insecurity.

Summary written by Lance Dorn, *Vice President, SB Friedman Development Advisors*