

A Message from the President of the Youngstown Columbiana Association of REALTORS®

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UNDERSTANDING WHY THE SUBURBS SHOULD BE A TOPIC DURING THIS ELECTION

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While more and more people are exercising their freedom of speech by outwardly expressing who they are voting for in November, the influence of the suburbs on this election goes much deeper than a sign in a yard. To understand why the suburbs and the opportunities extended to people to live in them are going to be an important topic in this year's election, we must first go back to where it all started.

(cue the dream-like sound effects and screen blur)

In 1968, Congress passed the Fair Housing Act outlawing the refusal to sell or rent to any person because of race, color, disability, religion, sex, familial status, or national origin, something we can all agree is a good thing. The responsibility for enforcing this Act lies with the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Justice. For over 50 years, the Act has been successful in preventing and remedying unlawful discrimination in the housing market.

However, prior to leaving office, President Obama enacted a sweeping new rule entitled, "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" (AFFH). This rule has become a point of contention between the two candidates in the national election as President Trump recently stopped enforcement of AFFH while candidate, Joseph Biden, has promised to resurrect and implement AFFH. This is an issue that has, so far, received little attention in our upcoming national election. So, what is this rule and what effect can it have on suburban communities?

You see, HUD controls much-needed infrastructure funding to states and suburban communities, (road construction, repair, federal Surface Transportation Grants). Under AFFH, to continue to receive such critical funding, a suburban community would need to prepare and submit to HUD a detailed analysis of its housing occupancy, by categories such as race, national origin, and English proficiency. While this keeps communities in check with discrimination, it also places stipulations on the funding communities need to maintain and grow. After the analysis is submitted, the community would then need to identify any imbalances or disparities and identify factors accounting for such imbalances, such as zoning laws, housing costs, and "lack of regional collaboration," even if there is no evidence or allegation of intentional discrimination.

The AAFH then requires a plan to be developed to remedy these imbalances, which could include nullifying a suburban community's single-family zoning ordinances to enable the building of high density, multiple unit housing that is more affordable than the residences currently in that neighborhood.

While supporters of both candidates have their opinions of how AAFH will impact communities, it is undeniable that the effects of AFFH could significantly transform America's suburbs. In my next column, we will dive into the different sides, for and against this rule, to help you, the voters, better understand the rule and its potential impact.

Patrick Burgan is the 2020 President of the Youngstown Columbiana Association of REALTORS®