

Letters

Affordable housing is achievable goal

I appreciate Lindsey Erdody's attention to the housing issues addressed in her article [A new test for housing projects, Nov. 30 IBJ].

The article highlights the perception that it is impossible to produce housing for people of modest incomes in Hamilton County. My organization, Hamilton County Area Neighborhood Development Inc., actively pursues this goal, and we don't go it alone. In reality, many local stakeholders also believe it should become a priority to build this type of housing.

Last month, HAND hosted the first Neighborhoods NOW Conference in Fishers, which attracted over 100 leaders, developers and residents to explore solutions to prevalent issues: general affordability, growth and jobs, aging population and sustainability.

We discussed how a shortage of workers leaves service jobs unfilled and stifles local business growth. In looking to the future, nearly 60 percent of the jobs in the county's target growth industries (including life sciences, IT, innovative manufacturing, business and financial services, and amateur sports) earn less than \$18 an hour (the wage necessary to afford the median rent in the area).

Growth and prosperity in Hamilton County relies on the connectivity of housing and jobs. Transit helps, but housing linked to jobs can address this more quickly, efficiently and sustainably.

Millennials and seniors alike desire urban, walkable neighborhoods with close proximity to jobs and services, so let's find ways to provide diverse housing stock to accommodate the demand.

In 2016, HAND invites local officials to develop a housing advisory group to carry forward the strategies recommended at our conference.

This group will prioritize strategies, research barriers, promote best practices and pursue avenues to build local capacity. HAND will work with existing partners and recruit new representatives from across the county to get this started. Eventually, these policies may serve as a model for other metropolitan communities.

One thing I know about Hamilton County is that when it sets its mind to something, it happens. I'm inviting leaders to accept the challenge and determine how we can build diverse, sustainable communities in spite of property tax caps—a condition which handicaps the entire state.

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