

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

The multigenerational housing crisis

By the Hearst Connecticut Media Editorial Board

The housing shortage in Connecticut manifests itself in all kinds of ways. One is higher prices. That's good for sellers, and bad for potential buyers. Lack of supply means those who already own a home have all the leverage.

It also means a lack of economic growth. The state economy has shown many positive signs in recent years, including at the state level, where deficits have been replaced by a forecast of surpluses many years into the future. But our growth is held back because it's so hard for people to move to this state and fill our many open jobs.

Then there are the personal

costs. If you can only afford a home an hour away from your job, that's a huge blow to your quality of life. If a change in your job means you're immediately priced out of your town, with all your activities and everyone you know, that's a big problem. And because so many people are vulnerable to such shifts, it means it's a constant worry for a large swath of the state.

Then there are the compromises we make to fulfill our needs. According to the CT Data Collaborative, of about 1.4 million households in Connecticut, nearly 4 percent are defined as multigenerational. This marks an increase from 10 years earlier, and shows how people are going about the business of making ends meet.

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A multigenerational household is defined as one that has three or more generations of relatives, such as children, parents and grandparents, living in the same home. It's not uncommon historically, and especially as grandparents age, it can make more sense than the alternatives. But there's plenty of evidence that more people are not entering into these arrangements because it's their first choice.

"I think it has to do with our housing issues and that there just isn't enough affordable housing," CT Data Collaborative Executive Director Michelle Riordan-Nold told CT News Junkie.

To be clear, there can be many benefits to multigenerational living. Grandparents get to spend more time with their grandchildren. It can make child care less stressful. There are more options for everyone in a variety of areas.

But such arrangements should be made because it's in the best interests of everyone. If families are forced to double or triple up because there are no other options, that doesn't serve anyone. And personal space is an amenity that can be hard to put a price on.

Connecticut has many options to increase the supply of housing. Many officials continue to cling to the idea of local control, which means each municipality gets to make its own rules on what can be built where. This should be anathema to strong believers in property rights, who could rightly ask why anyone can tell them not to build a duplex on their land when there's plenty of room for one and a lot of demand. But that's how zoning works.

Ultimately, it's a state issue. The state can and should take more of a leadership role in solving our housing shortage. We can't keep waiting for towns to do the right thing. Families of all sizes are counting on us to do better.