

Seeking champions of affordable housing in Lancaster County [column]

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East Lampeter Township officials agreed to convert township property at 2555 Old Philadelphia Pike into affordable housing. **SUZETTE WENGER** | Staff Photographer

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Right now, households earning the median income in Lancaster County cannot afford the mortgage to buy a house at the median price here.

That was one key metric shared at the April 4 Lancaster Chamber “State of the County” event by Ryo Tashiro, an outreach economist and adviser at the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia.

Readers know that the high cost of housing has been front-page news for years now. But when it becomes impossible for the average income earner to afford the average-priced home, it means the marketplace is fundamentally not meeting the needs of our community.



This also means housing affordability is a countywide issue impacting every municipality in our community. While the City of Lancaster has demonstrated leadership as the first local municipality to create a comprehensive housing strategy several years ago, and by dedicating a greater share of its pandemic relief funds to affordable housing development than any other local government entity, affordable housing is not simply a “city issue.” The Lancaster County Planning Department and its Places 2040 comprehensive plan are paving the way for strategic growth across our community. But more must be done at the municipal level to make this plan a reality in our community.

We were glad to see LNP | LancasterOnline’s recent reporting on the challenges and opportunities that boroughs, suburbs and rural places in Lancaster County face when considering housing solutions. [As Jade Campos reported March 21, the High Foundation and Franklin & Marshall College hosted two deliberative workshops last fall for municipal officials on affordable housing.](#) Their goal was to get participation from every one of Lancaster County’s 60 municipalities. Representatives from 25 municipalities chose to participate.

These were landmark events with a broader range of municipalities showing up to brainstorm housing solutions than perhaps ever before. We both celebrate these leaders’ commitment to working together to address housing challenges, and we encourage leaders from the remainder of Lancaster County’s municipalities to join in this important work.

A report published by the High Foundation highlighted two key themes that “surfaced repeatedly” during the workshops:

1. “Zoning reform is a crucial tool municipalities can use to encourage housing solutions that meet the needs of their communities.”
2. “Public education is essential to shifting perceptions and overcoming barriers to affordable housing.”

We couldn’t agree more. According to the Lancaster County Planning Department, of all properties in Lancaster County where zoning allows housing to be built (meaning they are not zoned commercial, industrial, etc.), 68% are zoned only to be used for single-family detached homes. In other words, on more than two-thirds of properties, it is illegal to build apartment buildings, buildings that mix uses such as housing and retail — or even a duplex.

That simply will not do. Not if our goal is a community where an average family can afford the average home. Not if our goal is preserving farmland and conserving green places. Not if our goal is to create vibrant communities where residents can live, work, play and worship in the same community. It will simply not do to only build single-family detached homes.

The Coalition for Sustainable Housing is ready and eager to help local government officials address these two key themes of zoning reform and public education. The coalition is a network of local residents representing a wide range of experiences and professional expertise. It includes builders, real estate agents, nonprofit housing developers, fair housing advocates and more. We are dedicated to championing more creative housing solutions for our community. We are committed to focusing our energy and expertise to build public support for a wide range of housing solutions across the county.



Municipal leaders who attended the workshops last fall concluded their time together by reflecting on action steps they could take in the coming year to address housing challenges in their community. [LNP | LancasterOnline's interview with East Lampeter Township assistant manager Tara Hitchens showed how that municipality is modeling this kind of action.](#) We celebrate its leaders' example of taking a variety of steps to address affordable housing and homelessness challenges where they can.

We extend this call to action to all local government officials: What will you do in 2025 to address zoning reform and public education on this issue, and to champion solutions? Will you join us in becoming housing champions for our community? If so, we cannot wait to work with you to make Lancaster County a place where everyone can thrive. Contact us anytime at lancasterc4sh@gmail.com to take your next step to create more housing solutions in Lancaster.

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