

Fix Affordable Housing Crisis with All of the Above New Housing Options

The logo for the Michigan Manufactured Housing Association features a stylized house outline in red. Inside the house, the text "Michigan Manufactured HOUSING Association" is written in white. "Michigan" and "Association" are in a smaller font, while "Manufactured HOUSING" is in a larger, bold font.

Michigan
Manufactured
HOUSING
Association

I read with great interest the recent Crain's Editorial ("Rent control in Detroit just doesn't add up," February 6, 2023) and accompanying stories about the deepening crisis in Michigan's housing market. These pieces each passed over the valuable role that manufactured housing can play in solving this problem that otherwise threatens to stem Michigan's future growth. State leaders and the Michigan Manufactured Housing Association can work together to provide quality, affordable housing options in communities across the state for current residents and anyone looking to move to Michigan.

There are brand new, available manufactured homes for sale in clean, safe, welcoming communities all over Michigan, starting at less than \$75,000, with ample financing and warranties available. These homes are built with the same materials as site-built homes, only in a controlled environment, where construction quality is superior to what can be done outdoors. Since 1976 construction of these homes has been regulated by stringent federal laws ensuring their quality. Further, new homes are constructed in a manner that their appearance is compatible with local architecture and can be essentially indistinguishable from site-built homes.

Our cities, suburbs, and even rural areas are facing the same housing conflict as the rest of the country, and it's one driven by a lack of affordable, quality renting and ownership options. This is an issue of simple supply and demand.

There just isn't enough supply to meet the existing demand. It's a problem that state leaders know well, as the governor's "Statewide Housing Plan" lays out goals of making tens of thousands of new homes available to Michigan families over the next few years to keep up with demand, fuel growth, and address this crisis.

State policy should be aimed at setting up our state for long-term growth and success, and Michigan should always be a place where everyone can afford to live, work, and raise a family. Policymakers should not be seduced by the false promises of Not In My Backyard acolytes, who claim that placing new burdens on developers and the construction industry will somehow lift all boats. Research shows that again and again, rent control and other anti-supply policies lower overall property values while discouraging homeownership.

Even worse, sometimes zoning restrictions specifically exclude manufactured homes in a local community, ensuring that people wishing to live in that community will be forced to pay artificially high prices for no good reason.

The last thing we need is more government crackdowns on housing supply. When it's been tried in markets large and small all over the country, so-called rent control has shown time and again that it only exacerbates a housing crisis. You don't fix a supply-side problem by cracking down on the available supply – but that's exactly what new government mandated limits on rent would do.

Michigan's manufactured housing industry is helping build toward the governor's goals by providing thousands of new homes for Michigan families every year, even through the height of the pandemic. The manufactured housing industry provided 12,404 new homes in Michigan since January 2020, despite many local governments standing in the way of the development of these critically-needed housing options with restrictive zoning policies.

These aren't just rental opportunities. Manufactured homes provide affordable homeownership opportunities for families all over this state – thousands more, every year. The biggest thing the state can do to spark even more of this kind of growth and address the housing crisis is to incentivize local governments to embrace pro-growth zoning policies to attract more housing options for the people who want to live there.

The single biggest threat to Michigan's future growth over the last few years has been rising construction costs. Following the old playbook of throwing up increased burdens to housing construction would only keep us heading down this road. Instead, we should encourage local governments to innovate and work with developers and the construction industry to attract new options to their communities. That's the pathway to creating a state where all of us can afford to live, work, and raise a family – one that's truly set up for long-term success.

In order to drive toward our shared, overlapping goals of addressing affordability and increasing the available housing supply, we need to relax zoning restrictions to help our state grow, increase homeownership equity across race, ethnic and socio-economic groups, and increase homeownership among low- and middle-income households. That's how we build a state where everyone can afford to live and thrive.

John D. Lindley is President & CEO of the Michigan Manufactured Housing Association