



Article posted: 2/27/2013 10:17 AM

Editorial: An eye on the future of suburban housing

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By The Daily Herald Editorial Board

Where are you going to live when you retire? Where are your kids going to live when they get out of college with a boatload of debt on their backs? For that matter, where are our young teachers and police officers and nurses going to live?

Five Northwest suburbs — and by extension, other highly desirable suburbs with largely middle-income, owner-occupied housing and easy access to high-quality schools — have been given a road map that leads to the best answer, which is "here," in the suburbs. The road map is a report called "Homes for a Changing Region," the result of a 10-month study that explains how community leaders need to rethink, a little, on the subject of their housing strategy.

A D V E R T

Everyone wants high-end housing. Communities prefer it, and developers want to build it. But by creating a dearth of affordable housing, we're often shutting out the very people we need: the young people just getting started; others who work here, and the elderly who want to downsize but stay in the communities they've called home for decades.

the types of housing each town, and region, will need.

Consider this statistic: In 2000, the number of homeowners in these towns paying "unaffordable" rates for housing (30-49 percent of their income) and "severely unaffordable" rates (50+ percent of income) was 20 to 25 percent. But by 2006-2010, suddenly 40 percent of all Buffalo Grove property owners were in homes taking more than a third or even half their income. In Rolling Meadows that was 38 percent, and in Arlington Heights, Mount Prospect and Palatine, only slightly less.

Those numbers are dangerously high for the stability of those communities. The housing report — conducted by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, the Northwest Suburban Housing Collaborative and the Metropolitan Planning Council — says they should take time to promote housing that will be in the

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greatest demand in the near future, including rental housing, for households earning less than \$35,000 per year. Who are those people? Seniors, and adults ages 25-44.

"We need these people," says Arlington Heights Mayor Arlene Mulder, an enthusiastic backer of "Homes For A Changing Region." "Those are our young teachers, our young professionals ... What would we do without people who are willing to serve, cook and clean? If they can't get to work, what would we do?"

Last week, the Arlington Heights Village Board listened as CMAP described the findings of the report. Trustees assured residents they won't adopt the findings as part of their master plan for future development. but hopefully their interest doesn't end there. People cherish the quality of life the suburbs provide, and they don't want to lose it. Nor do they have to. Through proper planning and a proper mix, the suburbs can strengthen their vitality, not diminish it as an inevitable decline.