

**OPINION  
COMMENTARY**

## **Guest opinion: Annmarie Jensen: Do we have the political will to create affordable housing?**

By **DAILY CAMERA GUEST OPINION** | [openforum@dailycamera.com](mailto:openforum@dailycamera.com) | Boulder Daily Camera

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*By Annmarie Jensen*

Every Community in Boulder County has a goal of achieving [12% affordable housing by 2035](#). This goal is both ambitious, and also not enough, based on the number of people spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

Do we really want affordable housing?

Affordable housing ranks as the number one problem in our community, according to the recent [Boulder County Public Opinion Survey](#). Yet, when local governments try to build affordable housing, they face opposition. Even though many people think affordable housing is for someone else, the federal definition means that if we built more affordable housing, every two-person family earning [\\$80,320 or less](#) would be eligible.

The people who oppose affordable housing are often very loud. They want the neighborhood to stay the way it was when they moved in. These voices are often righteous. They speak of things like the effect of housing on schools and the land, or the air pollution that low-income people will experience if they are too close to a highway or a factory. (And, of course, those issues can be real.) Yet as a long-term housing advocate, I am skeptical of those who come to local governments to oppose affordable housing because it is “not good enough” and who do not propose other solutions or of those who simply try to stall in the hopes that the developer will give up.

It seems many who oppose affordable housing may not even be aware of some of the lovely affordable housing built throughout Boulder County. Josephine Commons in Lafayette, the Spoke on Coffman in Longmont, Depot Square in Boulder, along with many single-family and multi-family for-sale homes scattered around the county, that most folks would never guess are affordable. In spite of these lovely examples, some communities have ZERO affordable housing for rent or sale.

The lack of available housing has equity implications because Black, Latino and Native American households are significantly more likely to have suffered from significant income inequality, exclusion from federal mortgage programs, redlining and other racist housing policies. Should those who currently live in our neighborhoods have the final word on who else gets to live in their neighborhoods? Do these voices perpetuate systemic inequality?

I challenge ourselves to think about what Boulder County will be like if we don't address this problem.

- Single-family residential development is greenhouse gas intensive. It does not lend itself well to transit, walking and reductions in auto travel.
- The lack of affordable housing forces people to commute from elsewhere into Boulder County contributing to greenhouse gases and traffic, and high ozone.
- According to a recent state report, the way local governments tax housing to support the providing of local infrastructure, means that a local government does not collect enough taxes on a single-family residence to support the cost of providing services for that residence. However, multi-family housing does cover its own costs.
- Several communities in Colorado are becoming inoperable because [businesses cannot find workers who can afford to live there](#). This is where we are headed if we do not create more housing affordable at a variety of price points.
- Our children will not be able to stay here. Elders will not be able to stay here.
- Local governments in Boulder County are struggling to fill key positions because of high housing costs.
- Our communities will lack the richness of economic, racial and cultural diversity.
- School enrollment suffers when families cannot afford to live in our communities.
- Community and religious institutions suffer from lack of diversity, especially lacking in younger people.

The high cost of land contributes significantly to high housing costs, so reconsidering land use is imperative to making housing more affordable as well as sustainable and efficient. We encourage you to attend an information session, that ECHO is hosting on October 13th, along with the Indian Peaks Group of the Sierra Club, Boulder Housing Network, Prosper Longmont, and Sustainable Resilient Longmont, with new data from a recent state report on land use.

Please join us for this zoom meeting, to learn more about how good land use can create sustainable, diverse and welcoming communities. Register here: <https://www.echocolorado.com/land-use-webinar>

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