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Franklin County has made progress on affordable housing, but NIMBYism remains a hurdle

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Because the affordable housing shortage in Franklin County has proved a tough boulder to budge, advocates want to push forward with more policies and push back against those who say *not in my backyard*.

Data from [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#) showed a modest bump in affordable housing in the city in 2019, a sign that local leaders say shows some progress before the Covid-19 pandemic. The deficit of affordable and available rental units in Columbus fell slightly from 51,507 in 2018 to 48,462 in 2019.

The city has about 71,264 renter households designated as "extremely low income" and only has 42 affordable units per 100 of those renters in that category.

The data show that 68% of renter households spend more than half their income on housing and utility costs. And over the years, these lowest-income renters have continued to be squeezed.

At a recent Columbus Metropolitan Club discussion, housing advocates said one of the biggest problems they see is resistance from residents who don't want affordable housing in their



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neighborhoods. Advocates have said for years that building all kinds of housing is helpful in turning back the problem because it adds to supply.

Affordable housing has been discussed in neighborhoods where residents say they don't want new development because of traffic issues, building density and size.

Aaron Schill, director of data and mapping of Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, said compact buildings and mixed-income communities are part of an answer there.

Lark Mallory, general counsel and director of community investments for the Affordable Housing Trust for Columbus and Franklin County, added that it's important to encourage smaller developers to come into the picture and add to the mix.

"The most affordable housing is housing that already exists," Schill said. "We need policies that keep that housing in the market rather than building our way out."

Advocates say affordable housing must be spread out across the city and near major job centers, not just concentrated in a few neighborhoods.

Homeport, the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority and others have pushed to develop more housing in Linden, Whitehall, the South Side and areas further outside the Outerbelt.

But that's where some residents tend to complain about dense, low-income housing developments.

Jennifer Gorsuch, CEO of homebuilder Fairfield Homes, said explaining the need for affordable housing to residents helps allay concerns. "It might be as easy as getting them exposed, showing them affordable housing communities, letting them tour them, meet the residents and see how beautiful it is," she said.

Schill said the city's zoning code update must address variances – at this point, almost all major developments require them. Eliminating them would reduce regulations that stymie denser housing while cutting down on red tape that slows projects.

Last week, Homeport cut the ribbon on two suburban developments – 28-unit Arrowleaf Apartments in Grove City and 30-unit Blacklick Crossing in Reynoldsburg.

"We've got to make sure we have housing available for our workforce," Grove City Mayor Ike Stage said.

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