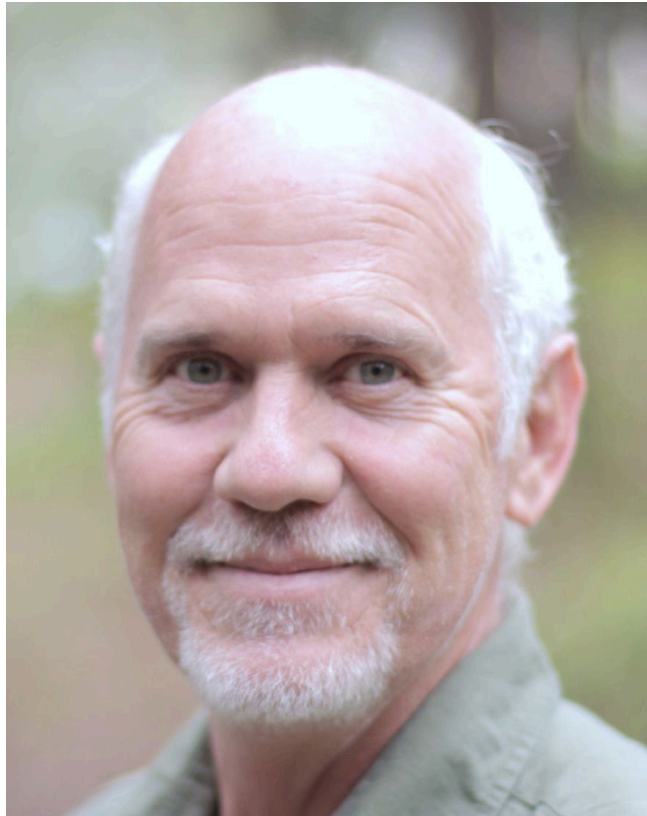


Guest Column: Government must find affordable housing solutions

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Poor people are so stupid. Don't they realize that their life would be so much better if they just worked harder and earned more money?

This seems to be the attitude of a few wealthy elites, who own a house or two and are living comfortably with a good income. They don't understand why some people can't afford to rent a place to live.

The reality is that the rent in our county is out of reach for many working people. A person who works 40 hours per week at minimum wage, earns only \$2,400 per month. How can this person pay \$1,000 rent each month? We need to find more affordable housing solutions.

In government speak these people are called "low income." In human terms these are our family, friends, and neighbors. During the pandemic we learned to call them essential workers. They are people that work hard every day and still don't quite have enough money to pay all their bills.

Del Norte County has recently updated our local Housing Element. This plan identifies our housing needs and locations where new housing can be developed. Forty percent of this planned housing is targeted for low income people because 40 percent of our population is considered low income.

Some people freak out because low income housing might be built in their neighborhood. We are not talking about criminals. We are talking about providing housing for residents of our community who deserve the dignity of a safe and affordable home.

We live in a wealthy state and can afford to help people who are less fortunate. If grants are made available to help our community build more affordable housing, it would be irresponsible not to apply for it. If we don't take it someone else will.

Local government has a critical role in finding solutions to our housing shortage. Low income housing is not a horrible blight on our neighborhoods. It is simply providing housing to people who need it and can't afford it.

In addition to building more housing, we also need to look at the causes of our housing affordability crisis. We should more thoroughly analyze the impact of vacation rentals on local housing availability.

According to the Del Norte County Tax Collector there are currently 155 single family houses that are registered as vacation rentals. Is this too many? Should there be a cap on the number of vacation rentals? Some communities have done this.

One thing for sure, if there are 155 houses that have been converted to vacation rentals, this is 155 houses not available to rent by local families. Moreover, when the supply of rental housing is reduced, demand is increased along with the rental prices.

In some communities the increase in vacation rentals has priced local working people out the rental market. They can no longer afford to live in the same community that they work in. We shouldn't let that happen here.

Keith Hendrick is the chairman of the Del Norte County Democratic Central Committee.