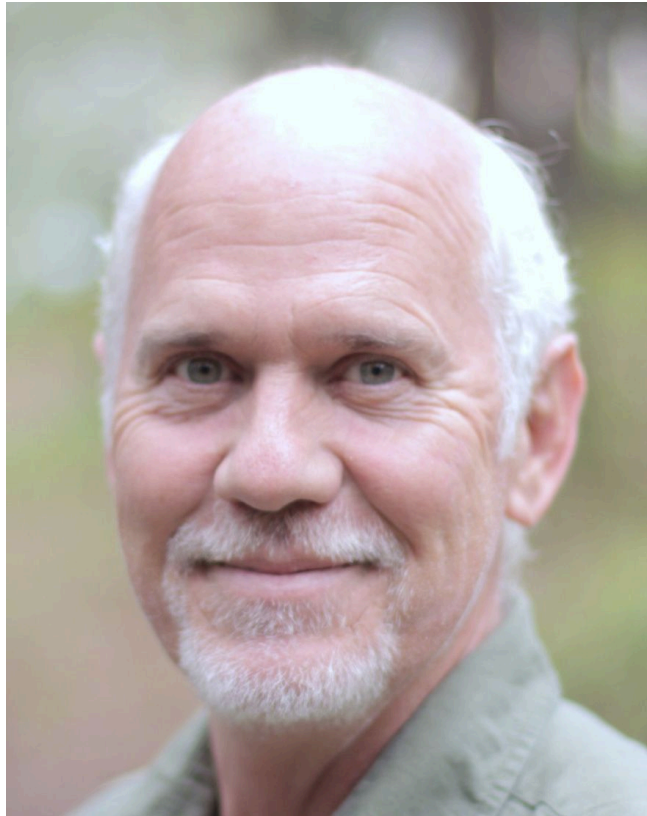


Guest Column: Accessory Dwelling Units – an ADU for You

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Last month, the County Board of Supervisors received the draft Del Norte County Housing Element which is a mandated plan for addressing the housing needs of the residents of the unincorporated areas of Del Norte County through June 2030. Crescent City has a separate housing planning process.

I have reviewed the Housing Element and will summarize, paraphrase, and highlight a few details of this plan to provide context for discussion. Source: <https://housingdelnorte.com/documents>

One goal of the Housing Element is to assist in the development of affordable housing for extremely low, very low and low-income households. These terms are defined for a family of four as follows: extremely low income: \$21,200 per year, very low income: \$35,500 per year and low income: \$56,550 per year. More than 40 percent of our population falls into one of these three categories.

Housing is the greatest single expense for most California families.

Households that spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, including utilities, are overpaying, or cost burdened. Severe overpaying occurs when households pay 50 percent or more of their income for housing. The majority of renters and owners experiencing housing cost burdens are lower income households.

The impact of high housing costs falls disproportionately on extremely low, very low, and low-income households, especially renters. In unincorporated Del Norte County low-income households make up 92 percent of those with a cost burden of at least 30 percent. This is caused by a lack of affordable housing.

Low-income households that are overpaying for housing don't have enough money for other critical essentials, including food and medicine. This is a significant hardship for too many workers, families, and seniors. But it also impacts our local economy as money is spent on housing that might otherwise be spent supporting local businesses and generating sales tax revenues.

These statistics provide evidence of the need to develop more affordable housing options for our community. One policy goal in the Housing Element is to promote the development of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to ease our rental housing deficit. These are sometimes referred to as "granny flats".

This is good planning and smart growth, since ADUs build new housing units on properties that are already developed. ADUs fill in the available space on existing properties without requiring new infrastructure like water and sewer. Although, I think extra attention must be paid in areas that rely on septic systems and wells to ensure these systems are not overburdened.

There is progress being made on this locally. Property owners are applying for permits to build ADUs. These property owners will gain income from renting out these ADUs. The community will add more affordable housing options for less affluent residents.

New state laws have added requirements for local governments related to ADUs, including a reduction in permit fees, and streamlining the time to approve ADU applications. This is fine but I recommend that we be strategic about fast tracking building permits for ADUs.

If we are providing incentives and simplified permitting, it would be prudent to require that ADUs be used to provide housing for local residents. We should restrict converting these ADUs to vacation rentals. California law allows local agencies to require that ADUs be used for rental terms of longer than 30 days. It would be prudent to adopt this requirement as an enforceable local planning requirement.

I suggest that if we do not take this reasonable step, then permitting more ADUs will not necessarily increase the availability of affordable local housing options but could result in more vacation rentals that drive up the price of housing and further limit the housing supply for people who live here.

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