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## **Daily Herald opinion: More elected officials talking about affordable housing**



The former campus of the Larkin Center in Elgin was turned into affordable housing. The main building was preserved and other homes were built on the property.

*(Rick West | Staff Photographer)*

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We have long called for more affordable housing in suburban Chicago.

Hardworking but low-paid workers should be able to live in the counties where they toil. Young people just starting their careers should be able to afford a home in the towns where they grew up. And older empty nesters shouldn't have to leave their communities to downsize.

But affordable housing has not always been a priority for elected officials in the suburbs.

That appears to be changing in recent years.

During this last election cycle, at least 16 candidates in Kane, DuPage, Lake and McHenry counties mentioned on their Daily Herald questionnaires that affordable housing as an important issue.

Several of those candidates secured reelection to the DuPage County Board. Another -- state Rep. Deb Conroy -- has been elected chair of the county board in DuPage.

"DuPage County provides such an amazing place to raise a family," Conroy said during a recent interview with our Editorial Board. "I don't think people should not be able to have that experience just because they don't have the money to buy a million-dollar home."

The Elmhurst Democrat has said she would use the county board chair position to "actively pursue development partners willing to prioritize thoughtful, affordable housing designed for families."

The willingness of Conroy and other newly elected officials to acknowledge the lack of affordable housing in the suburbs has us feeling optimistic.

Affordable housing is a topic that deserves attention, because there are benefits to the community.

Roger Hughes, a member of the nonprofit DuPage United, said last week during an online presentation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gljr6z8uEN4>) hosted by the League of Women Voters of Naperville that affordable housing provides stability for families. It helps children grow into productive members of society, he said.

People living in affordable homes have more disposable income that they can use to support the economy. Local businesses also benefit when their employees can live close to work.

Still, Hughes says not enough affordable housing is being built.

So while nonprofit groups are working to provide affordable housing options, there is more that elected officials could do.

Advocates say county and municipal governments could, for example, sell publicly-owned land at a discount to affordable housing developers. Officials could waive fees. They could even streamline the process needed to get a project approved.

Some have suggested updating zoning laws to allow for more creative housing options.

"I want county leaders to stop talking about affordable housing and make affordable housing a reality," DuPage County Board member Dawn DeSart wrote in her candidate questionnaire.

Increasing the affordable housing stock in the suburbs is going to take effort. But at least a growing number of elected officials are willing to have the conversation.