



MULTIFAMILY NW

The Association Promoting Quality Rental Housing

Affordable Housing Solutions will Require Collaboration

By: Deborah Imse

[01/30/16 OpEd—The Oregonian](#)

We all know that Oregon is a great place to live, but rising housing costs are threatening to price some families out of the communities they call home. In recent years, rents have risen quickly in Portland and across the state, while incomes have lagged behind.

One of the major causes of rising rents is increased demand for rental housing. Earlier this month, [United Van Lines identified Oregon as the “Top Moving Destination” in their Annual National Movers Study](#). According to the study, Oregon has seen inbound migration increase by 10 percent over the past six years.

Unfortunately, we haven’t built nearly enough housing to accommodate these new residents. Even with thousands of new units already built and thousands more in the pipeline, we are playing catch-up. As a result, average rents in some communities have increased nearly 20 percent over the past five years and vacancy rates are at historical lows.

The region needs quality housing options for families of all incomes. To get there, we’ll need collaboration from all sides: governments, nonprofits, foundations, property owners, and property managers.

As the organization representing property owners and managers, Multifamily NW has adopted a solutions-oriented approach to address the housing shortage. The market data we collect, along with reviews of affordable housing policies across the country and the experience of our members, have shown us the best way to create affordability in the housing market: adopting proven strategies that add to the housing supply.

To increase the overall housing supply, we need to remove barriers to building. This includes updating zoning codes to allow for a wider variety of housing types at a range of price levels. At the same time, we should streamline the process for development review and permitting new construction while retaining standards for high-quality buildings. Under the current process, approvals can take a year or more, adding to project costs and delaying the construction of much-needed market-rate and affordable units.

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Deborah Imse
deborah@multifamilynw.org

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We also need to expand and simplify incentive programs to encourage developers to build for a variety of incomes. For example, updating Portland's MULTE program to make it simpler to use has resulted in 82 new affordable units in the city in just a few months.

And there is widespread agreement among housing experts and advocates that we need dedicated funding streams to support subsidized housing for low-income families.

Promising funding sources include document recording fees and state and local bonding.

As we consider solutions, we should be careful to avoid those that actually reduce the amount of new housing built or increase housing costs, ultimately exacerbating the crisis.

Rent control of any type produces fewer affordable units than incentive-based strategies that make financial sense, and it increases the cost of everyone else's rental housing at the same time.

The members of Multifamily NW are owners and operators of both subsidized affordable housing and market-rate apartment buildings, and we are committed to pursuing solutions that strengthen neighborhoods and create housing options accessible to all families.

Deborah Imse is the Executive Director of Multifamily NW, an organization representing the owners and property managers of 170,000 rental housing units across Oregon and SW Washington, ranging from owners with single family home rentals to larger property management companies with thousands of units.