

Rock Hill's Proposed Land-use Policies will Create "Exclusive" Bedroom Community

The City of Rock Hill is considering new land-use policies that will slow housing construction, dramatically increase housing prices, and will make it more difficult for many working-class families to purchase a home in Rock Hill. What's even more concerning is that these policies are being considered at a time when the housing industry is recognized as the only bright spot in a weakened economy.

According to the local Multiple Listing Service (MLS), in 2002, 1,269 homes were sold in Rock Hill at an average price of \$137,808. Compared to Fort Mill (349 homes at \$197,119) and Tega Cay (114 homes at \$222,547), Rock Hill appears to be a great bargain. And this is where the rub comes in with some of our local public policy makers who believe Rock Hill is attracting too much of the "affordable housing" that is being built in York County. It is true that many of the homes built in Rock Hill would qualify as "affordable" to most middle-class families in our area. In fact, homes that sell in the \$110,000 to \$130,000 range represent the most popular price range of homes sold in Rock Hill in 2002. Is this really such a bad thing, as many of our local officials would have you believe? We don't think so, and certainly the public servants in this area shouldn't think so.

Recently, we completed a study that compared housing affordability in Rock Hill with surrounding communities. Specifically, we looked at the number of homes sold in 2002 and compared how many of these homes could be purchased by Rock Hill school teachers, Rock Hill firefighters, and Rock Hill police officers. What we found should surprise and elate both you and our local officials.

A Rock Hill teacher with 5 years of experience could afford up to 30% of the homes that were sold in Rock Hill during 2002. This same teacher could afford only 8% of the homes sold in Fort Mill and 1% of the homes sold in Tega Cay. A Rock Hill firefighter that is making a salary in the midrange of the city's pay schedule could afford 21% of the homes sold in Rock Hill, but only 7% of the homes sold in Fort Mill and none of the homes sold in Tega Cay. A Rock Hill police officer making a salary in the midrange of the pay schedule could afford a whopping 50% of all homes sold in Rock Hill, but only 15% of those sold in Fort Mill and up to 10% of the homes sold in Tega Cay. The fact that our local public servants can actually afford to live in the community they serve and have ample housing choices is something we need to celebrate, not eliminate.

At the direction of the Rock Hill City Council, the city's Planning staff and their Chapel Hill consultants have developed draft land-use policies that are designed to raise the level of standards for development in Rock Hill. What they will also do is raise the cost of developing land, raise the price of new housing, and raise significant barriers that prevent affordable housing from being built in Rock Hill. Initial estimates indicate the new regulations will add between \$10,000 and \$20,000 to the cost of a new home. What's even more concerning is that we have been unable to identify one existing Rock Hill neighborhood that would meet the proposed design regulations if it were built today (this includes the highly touted and respected Baxter development in Fort Mill).

Our elected officials need to remember that we are not Hilton Head or some Florida resort community. We are Rock Hill, South Carolina. Our history is in manufacturing. Our workforce is highly skilled and desirable. However, the inability of these workers to find affordable housing in Rock Hill will certainly hurt our local economic development efforts as companies

follow this workforce to other, more affordable communities. The only newcomers that will be able to afford to move to Rock Hill will be white-collar workers that drive north everyday to work. Adopting these new land-use policies will ensure Rock Hill's future as one of Charlotte's most expensive and exclusive bedroom communities.