

“Boom-mates – How Empty Nesters could help with the Housing Crisis” by Kathleen Lee

California has a housing problem – as in there isn’t enough of it. A recent report about the issue in *The Sacramento Bee*, found that the state was building only half as many new housing units as population growth required. The article’s author, Angela Hart further noted that, “[t]he state now needs 180,000 new housing units per year, according to state housing officials, and it is building less than 80,000 annually on average.”

This problem has evolved since the 1970s and has multiple causes, but two stand out. First, Proposition 13, enacted in 1978, resulted in much lower revenue for the states and particularly for local governments. Some of that shortfall has been made up through higher building fees that can come to a fifth of the total cost of building. Proposition 13 has also provided an incentive for commercial building rather than residential building. In many markets only luxury home construction is profitable.

Second, and probably more important, California has given local residents a great deal of control over development. While this definitely has a benefit, it also has a downside, especially with regards to higher density, affordable housing. NIMBY (not in my backyard) groups can be quite vocal in their opposition and often local government decision makers bow to these local critics. Due to legal challenges and vocal opposition by neighbors, many proposed projects fail to get approval.

One of the groups hardest hit by the housing shortage are the millennials – both those in school and those who are just entering the workforce. Most of these individuals are renters and most find it difficult to pay that rent even if they are able to find a space to do so. That is especially true here in Humboldt County, which according to the real estate site RealtyTrac, ranks in the bottom 10% of the US in terms of affordability.

At the same time that millennials struggle to find housing, ageing baby boomers often struggle to remain in their own home to “age in place” in the face of raising cost of living. Innovative programs that bring these two groups together could go a long way in addressing the housing shortage.

Another real estate site, Trulia, did a study in 2017 of 100 housing markets and found 3.6 million unoccupied rooms. They estimated that, if these rooms were rented, they could provide the homeowner with an average of \$14,000 per year and save the young renters up to \$24,000 a year over renting a one bedroom apartment. They called the new arrangements “Boom-mates.”

In addition to the financial benefits, intergenerational living can have social benefits to both generations. Numerous studies have linked social isolation of the elderly with mental and physical decline while the benefits of cross generational contact have also been documented. Young people, who often have had little contact with people much older than them, can benefit from the experience of intergenerational living by seeing the commonalities that they share. Older folks can get a bit of assistance on physical tasks that are becoming challenging and can learn new skills such as cooking, gardening or home repairs.

If homesharing with a college student or younger person does not appeal to you, that's ok! There are many people of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds looking for alternative housing. Homesharing is adaptable to the living preferences of each person and no two homesharing arrangements look exactly like. The flexibility of homesharing allows for more customizable and better homesharing experiences.

To learn more information about homesharing and how it can work for you go to www.a1aa.org/homesharing or contact the Area 1 Agency on Aging by calling 707-442-3763 or emailing at seniorinfo@a1aa.org.