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MY VIEW JENEVA MARTINEZ

Cut the red tape: A pro-housing guide for towns

By Jeneva Martinez

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Last month, I attended three intense days at the New Mexico Housing Summit in Albuquerque, where 600 housing leaders from 24 states and 80 municipalities gathered to tackle the housing crisis head-on.

The facts are impossible to ignore: Eighty percent of New Mexico families cannot afford the median home price. Since 2017, rents have skyrocketed 60% and homelessness has jumped 87%. By 2035, our state will need roughly 73,000 additional homes.

Meanwhile, building permits are declining — exactly the opposite of what’s needed. Nearly 40% of the cost of a new home is eaten up by regulatory requirements. That’s not a market failure; that’s a policy failure. And yet, every time I talk about solutions, someone inevitably says, “The government can’t get involved.”

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Government created much of this red tape — and government can cut the red tape. City councils, planning boards and state agencies have the tools to remove needless barriers that drive up costs and slow construction.

Here’s what Roswell can do right now: Promote density and diverse options. Let’s allow accessory dwelling units, duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes in neighborhoods that currently allow only single-family homes. We should welcome mixed-use developments — housing near jobs, transit and shops — while slashing outdated rules such as oversized parking requirements, large lot minimums and restrictive height limits.

Second, let’s embrace “middle housing.” Between single-family homes and big apartment complexes lies what is termed middle housing. Those are townhomes, cottage clusters, courtyard apartments and ADUs. Such options fit neighborhood character, provide choices for all income levels and ages, and create walkable, vibrant communities.

Third, let's streamline permitting and approvals. Time is money. Roswell can eliminate or reduce impact fees, shorten review periods with third-party inspectors and digitize permitting for efficiency. Public input should focus on zoning plans — the big picture — rather than fighting every single project. These aren't radical ideas; they're commonsense steps cities across the country are already taking to keep housing attainable. Cutting unnecessary regulations does not mean cutting safety or quality — it means focusing on what truly matters and removing rules that simply add cost without adding value.

Housing is infrastructure, as essential as roads and water. If we want teachers, nurses, service workers and our own children to stay in Roswell, we need to act. The private market can build — but only if government clears the path.

The New Mexico Housing Summit made one thing crystal clear: Cities that embrace prohousing policies thrive. It's time for Roswell — and other cities around the state — to do the same. Let's prove that when government has the courage to cut red tape, families win, neighborhoods grow stronger and our entire community benefits.



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