

LETTERS

Giving communities the housing boost they need

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A condo building on Washington Street in Union Square sits alongside the Somerville neighborhood's stock of older apartment buildings. CRAIG F. WALKER

Small transfer fee would leave a legacy of affordable housing

The Globe's support for Boston's home rule petition to build more affordable housing through a real estate transfer fee is welcome, but I was disappointed at negative

comments about providing this option to other communities that need it just as much ([“Housing crisis needs all hands on deck,”](#) Editorial, Jan. 13).

Boston, with only 10 percent of the state’s population, cannot solve the housing crisis on its own, as city officials and past Globe editorials readily acknowledge. But housing funds are even more scarce in small- and medium-sized communities, which have less federal funding and fewer big developers to contribute resources. Other cities and towns who are willing to step up and build affordable units need another tool to do so, and a modest fee on real estate sales is just such a tool.

A small fee would not seriously affect housing prices, and this is especially true now, as the market appears to be at or near the top and prices seem to be stabilizing. A transfer fee would be paid by precious few, and most likely once or twice in any buyer’s lifetime, yet it would leave a legacy of middle-income housing to stabilize participating communities for generations to come.

By applying the fee only to transfers above the statewide median sales price, half of all home sales would be exempt from any fee at all. Further, communities would be allowed to establish a higher threshold if they wish, and to exempt first-time home buyers, and we fully expect many communities will take those steps.

The Legislature should pass Boston’s home rule petition, and give other communities throughout the state the option of raising the funds they need to address our statewide housing crisis. The need is dire, and the time to act with urgency is now.

Marc D. Draisen

Executive director

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Boston

Funds for housing have to come from somewhere

While I am glad to see the Globe covering our affordable-housing crisis in greater depth, I was disappointed by the Jan. 13 editorial [“Housing crisis needs all hands on deck.”](#) This will be cited by many self-interested groups (notably realtors) as a reason to reject the pending legislation that would authorize “local option” transfer fees for affordable housing.

The editorial has not proposed another source to fund affordable housing. We cannot raise useful sums from existing state and local revenue sources. There are too many demands on these funds already. And I know of no Pollyanna who thinks the federal government will help us increase the stock of affordable housing.

The pending bill permits municipalities to set their own threshold for transfer fees as long as it is above the statewide median sales price. Boston has done this. In Concord, the transfer tax approved by Town Meeting uses the median Concord sales price as the threshold, an amount substantially higher than the statewide median.

I hope the Globe will rethink its opposition and encourage the Legislature to proceed with the pending bill. Do not require every city and town willing to provide more affordable housing to fight for approval of individual home rule bills.

Frank “Rich” Feeley

Board member

Concord Housing Foundation

Concord

That ‘starter’ home would still be in reach in many Mass. communities

In opposing a bill that would give communities across the state the ability to tax real estate transactions and use the funds to create affordable housing, the Globe editorial board opines that taxing homes selling for \$400,000 or more would prevent people from buying so-called starter homes. This perspective misses the fact that starter homes in the state's Gateway Cities and other small urban towns sell for far less than this figure. Local leaders in these communities strongly support the bill, which they understand would help their residents. Note that, on the question of how else we might finance affordable housing outside of Boston, the editorial, like the real estate lobby, is mute.

Monte L. Pearson

Burlington

A point-counterpoint from online readers

We're a victim of our own success, but the medical, education, and technology organizations aren't easily displaced. The western part of the state is cheaper, but good luck getting people to move there. Fact is, the work is here, and companies are willing to pay. Hanging out in the town you grew up in and expecting to maintain the status quo isn't a viable strategy.

Posted by suprdav on BostonGlobe.com

I agree, that's where smart growth, expanding mass transit (congestion tolls to make people use it), would work out great. The State House is in Boston, but corporations don't all need to be there. There are a lot of underpopulated small cities, like Waltham. Fitchburg, Brockton, Springfield, etc. Gardner is a good example. The commuter rail used to stop in Gardner as recently as the mid-1980s. Put it back into service and the

town becomes more viable for corporations. Think outside the box. Don't be so provincial. Not everything has to be jammed into Boston and the nearest suburbs.

Posted by oferguson on BostonGlobe.com



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