

Policy Brief: The YIMBY Movement is a Springboard for More Affordable Cities for All

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The ongoing housing shortage in the United States is detrimental to the affordability crisis. Everyday consumers are feeling the effects of inflation more than ever, and a NIMBY ("not in my backyard") mindset is preventing new housing from being built. Through adopting a YIMBY ("yes in my backyard") approach, cities will be able to increase housing supply while still remaining affordable - a plan that benefits everyone.

YIMBY success stories can be defined by four key characteristics: (1) current housing affordability challenges, (2) response through deliberately building new housing; (3) growing population; (4) resulting increased affordability. Metro areas that embrace this approach see benefits for both people with lower income levels, and local economies overall, as seen by research conducted by the Urban Institute in Alexandria, VA.

The YIMBY-movement is continuing to gain momentum among both consumers and government officials, including sponsors for this policy from Austin, TX and San Francisco, CA. Both of these markets have growing populations and large employment bases in key industries, including tech, healthcare, and service / hospitality. While both cities are growing, only one, Austin, built housing. The YIMBY movement has also gained support of major professional and trade organizations, including the Tech Workers Coalition. The current state of affordability speaks for itself, and the co-sponsorship of this policy shows the need for YIMBY support at a national level.

Austin is a prime example of a successful YIMBY city. Austin is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States, with a population increase over 30% since 2009. The city responded to this growth through building new housing to fill the demand, supporting new construction projects. Since 2009, they've awarded over 145,000 new housing permits, at an upward trajectory. These policies lead to an 11.8 decrease in rent burden, increasing affordability for residents, putting more money in their pockets to spend and stimulate the local economy.

In contrast, San Francisco is a city experiencing a NIMBY crisis. While they are similar to Austin in that they have experienced a tech boom with lots of high paying jobs, residents are facing extreme rent burden (up 18.2 points). Although they have a population growing by over 12% since 2009, their housing growth is stunted by blocking new housing projects through obstructive approval processes. This all results in a city with worsening affordability, significantly less affordable than the national baseline. This is a prime example of how NIMBY policies block progress and hurts residents.

The goal of the YIMBY movement is to lower the cost of living by improving the supply of housing. These are not just hypothetical dreams, but policies that have real world implications to help cities. Research has shown the positive impact of YIMBY policies, such as reducing homelessness, improving public health, improved quality of life for older adults. Skeptics will claim concerns over "neighborhood character," but in reality these policies will support the intentional and thoughtful growth of cities, creating better lives for all.

Housing affordability is an issue that impacts all families and households, regardless of political affiliation. Residents need access to homes they can afford, which can only be delivered through aggressive, sustained building policies.

Sources: US Census Bureau, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Association of Homebuilders, Urban Institute in Alexandria, VA, HousingWire, Yahoo Finance