

Editorials are the institutional voice of The Free Press and independent of the newsroom reporting staff

OUR VIEW: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Progress made but challenges loom

Adequate housing drives everything good about an economy, and developing affordable housing should be at the top of the list for business, government and taxpayers.

Reasonable and affordable housing helps people secure gainful employment and move up by improving themselves through skills or experience. Affordable housing builds communities, small outstate communities even more so than metro areas.

Why it matters:

Why it matters: The need for affordable housing in Mankato and Minnesota continues to outstrip the supply.

Living in a smaller community outside a major metropolitan area can be more attractive if housing prices are in line with wages that will typically be lower.

Good housing creates social stability and lower rates of crime.

So a recent announcement that the Mankato area was awarded state and federal funding for revamping 77 units of affordable housing was good news. The bad news was two other major projects, comprising 130 units, did not get funding.

The Minnesota Housing Finance Authority awarded \$15 million in tax credits and loans to Colonial Square apartments to complete a major upgrade and remodel of its 77 units. The former Minnesota State University dorm was redeveloped years ago. Some 65 percent of its tenants have physical or mental disabilities and make no more than 50 percent of the area median income.

Those tenants were at risk of losing their homes as the owner Tapestry Companies was strongly considering making the apartments market rate. The Minnesota housing funding will ensure the units remain serving the low-income tenants.

Two other projects that did not receive funding included the Gateway West project, with 80 affordable housing units and a 160 daycare center, and Rosa Place II with 51 units of affordable housing.

The city of Mankato has supported with additional funding the Gateway project as it would have redeveloped the old city transportation garage property. City leaders will examine why the other two projects did not get funded and consider proposals again in the next round of funding.

That's the best strategy right now. It may be the projects qualified, but the money ran out, or there may be other reasons.

It's troubling that Tapestry was seriously considering going with market rate housing. There have been other housing complexes in the city whose owners were also said to be considering changing to market rate housing.

The city should create disincentives to do that. Affordable housing needs still outstrip the supply.

The city of Mankato deserves credit for being aggressive in pursuing affordable housing projects in accordance with its strategic plan.

In the last four years, Mankato has helped secure funding for four affordable housing complexes, including Dublin Crossing, Dublin Heights, Rosa Place and Colonial Square. In the previous 10 years, the city secured only one affordable housing complex, the 60-unit Sibley Park Apartments.

Affordable housing stands as an asset that can be leveraged for community prosperity and growth. It also lifts up and supports those who have been less fortunate in a society that has pushed more wealth toward the top 1 percent of earners.

The more affordable housing, the more community prosperity and growth.

THEY SAID IT

“While it was disappointing that Gateway West and even Joseph Development wasn't funded, it is positive that there will be preservation of existing units in Mankato.”

PAUL VOGEL, MANKATO DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

“Unless we address affordable housing in our region, I don't think we'll really be able to prevent or end homelessness.”

ANDREW PIETSCH, BLUE EARTH COUNTY CHILD SUPPORT/SUPPORTIVE HOUSING SUPERVISOR

FOUNDED IN 1887

The Free Press

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STEVE JAMESON, Publisher

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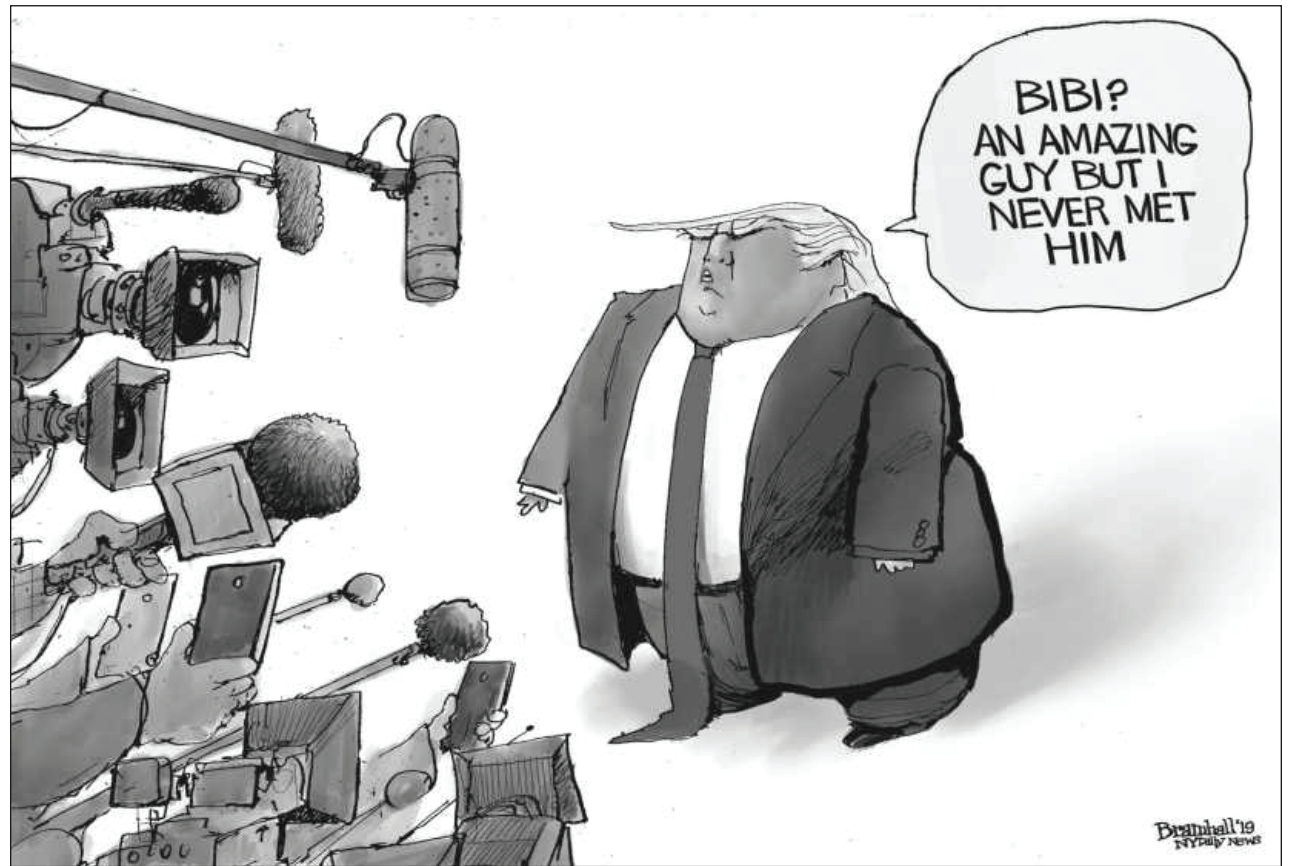
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Homeless project aims to shed light, offer solutions

The Free Press embarks today on a continuing series about homelessness in the Mankato region as part of the public service journalism we believe serves our communities and helps them solve problems.

The “Address Unknown” project started with Free Press journalists meeting with a half dozen or so leaders of organizations that work with the homeless, help them find housing and jobs and support their safety and well-being.

What those leaders told us may surprise you. Many spoke about the “hidden nature” of the problem in Mankato. While it seems more and more one can see a homeless person walking downtown, getting breakfast at Common Grounds or lunch at the Salvation Army, the myriad of homeless people, those in emergency shelters or those in transitional housing remain invisible.

We found homelessness is not a one

dimensional problem. It relates to one's ability to get a job as most job applications require an address.

And homelessness also has a domino effect. People can't move from sleeping in their cars or in tents if there's no room at emergency shelters like the Welcome Inn or Theresa House. People can't move from Theresa House if there's no room in Section 8 subsidized housing. And people can't move from Section 8 to free up space for others if

there's not enough affordable housing. Many affordable housing programs, with a few exceptions, have been defunded or underfunded for years. We'll be reporting on why and talk to lawmakers making those decisions.

Agencies that help the homeless often come up against attitudes about the homeless that lack a complete understanding of the problem. People don't wake up one day and decide to be homeless. Circumstances like fire,

family discord, substance and physical abuse figure into the life circumstances of the homeless.

These programs have trouble getting support because people think boosting services for the homeless and housing will “be a magnet” for more homeless people. We hope to shed light on that somewhat misguided premise.

We'll also be offering solutions in our reporting. We'll be reporting on those who eventually secured stable housing, a job and were able to put food on the table. We'll be showing how you can help the agencies working on these problems.

We'll make calls to the community and those in power to marshal their resources, focus their programs and engage in partnerships to make sure the homeless can eventually call the Mankato area their hometown.

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JOE SPEAR
Managing Editor

Youth in foster care need permanent homes

By Jodi Raidt

Statewide program manager at Therapeutic Foster Care

and Heidi Wiste

director at Foster Care & Adoption

Many Minnesotans might be surprised to learn that most children who are adopted in Minnesota today are not coming from China, Colombia, Malawi or India. They are children right in our own backyard.

Today, 905 of 10,000 children in foster care in Minnesota have an immediate need for a permanent and loving family. Almost 60% of children in foster care are siblings. They also tend to be older children.

Mike and Megan Nelson, who knew of the great need for foster families, decided to take a leap of faith and walk through the education and training involved to become foster parents. They were also open to adoption.

As a blended family, the Nelsons have two older children at home and several adult children who are now on their own. With available space in their home, love for children and a willingness to learn, they knew they could make a difference.

Last year, they opened their home

to three sisters, ages 12 to 17, with whom they have developed a special bond. So special, that this month — National Adoption Month — the sisters are officially joining the Nelson family through adoption.

If you've ever wondered about adopting children from foster care, here's what the Nelsons want you to know:

- All kids deserve to be loved and cherished in a family.
- Be ready to care for children with special needs. While children may have mental health, developmental or physical challenges, many resources are available to support families and help children succeed.
- It takes more than love. Time, patience and intention are needed to understand a child's unique situation and provide support they need to thrive.
- Openness with biological family members, when that's possible, provides opportunities for children to connect with their roots and enrich their lives.
- Adoption financial assistance is available to support children adopted from foster care until they reach age 18 or graduate from high school.

Our organizations at Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota and Children's Home Society of Minnesota have been working with families over decades to equip them with the education and support they need to welcome children into their homes and lives through foster care and adoption.

For families who want to provide permanence for children in foster care, there is little-to-no cost for adoption and there is support available for the journey.

It takes a leap of faith to raise a child — whether they are coming to us biologically or through foster care adoption. If you've ever considered welcoming a child into your home as a foster or adoptive parent, we encourage you to learn more. All children need a loving family. These kids are depending on us.

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YOUR VIEWS

Hearings have their heroes

I was a 20-year old news junkie when the Watergate hearings were initiated. I worked my viewing of live coverage around my class and work-study obligations, even as my 15-inch, black-and-white television had a cathode-ray tube problem that created a horizontal bar in the middle of the screen.

My memories of the hearings all have an annoying horizontal bar in the middle of them.

The big heroes in that era were the investigative journalists. Majors in journalism spiked for several years after that; you can look it up.

The heroes of these hearings are state department and national security infrastructure professionals. There could be no better legacy of this era if people started majoring like crazy

in world languages and comparative literature and political science and economics and all the other ways they might get on track for a career in the diplomatic and security services.

And then all they have to do is to take their oaths seriously. And tell the truth. Even as self-proclaimed patriots mount vendettas against them.

Richard Robbins
Mankato

Hagedorn dismisses, insults constituents

After his Mower County town hall on Nov. 6 Rep. Jim Hagedorn, R-1st District, continued his pattern of being dismissive, divisive and disrespectful to his constituents.

Hagedorn took to televi-

sion and social media to target Indivisible and paint all southern Minnesota constituents who disagree with him with the same inaccurate brush. Although, in an interview with KAAL, he said the town hall was “not as contentious as reported,” on Facebook, he labeled constituents as “disruptors and harassers” and the “radical resistance Socialists.”

As a former Republican, I am deeply troubled by a congressman who bans constituents from his offices, insults them on Facebook and refuses to even pretend that he cares about his constituents' views. Even as constituents respectfully engage with him and his office, he chooses to represent only the people who agree 100% with him rather than all

people of southern Minnesota.

While Congressman Hagedorn's behavior is disappointing, it is unfortunately in line with his widely reported history of insulting and dismissing people and groups with whom he disagrees.

There are many urgent issues facing this country today. We will continue our attempts to engage in respectful and productive issue-based dialogue with the congressman so that he may have a fuller grasp of all the viewpoints held by his constituency, many of whom have direct expertise and personal experience that would be relevant to the representative's understanding.

Peggy Dimock
North Mankato
Member, Indivisible St. Peter/Greater Mankato