

## **Affordable housing on radar screens Issue is 'growing in importance' as local quality of life is assessed**

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Affordable housing ranks about as important as protection of the environment among workers in the Richmond region, according to a study by a task force for the Greater Richmond Chamber.

"Affordable housing is a second-tier issue -- not at the top of everyone's radar screen -- but it is growing in importance," said James W. Dunn, chamber president and chief executive officer.

People are more concerned about education and public safety than they are about affordable housing, according to the study of workers and employers.

Still, about 50 percent of workers and 49 percent of employers ranked affordable housing as a very important issue.

Only 18 percent of respondents with incomes of \$50,000 to \$99,999 were satisfied with the availability of houses in their price range.

About half the employees in the area earn \$60,000 a year or more and could technically afford a \$175,000 home, yet there is little quality housing in that price range, according to data from the Central Virginia Multiple Listing Service used for the study.

Dunn said it will take several years and regional cooperation to address the challenges of affordable housing.

"There is no quick fix," he said.

The chamber is involved in the issue because economic development relies on a region having a stellar business climate and outstanding quality of life, Dunn said.

"Affordable housing is a business issue and a quality-of-life issue," he said. Employees need to have good, decent, affordable housing, he said.

The study was based on a telephone survey with 301 employees in the Richmond area, with a margin of error of 5.8 percent, and an online survey with 391 employers, with a margin of error of 5.1 percent.

Households making less than \$100,000 a year are the most concerned about affordable housing, according to the study.

What matters the most to people making more than that is safety, said Laura Lafayette, a vice president with the Richmond Association of Realtors.

Households earning \$50,000 to \$100,000 make too much for nonprofits to help them or to get assistance from the Virginia Housing Development Authority, she said.

"It's the folks in the middle getting pinched on housing," she said.

The study, conducted by the Southeastern Institute of Research, found that people in general are confused about what work-force housing means, so going forward the Workforce Housing Task Force will be called the Partnership for Housing Affordability.

The task force is made up of about a dozen people from the business community, nonprofit groups and private sector, including the Richmond Association of Realtors, the Virginia Local Initiatives Support Corp., the Better Housing Coalition and the Home Building Association of Richmond. Input is sought from government representatives from Richmond and the counties of Hanover, Henrico and Chesterfield. Contact Carol Hazard at (804) 775-8023 or [chazard@timesdispatch.com](mailto:chazard@timesdispatch.com).