

**Housing from page 8**

established Andover property owners, but it is a strong signal to “go away” for local first-time homeowners.

Let’s consider a real-world example from the viewpoint of a recent local high school graduate who is hoping to find an entry-level manufacturing job at one of the large employers in the area. This person is willing to work hard for decent pay, and hopes to settle down here and start a family. Unfortunately, our hypothetical new worker has no savings nor the means or inclination to pursue a post-secondary degree.

First, let’s see what pay range manufacturing companies within easy commuting distance from Andover are offering their new hires. A quick look at a nearby company’s offerings online at Glassdoor describes only a single entry-level office position, for an “Enviro, Health and Safety Intern,” requiring at least one year experience and a Bachelor’s or other degree. The pay range is \$38,000 to \$74,000 per year, with \$54,000 being “most likely,” according to Glassdoor.

Unfortunately, our hypothetical entry-level worker doesn’t qualify for this job.

Another nearby company in a similar industry advertises a “foundry machine operator” position for \$17 to \$22

per hour, or roughly \$34,000 to \$44,000 per year, while a different foundry company offers an entry-level, second shift job at \$17.50 to \$19 per hour, or \$35,000 to \$38,000 per year. Our inexperienced worker might probably accept an offer on the lower end of that pay range.

How do those income figures square with housing costs in our area? For example, Zillow shows a very tight local housing market, with only a single apartment currently for rent in Franklin, at \$1,500 per month for a two-bedroom on Prospect Street.

Using the rule of thumb that a person should spend no more than one-third of their income on housing, you’d need an income of \$54,000 per year (\$27 per hour) or a roommate to split the place with, and you’d both need an income above \$13.50 per hour. Of course, if this single Franklin apartment is already rented, there are apparently no current alternatives closer than Claremont or Concord.

Might it be more affordable to buy rather than rent? The cheapest listing for sale today is on Victory Drive in Franklin. They are asking \$165,000, with a \$990 per month mortgage. The next cheapest year-round listing is a mobile home in Andover, at \$179,000, with a monthly mortgage slightly above \$1,000. Down payments of 20%

on these properties would be around \$33,000 to \$39,000, with a 30-year fixed rate mortgage at 5%.

Can anybody moving to our area take a job as a laborer, then afford a starter home or apartment to live in? Not likely. It doesn’t sound to me like our area is an inviting place for entry-level workers, and that helps explain why 62% of New Hampshire high school grads leave the state, never to return.

But the worst news is this: If our area is unattractive to workers, profitable companies who rely on hundreds of workers to meet the rising demand for their products in today’s rebounding US economy will not be able to hire workers they need to remain open here in New Hampshire. The companies will either go out of business, or move to another state with low housing costs, higher minimum wages, or both.

If either of those things happen, New Hampshire jobs will disappear, the to-

tal value of Andover’s and neighboring towns’ tax bases will decline, and tax rates on remaining property owners will rise to cover our towns’ fixed expenses, such as maintaining roads and heating public buildings.

There are only two ways out of this quandary, and both should happen soon if a local economic calamity is to be averted. One is to raise the federal minimum wage, which would help level the playing field for New Hampshire versus lower-wage southern states.

The other is that housing affordable to young entry-level workers must be built in our area. If these two things do not happen, the population of New Hampshire will continue to shrink and age as younger folks seek their fortunes elsewhere, and the industries that power our local economy will leave with them.

The Andover Planning Board will be taking up the issue of the scarcity of workforce housing this year.

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