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Rosemount receives tips on housing, development

Single-family homes and townhouses are relatively easy to find in Rosemount.

Apartments and places to rent? Not so much.

That south-metro nugget is among the findings of an Opportunity City Pilot Program study of Rosemount conducted by the Urban Land Institute of Minnesota with the goal of helping cities create a wider range of housing choices as they grow or redevelop.

The institute, with input from its Regional Council of Mayors, launched studies of five metro-area suburbs in 2008. More variety in the size and price of housing in a wider range of styles -- single family, townhouses, condos -- leads to economic stability and regional prosperity, according to the nonprofit planning organization.

In addition to Rosemount, the institute examined Brooklyn Park, Minnetonka, Shoreview and Richfield. The institute aimed to look at cities at various stages of development. Rosemount was chosen as an example of a city that is still growing.

"We wanted to take a closer look at a few cities to see how this works," said Kathy Capone Bennett, a consultant for the Urban Land Institute of Minnesota.

In Rosemount's case, the city already retains its residents well. About 35 percent of the households that move choose to stay within the city, the highest percentage of the five cities that were studied.

But Capone Bennett noted that most of the city's housing falls in the "move-up" category, larger or more expensive properties for people who may have outgrown an apartment or first home. Just 12 percent of Rosemount households rent their living space. When the Urban Land Institute brings recommendations back to the City Council this summer, a push for apartments and rental properties is likely to be among them.

"That is really where the younger households start," Capone Bennett said. "To be able to retain younger households, you first have to have the housing that they can live in."

Mayor Bill Droste said city planners have known that the city lacks rental housing, and he noted that a 108-unit apartment building opening downtown this summer is a step in the right direction. Over the past decade, he said, the city has tried to incorporate many kinds of housing, adding townhouses and looking to target transit corridors for denser development that could serve young people and aging residents looking to downsize.

"It's very timely," Droste said of the study. "We can be very focused on where we need to look at

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housing."

Richfield, one of the other cities studied, already has seen the benefits of having rental options.

"Existing apartment tenants were fairly likely to buy their first house here," said John Stark, the city's community development director, in noting what Richfield learned from the institute's study. He said the city knew it had a solid base of first-time homebuyers, but that they came from local apartments "was a surprise to us."

Just having the apartments, however, isn't enough.

Stark said Richfield now needs to make sure its apartments are continually updated and have amenities that attract residents.

Capone Bennett said that's a lesson that's true in studies of all five suburbs.

"By not reinvesting in that or creating new rental housing with amenities, you're going to lose that young population," she said.

Of the cities studied, Rosemount may have the most potential for drastic changes because it is still expected to grow from its population of about 23,000 to more than 40,000 with development at what is now UMore Park. Capone Bennett said she hopes the study and work with the Urban Land Institute of Minnesota anticipates demographic

changes, such as an aging baby boom population, and provides direction in planning.

"Do it now versus waiting until it becomes a problem," she said. "They really have opportunities. They have properties and a lot of land."

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