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## **Forum calls for action on Eastside housing**

**By Ashley Bach**

*Seattle Times Eastside bureau*

A lack of affordable housing on the Eastside is hurting the region and can only be solved by innovative government solutions and vocal support from residents, according to housing advocates at a forum Wednesday in Bellevue.

"We should be mad as hell," said Kirkland Mayor James Lauinger.

Lauinger and King County Executive Ron Sims were among the speakers at a breakfast organized by the Housing Development Consortium, a group of nonprofit developers. About 250 people, many of them community leaders, attended at the Bellevue Hilton.

The speakers described how difficult it is for middle- and low-income residents to buy a home, which then forces some people out of the cities where they grew up and strains the road system. Eastside cities can't retain critical employees positions.

But the primary focus was a call to action for the crowd. Government and community leaders should consider donating land, providing their employees with housing and giving money to housing groups, said Nancy Amidei, professor at the University of Washington School of Social Work.

Residents should aggressively lobby their elected officials to make major changes, such as a state sales-tax waiver for low-income housing, she said. Even e-mails and letters have an impact, she said.

Bellevue is a local hot spot, Amidei said. The city is considering a new land-use plan for "Auto Row" east of downtown, she said.

Bellevue leaders are planning affordable housing as part of a separate revamp of the 900-acre Bel-Red Corridor, but they need more residents telling them that "this is the right thing to do," said Eric Campbell, president of CamWest Development.

Affordable housing is even more difficult to build now that urban villages, such as Snoqualmie Ridge and Redmond Ridge, are closer to completion, Campbell said. About

12 percent of the homes at Snoqualmie Ridge are set aside for people earning no more than 80 percent of the King County median income, city officials said.

Offering incentives and increasing fees for developers haven't worked in Kirkland, but zoning rules in Redmond requiring affordable housing have produced results, Lauinger said.

Preserving current affordable-housing stock is also critical, said Sue Sherbrooke, CEO of the YWCA of Seattle-King County-Snohomish County. Earlier this year, the YWCA bought 220 units in Snohomish County, maintaining the lower rents, but such deals are hard to come by, she said.

*Ashley Bach: 206-464-2567 or [abach@seattletimes.com](mailto:abach@seattletimes.com)*

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