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Spring marks the beginning of more hopeful times in Syracuse – and contrarily, the beginning of housing season.

While elected officials and council members have poured more energy into improving the ongoing housing crisis, uncertainties linger among many Syracuse residents as March approaches. A shortage of viable housing, the controversial I-81 viaduct construction project, high federal interest rates and efforts for expansion by Syracuse University and SUNY Upstate Medical University are all hot topics in the housing conversation.

Syracuse representatives in the county legislature have different opinions on how to tackle the housing issue. Plans to renovate and build hundreds of units of affordable housing have been in the works for months. Some initiatives include the transformation of the new 15th ward (a result of the recently established [ReZone plan](#)) led by well known developers McCormack Baron Salazar. and the renovation of [McCarthy Manor Apartments](#), which are subsidized under the Section 8 voucher program.

On the state level, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul has been outspoken about the housing crisis, too – recently encouraging state agencies to look into potential housing development sites. Last Wednesday, Hochul hosted a roundtable discussion on the housing crisis with local officials, remarking on the inefficacy of her former ‘sticks’ method and instead proposing an incentivization method for communities to commit to building more housing units.

“I’m told this is what you’re willing to eat to help build more housing,” Hochul said, holding a bunch of carrots in the air. “And I’ve got 600 million carrots out there on the table.”

Making funding available to “pro-housing communities” will in turn bring back New York’s political clout and resources in Washington, Hochul said. Hochul sees the benefits of more housing extending to the New York economy on state and local levels.

The idea that affordable housing expansion is beneficial to all is not foreign to Syracuse, either. In facing the housing crisis, citizens, legislators and officials have long debated how to improve the local economy. It’s a balancing act between allocating money to affordable housing while also accounting for lucrative private establishments, such as Syracuse University, who hope to expand more into the city.

Most recently, the Syracuse Housing Authority and SUNY Upstate Medical University faced backlash from community members and elected officials for making [plans to build an optometry school](#) in place of 92 public housing units. Tenants were not aware of the discussions taking place. The plan was put on pause after a negative public opinion, but brought up the same concern many Syracuse residents mention when discussing the I-81 viaduct project; which is how much infrastructural initiatives by the city will actually improve the lives of residents.

Maurice Brown, recently elected county legislator for Syracuse's 15th district, has seen the issue from many angles. Brown is a graduate of Syracuse University and an avid fighter for housing as a human right. He put affordable housing initiatives at the forefront of his political campaign. He was particularly outspoken against the construction of the \$85 million dollar aquarium in Syracuse's inner harbor and supportive of reallocating money to make affordable housing actually affordable.

"There are many affordable housing and mixed-income housing projects going on, but the bulk of the housing you are seeing being created in the city area is luxury housing or student housing," Brown said. "Those are the most profitable for developers. And as a government, we need to do a better job at making low-income and affordable housing profitable for developers."

The county's slow-moving initiatives and [uncommunicated plans](#) worsen the distrust among residents. Affordable housing development as a human rights and political issue in Syracuse is not divided solely by socio-economic or racial lines, either – especially in the midst of a housing crisis, Brown sees the issue transcending those factors.

"When folks have secure housing, they're able to do a lot better – more people are going to shop at your businesses, more people are going to attend the school that you teach at – it is better for the community," Brown said.

The well-being of the community, according to Hochul and Brown, seems to lie in the recognition that housing insecurity exists everywhere – and that more housing options for lower income residents is beneficial for all residents.

"We have to remember that these are our neighbors. Neighbors that are living rent-burdened. We have housing insecurity all over," Brown said. This is not an us versus them – this is a community."