

Affordable housing is Utah goal

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An initiative to help municipalities craft and implement affordable housing programs has the endorsement of the governor and is scheduled to launch early next year.

The Utah WorkForce Housing Initiative is a technical and training resource designed to help accomplish legislation passed in 1996 that established plans for the provision of moderate-income housing and for a program to assist local government in planning for such housing.

Those housing plans have been slow to develop, because municipalities said they needed better resources to build realistic affordable-housing programs for their cities, said Richard Walker, a member of the not-for-profit Lotus Community Development Institute.

Speaking Thursday at the annual summit of the Utah Intergovernmental Roundtable, Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. said correcting an increasing gap between workers and affordable housing is essential to protecting economic development in Utah.

"The lack of affordable housing is squeezing people out," he said, adding that closing that gap "is a must-deliver for our state."

Utah's good jobs, quality of life and housing stock are among the amenities that continue to feed growth in the state, Huntsman said. The availability of affordable housing is the top concern the governor said he hears about when talking to law enforcement agencies and school districts around the state.

Partners in the initiative include state government, the Utah League of Cities and Towns, key housing industry organizations, Envision Utah, community and industrial banks and others. Huntsman said such partnerships are critical to the development of effective plans for affordable housing.

Vernal, Moab, South Salt Lake, Logan and the tiny Garfield County town of Boulder are acting as pilot communities already working with the initiative to develop housing plans.

The rollout early in 2008 will include statewide training sessions and the availability of new software that will help cities develop housing plans unique to their needs that also meet the state mandate, Walker said. "A strategy is what we're helping communities develop."

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