Affordable housing advocates and builders questioned a draft study released yesterday by the Long Island Regional Planning Board, saying it underestimated Long Island's need for low-cost housing.

The study, which forms the "Housing" chapter of the board's upcoming Regional Comprehensive Plan, found the Island needs nearly 14,000 new affordable-housing units. Seth Forman, deputy director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board, presented the findings to the board at a meeting in Hauppauge.

But critics said that number was too low, citing a 2003 study by the New York State AFL-CIO that estimated the region needs approximately 83,000 affordable houses and apartments.

"It's off by about 1,000 percent," said Robert Wieboldt, executive director of the Long Island Builders Institute, a homebuilders' lobbying group. "This is a very lowball figure."

Lee Koppelman, executive director of the regional planning board, cautioned against concluding that the figure represented Long Island's total need for affordable housing, saying the study is only a draft.
"We addressed one area where we were able to get definitive numbers," he said. "Is there a shortage? The answer is absolutely yes."

Koppelman calculated the lower number by only counting people who earned less than 80 percent of the median family income who were also living in substandard or overcrowded housing, or in a shelter. Other elements of the study also drew a strong reaction from housing advocates, including a finding that Long Islanders' median monthly housing costs - when adjusted for inflation - have actually decreased slightly since the 1980s.

The study found, for example, that in 1985, the monthly cost of homeownership was $2,830, compared with $2,388 in 2004. Forman said the main reason homeownership was less affordable in the 1980s are today's historically low interest rates. The findings prove that today's housing crisis is not a new problem, Forman said. "We've been where we are today," he said.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy said he was surprised by some of the findings, and noted that those monthly costs could rise suddenly if interest rates were to jump.

"The scary thought is what happens to the buyer of these high-priced homes when wages dip, the economy slows, or adjustable rates go up," Levy said.

Peter Elkowitz, president and chief executive of the Long Island Housing Partnership, a nonprofit affordable-housing developer, said he questioned the study's findings.

"These results are surprising," he said. "I have 17,000 active people waiting on our list for affordable housing," he said.

The study also identified 53 communities around Long Island that have lost population density since 1980 - areas that, Koppelman and Forman said, could be targeted for low-cost housing development.

Wieboldt said the new analysis would help developers make their case to towns and villages. "It gives us an argument that there is a housing need there," he said. But some local politicians questioned whether these communities would accept affordable housing. The upscale community of Lakeview, for example - which the study found has lost more than 3,000 residents since 1980 - recently rejected a senior housing project.

Absorbing residents

The five villages in each Long Island county that can add the most residents before returning to their 1980 density level: [CORRECTION: A graphic accompanying a story about a new affordable housing study Friday incorrectly referred to several unincorporated communities as villages. Of the 10, only Westbury and Mineola are villages Pg. 11 NS 7/23/05]
NASSAU COUNTY

Community: Levittown
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 8,439
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 7,171.1
Diff. : 1,267.9
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 8,723

Community: Westbury
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 7,669
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 5,979
Diff. : 1,690
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 4,039

Community: North Massapequa
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 7,692
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 6,333
Diff. : 1,359
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 4,104

Community: Plainview
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 4,971
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 4,478.2
Diff. : 492.8
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 2,819

Community: Mineola
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 11,468
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 10,348.7
Diff. : 1,119.3
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 2,082

SUFFOLK COUNTY

Community: Riverhead
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 1,478
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 696.5
Diff. : 781.5
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 11,793

Community: East Northport
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 4,750
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 3,556.5
Diff. : 1,193.5
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 6,994

Community: East Quogue
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 1,057
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 414.2
Diff. : 642.8
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 6,621

Community: Hampton Bays
1980 density (people per sq. mile): 683
2000 density (people per sq. mile): 297.1
Diff. : 385.9
Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 4,646

Community: Deer Park

1980 density (people per sq. mile): 4,950

2000 density (people per sq. mile): 4,525

Diff. : 425

Additional population required to return to '80 density level: 2,661

SOURCE: LONG ISLAND REGIONAL PLANNING BOARD

[Illustration]
Caption: Newsday Photo/Thomas A. Ferrara-Lakeview, which has lost 3,000 residents since 1980, recently rejected a senior housing complex. Chart - Absorbing residents (see end of text) [CORRECTION: A graphic accompanying a story about a new affordable housing study Friday incorrectly referred to several unincorporated communities as villages. Of the 10, only Westbury and Mineola are villages Pg. 11 NS 7/23/05]