LI's 'baby bust' generation, Report says fewer babies born, not lack of affordable housing, is to blame for dearth of 20- to 34- year-olds; [NASSAU AND SUFFOLK Edition]


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Abstract (Document Summary)

The Long Island Regional Planning Board report comes as something of a threat to local leaders, who have been devoting vast resources building "workforce housing" so Long Island's young professionals won't be tempted to move to cheaper pastures. Experts question some aspects of the study, and maintain that a lack of affordable housing is still a major barrier to retaining young workers.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy disagreed with [Seth Forman]'s analysis, citing a study last year by the Rauch Foundation that showed 53 percent of Long Island's 18- to 34-year-olds had considered moving away because of the cost of living, taxes and lack of affordable housing.

"You don't need to be a rocket scientist or need factual data to realize that the housing crunch is pushing people off the Island," said Levy, whose administration is working to locate land that could be developed as workforce housing (affordable housing for young professionals) and give developers financial incentives to build it.

Full Text (561 words)

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High housing costs may not be what's driving young professionals away from Long Island, as local experts have long believed, a new study shows.

Instead, a "baby bust" between 34 and 20 years ago has resulted in fewer adults that age, because many people began to put off marriage and children.

The Long Island Regional Planning Board report comes as something of a threat to local leaders, who have been devoting vast resources building "workforce housing" so Long Island's young professionals won't be tempted to move to cheaper pastures. Experts question some aspects of the study, and maintain that a lack of affordable housing is still a major barrier to retaining young workers.
But the authors of the report, released Thursday, say that while sky-high housing prices are indeed a problem, they are not keeping young people away.

"Housing is not a primary concern for young unmarried people," said Seth Forman, the study's author and deputy director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board. "They're coming out of cramped college dormitories. They're going to go where the job is."

Forman said his group will release recommendations in the coming weeks on how Long Island leaders should respond to the "birth dearth" and other demographic trends.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy disagreed with Forman's analysis, citing a study last year by the Rauch Foundation that showed 53 percent of Long Island's 18- to 34-year-olds had considered moving away because of the cost of living, taxes and lack of affordable housing.

"You don't need to be a rocket scientist or need factual data to realize that the housing crunch is pushing people off the Island," said Levy, whose administration is working to locate land that could be developed as workforce housing (affordable housing for young professionals) and give developers financial incentives to build it.

The 2004 Rauch Foundation study, called the Long Island Index, did acknowledge a "baby bust," but said that did not explain why, according to its study, the number of people aged 18 to 34 on Long Island had dipped five times further than that of people in that age group nationwide from 1990-2000.

"One way of looking at it is how many 18- to 34-year-olds do you know that can afford a $450,000 house?" said Carrie Meek Gallagher, project director for the Long Island Index.

According to a recent survey by the National Association of Home Builders, a Washington, D.C.-based trade group, the median price of a home in Long Island was $412,000 in the third quarter of 2004.

Gallagher said there are conflicting reports on whether Long Island has always had a shortage of young workers, or if it's a more recent trend.

Lee Koppelman, executive director of the regional planning board, said there are several reasons Long Island's young population dipped more than the national average.

He said Long Island has traditionally been a place where people raise children. Thus, as people began delaying marriage and childbirth in the 1970s, and as the use of birth control grew and more women worked, Long Island was affected more.

He also said the Island's good school systems mean about 90 percent of the students go on to college, and many don't return.
Caption: Newsday photo, 1995 / Bill Davis- Newborns fill a nursery at an LI hospital. A new report cites a 'birth dearth' 20 to 34 years ago.