



On the house

The big boys are starting to get it. As homelessness grows and people are forced to surf from couch to couch, sleep in their cars, or find a home among the bushes, even those who find themselves in more stable circumstances are deeply angry about how our communities are changing. Everyone's quality of life is diminished by so much suffering. And how can a community maintain a stable workforce when the cooks, the gardeners, the housekeepers, the baristas and the rest of the people who labor long hours for insufficient wages can't find a place to live?

Last week, Apple announced it would invest \$2.5 billion in affordable housing projects in California, following similar investments by Facebook (\$1 billion), Google (\$1 billion) and Microsoft (\$500 million). The corporations are using a variety of approaches to spend their money, including partnerships with local and state government to build mixed-income housing on government-owned land, contributing their own unused

property for housing projects and even constructing affordable housing at market rates, the kinds of projects the developers always tell us "won't pencil out."

Apple plans to direct \$1 billion to an affordable housing investment fund overseen by the state to finance very low to moderate-income homes. Another \$1 billion will provide first-time home buyers with financing and down payment assistance. The company will donate \$300 million worth of land near its headquarters in San Jose for affordable housing projects, give \$150 million to a Bay Area housing fund and award \$50 million more to a nonprofit in Silicon Valley trying to end homelessness.

It's a lot of money, but experts say it's not nearly enough in a state where the median home price has risen 75 percent since 2012, to \$550,800. California rents are up 40 percent, with an average apartment renting for \$2,293. Well-paid tech workers can afford the rent, but their not-so-well-paid colleagues who form the

backbone of any community are being priced out with many resorting to living in tents and RVs or doubling and tripling up in crowded apartments to make their own budgets pencil out.

Reno isn't far behind. During the third quarter of this year, the average monthly rent for an apartment spiked to \$1,345, a new record. In East Sparks, which boasts an easier commute to the Industrial Park near Fernley, the average monthly rent is even higher at \$1,522. And there's no relief in sight.

Apple's CEO Tim Cook said all the right things when announcing the multi-billion-dollar contribution: "Affordable housing means stability and dignity, opportunity and pride. When these things fall out of reach for too many, we know the course we are on is unsustainable, and Apple is committed to being part of the solution."

But the real unsustainability is relying on the good will of the corporate titans to make housing affordable. It reminds me

of the mining companies in Nevada who love to tout their charitable contributions as proof of their commitment to rural Nevada communities while ignoring the misery caused by their boom and bust business model and the environmental degradation they leave behind when the gold runs out. And their charity is a pittance when compared to the taxes they should be paying.

Political considerations, including large campaign contributions, have prevented Nevada from taxing these corporate behemoths appropriately or forcing them to mitigate the negative effects their profitable businesses impose on communities while they profit so handsomely. Since companies like Tesla, Switch and Apple refuse to pay their fair share of taxes in Nevada, we should be demanding they at least make a much more meaningful contribution to the affordable housing mess they've created in Northern Nevada.

I figure \$3 billion should just about cover it. □

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