

## THE FRONTPORCH

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- Trends from the Housing Needs Assessment
- A first look at HRB's newest project
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### STAFF AND BOARD

#### IN RESIDENCE

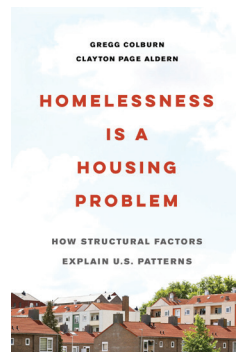
Conversations on the social, economic, and environmental meaning of housing curated by Housing Resources Bainbridge

### Homelessness Is a Housing Problem: A Community Conversation with Gregg Colburn

Thursday, May 4, 2023 at 7:00 pm  
Bainbridge Public Library

Introduction by Maria Metzler  
Executive Director, Helpline House

Register for free tickets at [housingresourcesbi.org/events](https://housingresourcesbi.org/events)



With support from  
**KITSAP REGIONAL Library**



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## Bainbridge Island is getting older and wealthier Are housing costs responsible?

The city of Bainbridge Island hired ECONorthwest to draft a Housing Action Plan with guiding principles, strategies, and actions to address the housing shortage on Bainbridge Island. The city is expected to adopt the plan spring 2023. The first deliverable was the Housing Needs Assessment, a vast document chronicling demographic changes; housing supply, demand, production, and affordability; workforce and employment patterns; and existing housing policy.

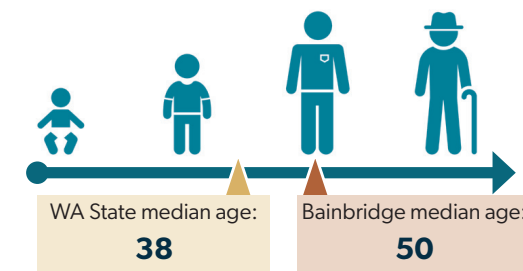
From that trove of information emerge two salient demographic trends: Bainbridge Island is older and wealthier. From 2000-2020, the share of households earning over \$150,000/year increased from 14% to 40%, and the share earning under \$50,000/year decreased from 35% to 20%. During that same

period, the share of Bainbridge Island households with children declined from 49% to 35%. It was also during this time that housing costs skyrocketed.

Illustrations courtesy of ECONorthwest

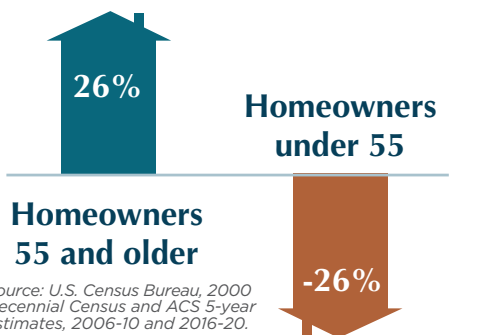
### THE ISLAND IS INCREASINGLY LOSING YOUNGER PERSONS WHILE GAINING SENIORS

Bainbridge's share of persons 60+ was **35%** in 2020 (up from 17% in 2000), as opposed to **25%** in Kitsap County and **22%** in Washington State. Bainbridge's median age increased from **43** in 2000 to **50** in 2020.



### THE SHARE OF OLDER HOMEOWNERS HAS BEEN INCREASING

while the share of younger homeowners has been decreasing over the last two decades (2000-2020).



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census and ACS 5-year estimates, 2006-10 and 2016-20.

## New homes on the way at The Ericksen Community

You would be hard-pressed to live on Bainbridge Island and not experience the work of Charlie Wenzlau, principal at Wenzlau Architects and the architect behind many island landmarks, including Ericksen Cottages, The Winslow Building (diagonally across from Town & Country), and Pleasant Beach Village. Wenzlau is the architect for HRB's newest project—The Ericksen Community, an 18-unit multifamily residence that will sit at the corner of Ericksen Avenue and Knechtel Way. Since arriving on the island in 1997, Wenzlau has been a staunch advocate of affordable housing, serving on the HRB board and numerous affordable housing committees and in 2004 designing HRB's Janet West Home.

In this brief Q&A, Wenzlau talks about his process for creating functional, beautiful—and permanently affordable—



Rendering courtesy of Wenzlau Architects.

homes for the Bainbridge community. This project is made possible by the city's revised Housing Design Demonstration Projects (see pages 2-3).

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Dear Neighbor,

The word “change” evokes both promise and peril, depending on whom you’re talking to. I use it carefully, but I use it more than ever.



Phedra Elliott

The 2022 Housing Needs Assessment, a prelude to the Housing Action Plan commissioned by the city of Bainbridge Island, demonstrates how the high cost of housing has changed the demographic makeup of the island. Those of us who work in housing knew that the Bainbridge community was aging and growing increasingly wealthy, but we could not have imagined just how acute these trends had become.

People tend to fall in love with the island as it was when they first arrived, and for good reason. There is so much to love about this place, so much worth keeping just as it is. Strong community ties, an ethic of service, excellent schools, comfortable homes, and extraordinary forest and coastline. For some this attachment manifests as resistance to change. But change happened despite this attitude. And this unplanned change, highlighted in the Housing Needs Assessment, is not the sort that anyone who cares about sustaining a vital and balanced community wanted to see.

Others take a different tack. They balance their attachment to this place with an awareness of present-day challenges, and they use it to inform and calibrate the change we must make to meet the challenges of growth and climate change. Building affordably and sustainably is inevitably a part of their vision.

As you’ll read in this issue of The Front Porch, the success of our latest project, The Ericksen Community, builds off recent changes in city housing policy, and the future of our schools depends on changes to the housing market. Stasis is not only impossible, but unhealthy. I hope that these and other stories bring the word “change” into your conversations about community and that the word, thanks to the good and loving work of community leaders and citizens, will come to evoke promise.

With gratitude,

*Phedra Elliott*

Phedra Elliott  
Executive Director

(continued from page 1)

**What are the expectations and challenges of building affordable housing?**

Our new housing communities must be a part of the fabric of the island both in character and in creating community. One of the bigger challenges is finding affordable land close to shopping and transit.

**How do you keep costs down while still creating a beautiful and durable building?**

Designing a livable home is about good light, healthy materials, and thoughtful site planning. These don’t need to add much cost to a project if they are considered early on and held as essentials. In general, keeping costs down means doing things simply and keeping a focus on what is important for the residents.

**HRB needed to fit as many units as possible into The Ericksen Community. How did you create functional, comfortable, and safe living spaces under these pressures?**

The Ericksen Community will sit on a very small site, so we had to be very efficient about how to provide parking and open spaces while meeting the needs for the unit layouts. We placed our emphasis on little things like the entry lobby and the laundry room as being not only functional but inviting.

**How did the site and neighborhood inform the design?**

The site plan is quite simple: locate the building facing the street and place the parking behind. From there we have been very deliberate about how to make the best use of small outdoor areas. The simple modern design should blend comfortably with the surrounding neighborhood which includes both residential and commercial uses.

## 2022 Affordable Housing Wins

Last year, HRB stepped up its local advocacy efforts with the hire of a public policy specialist and a fine-tuned system of advocacy alerts designed to educate and activate supporters. We are grateful for the engagement of the Bainbridge community and our good working relationships with city planners and members of City Council and Planning Commission, all of which contributed to three important policy changes:

**A revised Housing Design Demonstration Projects (HDDP)**

HDDP is intended to create housing that serves low-income households and to promote compact, low-impact development where appropriate. Under the original code, in exchange for using innovative green building practices, qualifying projects were granted incentives, such as density bonuses and reduced setbacks. But numerous and costly sustainability requirements made the program

## Superintendent Peter Bang-Knudsen on declining student enrollment

“We moved to Bainbridge Island because of the schools” is a sentiment that I often hear, and it rings true for my family. My parents moved to Bainbridge in 1978 because of the great community and excellent schools. I was in 5th grade and remember how excited I was to make friends and play at recess. After some time away, I returned to Bainbridge in 2010 with my kids in tow—I wanted them to share in the Bainbridge experience. I still remember how full my heart was when I watched my son William walk into his kindergarten class at Ordway. Later this spring, my heart will fill again as I watch William walk across the stage and receive his high school diploma from Bainbridge High School.

I am thankful for the learning and nurturing relationships Bainbridge Island School District has provided my family, and I wish more students could have the same experience. However, when I am asked what the most significant challenge facing BISD is, people are surprised to hear my answer—enrollment decline. “How can that be true?” they respond. “I see children everywhere on Bainbridge.” But, unfortunately, the numbers don’t lie. Today we have 3,462 students enrolled in our schools—600 fewer students than during our peak enrollment in 2005. State funding is allocated per pupil, and a loss of 600 students impacts our budget and what we can offer. If we had 600 more students this year, we would receive an additional \$6 million from the state to support the teaching and operations of our schools.

The decline in our student population didn’t happen suddenly. Instead, it has been a steady downward trend with multiple factors at play, including housing affordability and avail-

ability. According to the Multiple Listing Service, the average home price on Bainbridge in 2022 was \$862,012 more than the average price in 2012. In 2012, almost twice the number of homes were sold on Bainbridge than in 2022. It is interesting to note that in 2012, BISD had 230 more students enrolled than we do today, leading to the hypothesis that higher housing prices and less housing inventory impact enrollment.

This housing dilemma significantly impacts BISD staff as well. We have hired teachers ecstatic to work at BISD, only to have them resign because they cannot find local housing. In addition, almost one-third of our current staff live off island, and it can be challenging for them to get to and from work due to traffic backups, ferry cancellations, or bad weather. Without our off-island BISD staff, we don’t have enough staff to operate our schools.

Addressing and improving housing affordability is crucial to the continued success of BISD and, ultimately, the Bainbridge community. There is a direct correlation between a strong school system and a vibrant community. Please join me in advocating for housing affordability—our schools and community depend on it.



Peter Bang-Knudsen and his son William

impractical for affordable housing developers. HRB worked with Planning Commission and City Council on improvements to the program which included making green building requirements optional for HDDP projects with 75% or more units designated affordable and reduced parking requirements for 100% affordable developments within one mile of the ferry terminal. All projects, regardless of affordability, must receive green building certification.

**Increased density for affordable housing at Bethany Lutheran Church**

October 2021, Bethany Lutheran Church submitted a request to City Council for an increased density bonus, permitted under Washington state law, to build affordable housing on its land. HRB advocated on its behalf for a full year. Last fall, the city passed an ordinance granting the

density the church sought to create a project that is financially viable and makes maximum use of its land.

**City’s housing trust fund allocations restored**

A review by HRB of the city’s 250-page 2023-24 budget revealed that no new money had been allocated to the housing trust fund (HTF). Established in 1999, HTF is intended to support the development and preservation of affordable housing and is funded by public allocations, private donations, and proceeds from the sale of development rights. Since 2016 at least, the city has set aside \$100K each year for the trust. In addition to supporting city initiatives, the fund provides financial assistance to local housing nonprofits. In a letter to City Council, HRB alerted members to the lack of funding and recommended that it be restored, prompting members to reinstate the annual contribution.