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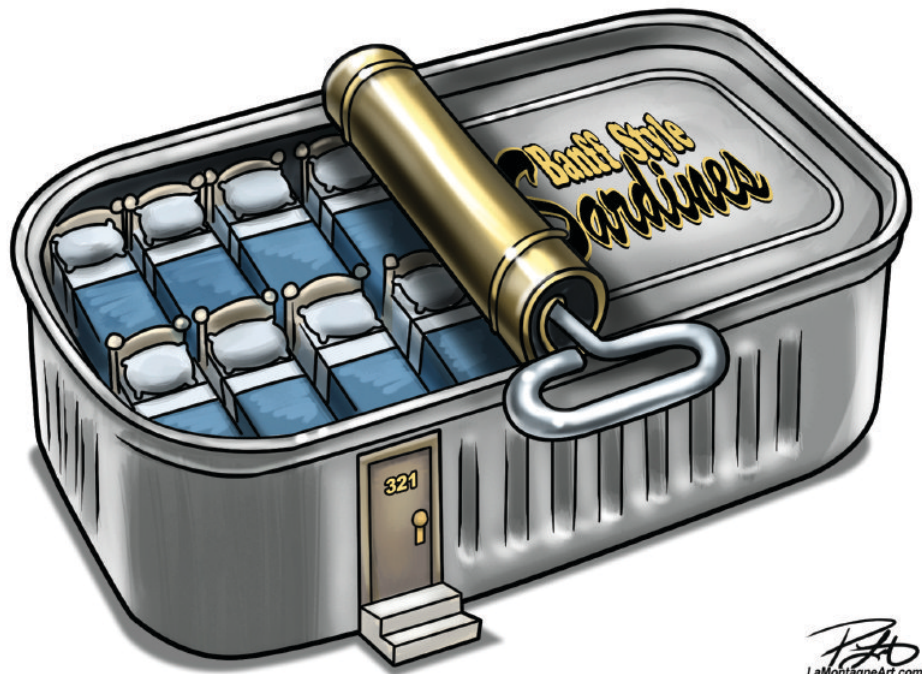
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EDITORIAL

Province needs to address rental, housing issues

The majority of people have at least one roommate horror story.

It may have been a non-stop cleaning disaster, the roommate who constantly missed rent and whose job was apparently drinking and watching Netflix all day or the one who dealt drugs next to your bedroom.

Most of those stories will pair in comparison to the 42 beds and mattresses that were found in a Banff home on Squirrel Street at the end of July.

Though it's unknown the exact number of people who lived in the home, pictures shared online by those who once lived there will likely have you beat for roommate stories on overcrowding alone.

Alberta Health Services shut the home down until the public safety issues are addressed and its operations have long been known to the Town of Banff.

While it became national news, it speaks to a greater issue in the Bow Valley – one that seemingly is hard to change – in the housing and rental crisis.

If you're not searching for a place to live, valley residents have likely heard the horror stories from someone attempting to find a place – let alone one that's affordable.

The costs to live in the region have long pushed residents out of the community due to the exponential prices, but have hit new levels as supply significantly outweighs demand.

When approving its strategic plan, Canmore council put out a call to the federal and provincial governments in aiding the municipality in addressing the housing disaster that has hit new levels of desperation in recent years.

The Town continues to work towards a plan to move forward in the short- and long-term, but anything that comes forward will take time to implement.

Areas of the community – such as South Canmore and Teepee Town – have been slowly redeveloped, while newer areas have more intensification than single-family homes.

There does, however, need more buy-in from elements of the community in the understanding that building up instead of out is the way forward.

In Banff, the tourism community has been ahead of the curve in addressing the housing issues it faces. But as long as people flock to the mountains, striving to live in one of the more scenic areas in Canada, housing will be an issue.

With Banff hampered by only being able to grow upwards rather than out due to the incorporation agreement with Parks Canada, the municipality has used clever methods such as zoning to push densification through redevelopment.

Of course, for that to happen it takes buy-in from the entire community to understand the likelihood of living in a single-family home with a large backyard is few and far between, which has largely been the case.

At the municipal level, there's little that can be done that isn't being used in the toolbox without the aid of the provincial and federal governments – or better known as the silent partners in addressing housing affordability.

The federal government has spent recent years cutting blank cheques and sending them out like grandparents for their grandkids birthdays to push the building of homes of all types, but for any serious change to be recognized, the province needs to step up and be a more active player.

Whether through providing unused land, financial help or better rent assistance, the province can aid communities and people through its actions.

In Alberta, long considered the wild west in more ways than geographical location, a system of rent control needs to be put in place.

Similar to British Columbia and Ontario, where rents for the majority of rental units can only be increased by a specific percentage each year, Alberta needs to have a system in place to protect tenants.

The lack of oversight and renters' rights has been fully exposed and as affordability becomes more pressing by the day, changes to the Residential Tenancy Act to institute a measure of rent control would positively impact individuals.

The promise of having it done in future years is a nice thought, but action needs to happen today.

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