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Letter: Low-income housing

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There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about Section 42 housing and how it works for the betterment of a community.

First, the federal government is going to allocate money to housing, whether it be cash or tax credits. Section 42 of the tax code was created to fill the gap in affordable housing between public housing for the poor and market rate housing. It was designed to stimulate private investment in affordable housing, targeting investors who have large and consistent tax liabilities (Warren Buffett is a large investor in Section 42 tax credits). It also targets working class tenants who work in retail, the service industry and other lower paying trades. The investors who purchase the tax credits are redirecting their federal tax payments to a local housing project rather than sending them to Washington. It is an investment in society. And rich, poor or in between, we all are members of society. It is a win-win situation.

A few years ago, I met a young, single black lady with two children at an open house for a Section 42 property in Parsons. She worked days at Walmart, cleaned a doctor's office in the evenings and was taking online college courses. She spent more than 20 percent of her net income on child care and was paying off a \$2,000 medical bill. Her rent was about \$200 per month less than the going market rent for the same apartment. She tearfully told me that it was the nicest place she had ever lived and that she was thankful to the investors and developers for building decent, safe, affordable housing where she could raise her children with pride. This is what Section 42 housing was designed for, and it makes a big difference to the lower-income working class.

If managed properly, Section 42 housing does not deteriorate a community — it stimulates it with new investment and working-class tenants who struggle to make ends meet because many of them pay upwards of 50 percent of their income on inferior housing. They are usually good neighbors who work hard and are carefully screened by the property manager, who answers to the federal government, the state and the investors.

There is one group of people who should be against Section 42 housing — landlords who buy old, run-down energy inefficient properties, then won't fix things when broken and take advantage of tenants. They have the most to lose.

BILL CATON,

Auburn