

ALERT

## **A building problem: With increasing demand for housing in Danville, leaders say there's no simple answer**

**John Crane**

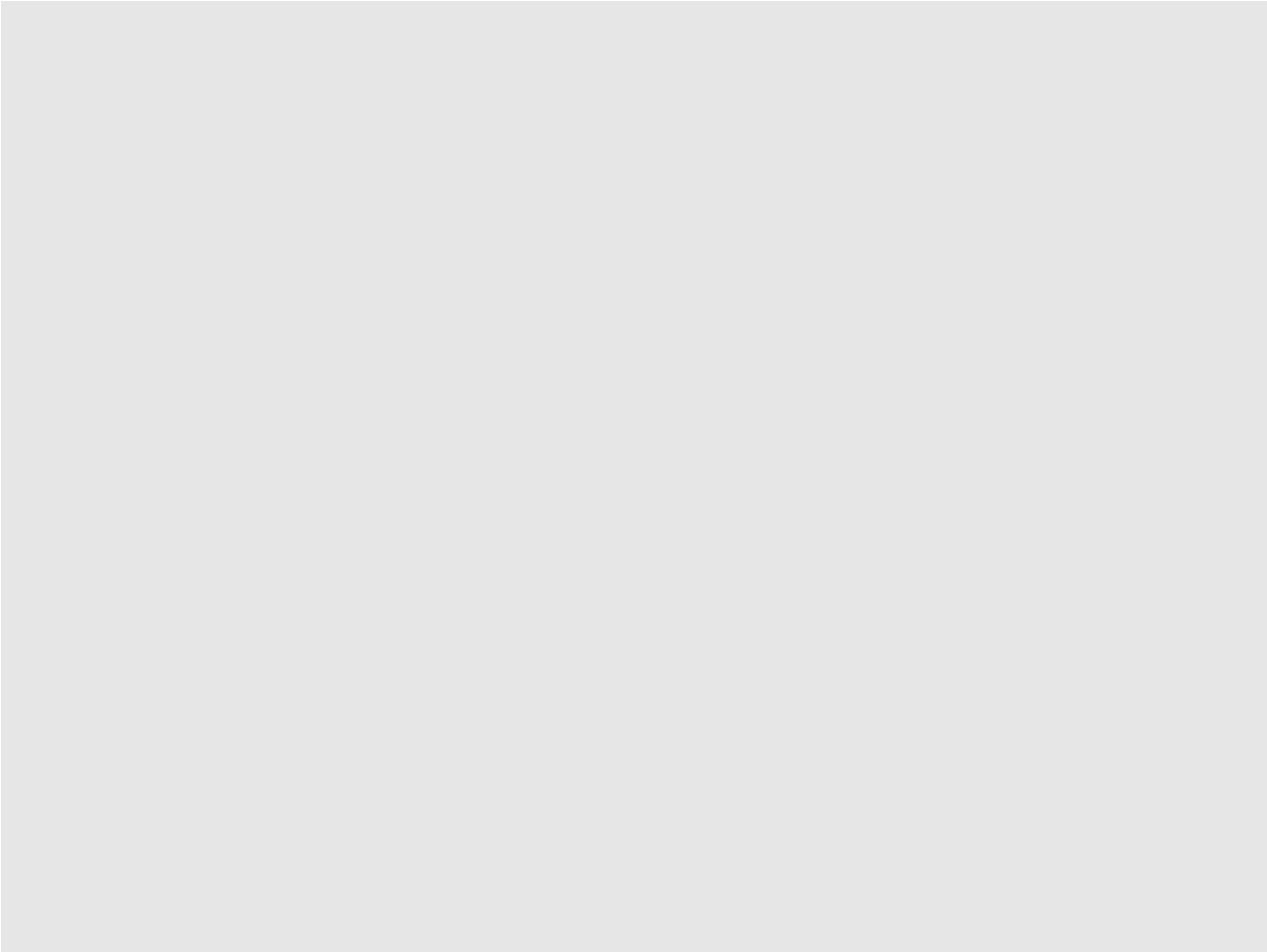
Aug 27, 2022

**W**hen Chuck Simmons was looking to move back to Danville from New York earlier this summer, he had a hard time finding a place to live.

He visited **realtor.com** only to discover there were no available houses to buy that met his criteria. He looked at apartments and lofts to rent online but had trouble contacting anyone at leasing offices.

“When I did, they quickly informed me that there were no apartments available,” the 39-year-old Axton native told the Danville Register & Bee. “In many cases, I couldn’t even get on a list and was told to keep checking back.”

Simmons wanted to purchase a single-family home, “but the area lacks contemporary housing developments,” he said. Simmons found a place in the booming River District for the time being.



Axton native Chuck Simmons, 39, faced hurdles when trying to find a home in Danville this summer after he decided to return to the area from New York.

John R. Crane photos, Register & Bee

“In the end, I settled on a loft because it is trendy, but I know in the long-term it will not meet my needs,” said Simmons, an assistant principal at an elementary school in Danville.

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Danville needs more than 1,000 additional homes to meet demand generated by nearly 4,000 jobs expected to come to the Dan River Region through next year, according to a recent housing demand study by The Danter Company.

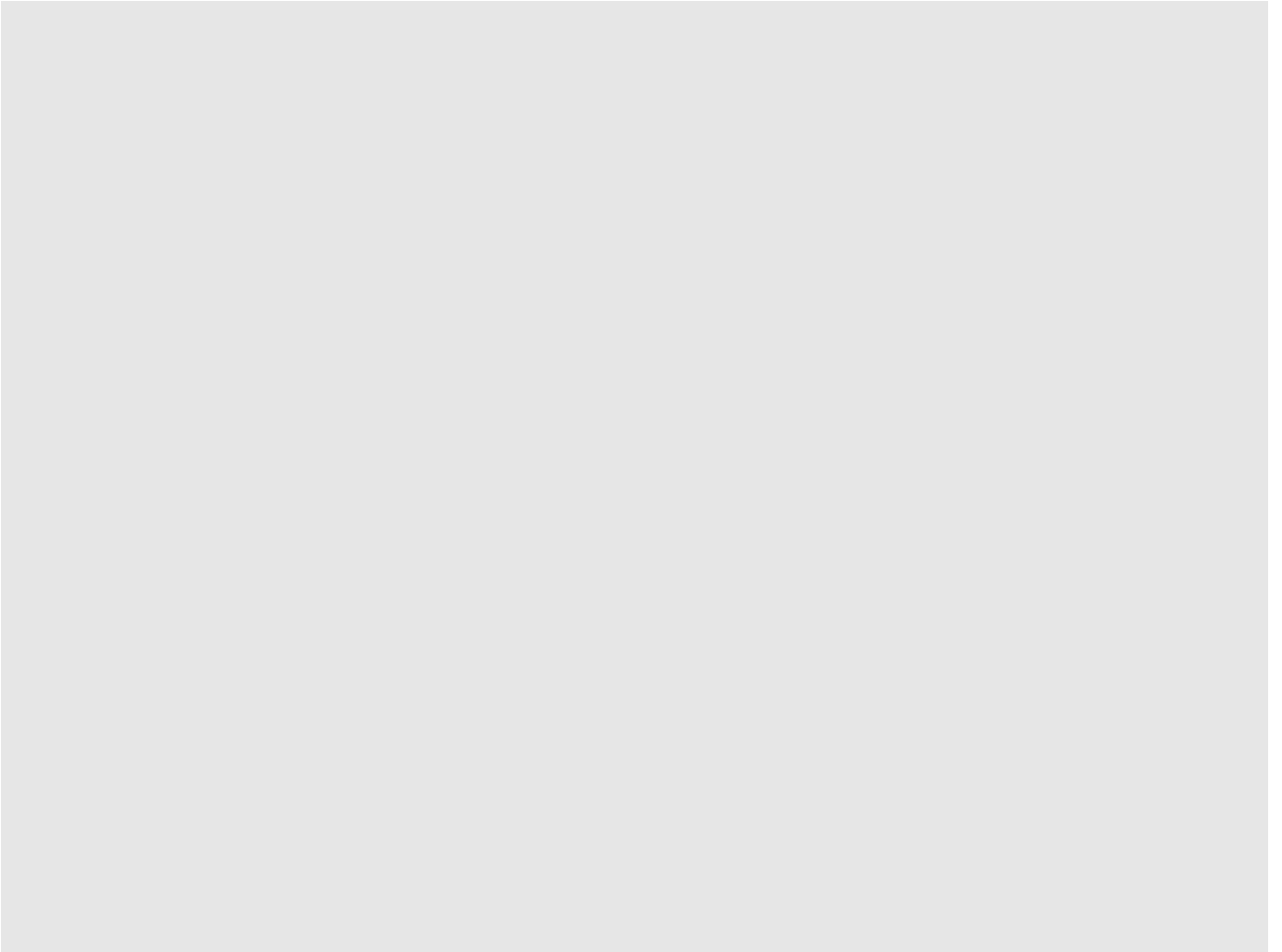
Since 2018, there has been \$1.1 billion worth of economic development projects promising about 4,000 jobs announced in Danville and Pittsylvania County.

The city's housing supply is low due to lack of new-home construction over the last several years, said Ken Danter, founder and president of the company that conducted a housing analysis of the Danville area, during a presentation at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research on Aug. 18.

Those thousands of jobs will drive up housing demand, with 1,059 new housing units needed to meet that — including 921 apartments and 138 single-family homes.

In addition, another 1,366 units are needed — 760 apartments and 606 single-family homes — to satisfy pent-up demand. Those figures add up to 2,425 homes that must be built to meet housing needs due to both job-driven and pent-up demand, Danter said during his presentation.

The study looked at population, income, homeownership, single- and multi-family building permits and other factors.



Ken Danter, founder and president of The Danter Company, gives a presentation on housing demand in Danville during the Southern Virginia Regional Housing Summit at the Institute for Advanced Learning and Research on Aug. 18.

John R. Crane, Register & Bee

## **Slow pace**

Over the last 10 years, Danville has built an average of just 10 single-family units per year, compared to an average of 89 for the other cities, based on building permits, Danter said.

“Just on that basis alone, that’s 900 homes that didn’t get built in this market,” he said.

Hampton Wilkins, broker and president at Wilkins & Co. Realtors in Danville, hopes Danter’s presentation will shine a light on Danville’s housing needs so developers in other areas will know the region’s situation.

“Awareness is the main thing,” Wilkins told the Danville Register & Bee. “We’re letting everyone know Danville needs housing.”

The city’s housing market challenge is not new. Last year, Danville saw homes in Schoolfield selling at several times more than they would have in 2020 as a result of the expected Caesars Virginia casino project that is expected to be complete in 2024.

“We’ve seen an increase in home prices, we’ve seen an increase in apartment prices,” Wilkins said. “It’s simply supply and demand.”

There is no easy solution to Danville’s dearth of available housing, Wilkins said.

## **No ‘simple answer’**

“I wish there was a simple answer,” he said. “It’s going to take a collaborative effort to address our housing shortage.”

Danville is not the only locality facing such a problem, Wilkins said. The city’s economic success is having a ripple effect into other parts of Southside Virginia.

“Pittsylvania County, Halifax, Martinsville, South Boston, these areas will benefit from Danville’s growth, and properties in those areas are also increasing in value,” he said.

Regarding the city’s tight housing supply, builders haven’t been constructing homes because material is so expensive and labor availability is low, Wilkins said. Costs are so high, they cannot justify the asking price or rental needed to cover the debt, he said.

U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia, praised the city’s market for being able to bring in \$1,100 in rent for a loft or apartment in the River District. Warner stopped by Danville Wednesday during a three-day swing through Southside and Southwest Virginia.

As for Simmons, he pays \$1,200 for his new loft, including utilities and internet.

“I actually love my new loft, but I will be happy when more new, contemporary homes are available in the area for purchase,” Simmons said.

Simmons, who returned to the Danville area to be closer to family and have more space, is happy to be back in the city.

“We are on the cusp of some major economic improvements, and I love what has been [done] with the River District,” Simmons said. “I’m excited to be back in Danville and am eager to see how the region advances in the years to come.”

Danville City Councilman James Buckner, a real estate agent with Wilkins & Co., said developers, City Council, city government and the city as a whole are working every day to recruit builders into the city and find land to construct homes on.

Like Wilkins, Buckner had no concise explanation for what could be done to alleviate the housing shortage.

“As a Realtor, if I could answer that question, I’d be a millionaire,” he said.

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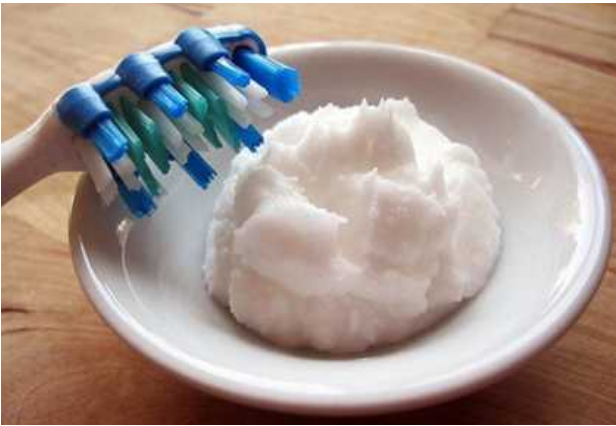
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By John Crane

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