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### **Urban Institute Study Cites Need for Washington, DC Affordable Housing**

*Industry leaders encouraged, emphasize safety in future construction*

**Washington, DC**—A recent [study](#) published by the Urban Institute, titled “Meeting the Washington Region’s Future Housing Needs,” has called for government officials, community organizers, and philanthropists to tackle DC’s growing affordable-housing crisis. The Urban Institute is a privately- and federally-funded research organization focusing on social and economic policy. According to the study, some additional 264,000 low-cost housing units are needed currently; without correction, this number could grow by over 100,000 over the coming decade. Additionally, the study says, “the region needs at least 40 percent more middle-cost housing units to match expected needs.”

To address these needs, the study reports that many of the new housing units will have to be multi-family, potentially meaning multiple mid- and high-rise construction projects within and around Washington. With an increase in that type of construction, some argue, comes a need to ensure safety is factored into the equation.

“While growth and affordable housing are good for the economy, there is little room for error when planning for safety in construction,” says Kevin Lawlor, spokesperson for Build with Strength, a coalition of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association consisting of community and labor organizations, fire safety professionals, engineers, architects, and industry experts committed to strengthening the nation’s building codes at the state and local levels to ensure greater access to safe and resilient housing. These will be key elements to DC’s future construction projects. “America has seen far too many fires in mid- and high-rise residential buildings over the last decade. When you set out to build new communities, you need to prioritize the safety of residents, no matter their income. The use of noncombustible materials, like concrete, steel, and fire-treated lumber, as well as other fire safety measures, must come before everything else.”

In a September 4<sup>th</sup> [article](#), the Washington Post wrote that the Urban Institute study cites a need to “relax zoning and regulatory restrictions” to increase affordability for such an ambitious project. The Post article also points out that organizers are focusing particularly on avoiding mistakes made by other large cities with similar affordable housing shortages.

This, says Lawlor, means building with safety and with long-term investment in mind. Building materials, according to Lawlor, are paramount to realizing a return on initial investment. For example, Lawlor cites that concrete saves 5-8% annual savings on energy when compared to a construction material such as wood. Numbers that seem modest in the short-term, he says, can accumulate to tens and hundreds of millions in savings over many years.

“This is an encouraging time to be involved in the construction industry in Washington, DC,” says Lawlor, a resident of the DC metropolitan area himself. “It’s exciting to envision what more affordable housing will do for our community. But we also have to be mindful to do it the right way—this is an investment in our collective future and shortchanging ourselves by sacrificing safety and durability would be a grave mistake.”

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments is set to vote this week on future construction of DC housing units through 2030.

Build with Strength, a coalition of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association (NRMCA), has launched a campaign to educate citizens, local and state officials, and industry experts about the inherent dangers of wood-framed construction, particularly in multi-story, residential and commercial buildings. As a grassroots organization, they work with local elected officials and industry workers, from architects to project managers to advocate for the safety benefits of working with concrete-based construction.

Learn more at [www.buildwithstrength.com](http://www.buildwithstrength.com)

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