



TRENT NELSON

Housing developments rise in the southern Utah community of Ivins, where the median price of a home sold in April set buyers back \$725,500, according to the Washington County Board of Realtors.

## Residents' hesitancy aside, Ivins leaders eye affordable housing for resort's workforce

\$2 billion Black Desert mega-resort is about to recruit thousands of workers, but the city's median housing price in April topped \$725,000.

By MARK EDDINGTON  
The Salt Lake Tribune

Ivins » Nestled within the majestic shadow of Red Mountain, Ivins is home to housing prices that are too steep for many people who want to live in the city nine miles northwest of St. George.

The median price of a home sold in Ivins in April set buyers back \$725,500, according to the Washington County Board of Realtors. That's a hurdle when the county's median income for a family of four is \$83,900, which, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, would only qualify for a \$390,000 loan.

Ivins hasn't had a sense of urgency about that gap; many residents oppose higher-density housing and the city's Affordable Housing Committee has been moribund over the past several years. But that's changing now — with the \$2 billion Black Desert mega-resort taking shape in Ivins and expected to employ more than 2,500 workers.

"We realize that we have a desperate need to provide workforce housing," said Ivins Mayor Chris Hart. "Where are all these workers going to live?"

To tackle the issue, the city has reactivated the Affordable Housing Committee and tasked its eight members with taking an in-depth look at what Ivins can do to alleviate the problem.

### STARTER HOMES VERSUS HIGH-RISES

Council member Sharon Gillespie, who is spearheading the committee, said affordable housing is not just an Ivins or a Utah issue. "But that doesn't mean we can't work to address or solve the problem here in Ivins," she said.

At first blush, Ivins officials' renewed enthusiasm for affordable housing would seem to run counter to residents who have expressed anger in the past over the prospect of the city becoming a haven for higher-density housing. For instance, in a 2022 survey, 70% of residents said they were opposed to more townhomes and condominiums and 81% were against additional apartment complexes and other rentals.

However, Gillespie doesn't see it that way. In 2022, she noted, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox's affordable housing mantra was geared toward building more high-rise apartments and

condominiums. The governor now is sounding the need to build more starter homes — another 35,000 over the next five years, to bolster the supply and lower home prices.

"What we need in Ivins for families to be able to afford to live here is not a high-rise apartment or condo," Gillespie said. "From what I understand, that is what Ivins residents [said in the survey] that they don't want. So I'm grateful the governor has shifted his focus this year to first-time starter homes."

In talking with homebuilders earlier this month, Cox was ebullient about the Utah Legislature's recent passage of HB572, which enables the state to use its budget surplus to reduce the cost of loans that builders need to build starter homes.

The legislation created a \$300 million fund to supply builders with lower-interest loans through their bank or credit unions. In exchange, builders must agree that 60% of the homes they build with the funds must be starter homes.

### NO OVERNIGHT FIXES

Ivins officials want to add more tools to their affordable housing toolbox. One option the committee will explore is setting up a community land trust, which keeps home prices lower by selling moderate-income buyers only the house, while retaining ownership of the land beneath it.

Typically, a nonprofit or local government owns the land, leases it for 99 years and limits how much the home can be sold for, thus ensuring the property remains affordable.

Ivins would either need to purchase some land or have some land donated to the city to set up its own land trust. So far, the city is bereft of both land and cash from donors, though the city could decide to fork over its own money for an affordable housing development. City officials are currently in the preliminary stages of looking for land.

Gillespie said the committee is also working with the Ivins Planning Commission to fine-tune regulations to boost the number of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in Ivins. ADUs, which can be either attached to or separate from a residence, can help buyers obtain financing, based on the potential of the rental income to assist them in making a mortgage payment.

The committee members have varying backgrounds and expertise, such as experience in architecture, development, social work and municipal zoning.

As pressing as the city's affordable housing problem is, Gillespie is preaching patience. "This problem didn't happen overnight," she said, "and it's not going to get fixed overnight. It's going to take years to get this fixed."



## SKECHERS HANDS FREE Slip-ins



LEARN MORE

### HANDS FREE, JUST STEP IN & GO

Introducing new Skechers Hands Free Slip-ins™. Putting on your shoes has never been easier. No bending over. No pulling them on. Just step in and go.

Exclusive Heel Pillow™ holds your foot securely in place!

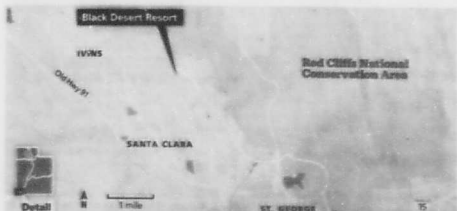


NO MORE  
BENDING

NEVER HAVE TO TOUCH YOUR SHOES AGAIN™

NO BENDING OVER.  
NO TOUCHING SHOES.  
JUST STEP IN & GO.

skechers.com



GRAPHIC BY CHRISTOPHER CHERRINGTON - The Salt Lake Tribune