

# Viewpoint

## Our Home, Our Future

*Voices from our Salisbury community about the housing we need for a healthy, economically vibrant future.*

*"Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future."*

—John F. Kennedy

A good education is critical for children to develop their potential and thrive in our knowledge-based economy.

With skyrocketing housing costs, many families who would like to take advantage of the quality education our schools offer cannot afford to live here. The cost of housing is also a serious challenge for teachers and other workers needed to run our schools.

This has been a long-running issue exacerbated by Covid. The increase in part-time residents who make up approximately 50% of our households has reduced housing stock available for full-time residents.

An increase in short-term rentals such as Airbnbs and very expensive seasonal rentals has put more homes out of reach. According to the Litchfield County Board of Realtors, between 2018 and 2022 the area historical median housing prices increased in Salisbury 59.6%. The increase in Sharon was 79.7%, Canaan 173.6%, North Canaan 67.4%, and Cornwall 148.1%.

High housing costs have had a huge impact on families with school-age children.

The student population at

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

By MARY CLOSE OPPENHEIMER

our local public schools has been declining for years.

The number of students has declined at Housatonic Valley Regional High School (HVRHS) from 613 in 2005 to 300. Fortunately Salisbury Central School's population has increased slightly since 2015 thanks in part to a stable population of private school faculty's children who get free housing and a bump from families moving into town during Covid. In the past 10 years Sharon Central School's population declined from 177 to 100.

Ian Strever, principal of HVRHS, said he recently purchased a home in Falls Village. He says, "At the time I was looking in Salisbury, the lowest-priced piece of real estate was \$890,000. There is nothing remotely realistic in Salisbury on a public school teacher (or administrator) salary. Unlike in the past when teachers were part of the community, new teachers can't afford to live here. Almost all live outside of the district in towns that have more diverse housing stock and options like condos, smaller homes and rentals. There is a waiting list of about 100 peo-

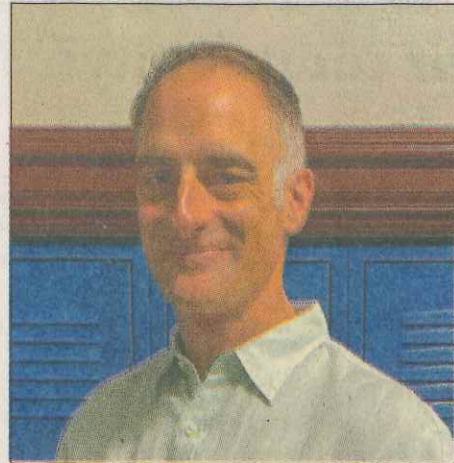


PHOTO BY MARY CLOSE OPPENHEIMER

**Ian Strever, principal,  
Housatonic Valley Regional  
High School**

ple for Sarum Village and the rare affordable free-market rental or small home here are quickly snapped up by local people who hear of the opportunity through word of mouth. If a teacher is new to the area they don't have that network. It makes attracting and retaining qualified staff very difficult."

Recognizing the challenge of attracting teachers to the state, Connecticut has established CHFA, a Teachers Mortgage Assistance Program that is designed to attract more teachers with below market interest rates and down payment assistance. In January of 2020 science teacher Kurt Johnson came here with his wife and son. He struggled to find a home he could afford and found that housing costs in Salis-

bury and Sharon were too high to qualify for the CHFA \$325,000 cap.

After a lengthy and intensive search he ended up buying a home in Canaan.

While this is considered a wealthy area, 30% of the students at HVRHS qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. When our young people finish school where will they live? Where will they go when they want to move out of their parents' homes and begin independent lives? Even traditionally affordable neighboring towns have become prohibitively expensive. There are no starter homes available for young people so they can remain in the community they love and where they grew up.

They are our future workforce and our town's future.