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Editorial: New Bexley rent rule makes a statement about diversity and inclusion

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As central Ohio struggles with a persistent shortage of affordable housing, it's good to note how far we've come from high-rise government projects of decades past that too often weren't good places to live and only perpetuated poverty.

An encouraging example of this is Bexley City Council's recent vote prohibiting landlords from rejecting someone as a tenant based solely on what income he or she would use to pay the rent. At issue are the federal vouchers that some low-income families are given for housing. Under new language in the suburb's fair-housing code, such vouchers are expressly included in the definition of "lawful income."

Policy makers generally recognize now that allowing people greater choice in where they can live increases the likelihood that they can work their way out of poverty, and Bexley's new language affords that choice. "In communities that have added protection, people have the opportunity to access more and better housing," said housing advocate Amy Klaben, who urged Bexley officials to consider the change.

Whether this actually will open up Bexley apartments to many low-income families is debatable; it remains a relatively high-income area, with a median house price of nearly \$400,000 and rents starting at \$850 per month.

It wasn't surprising that the Columbus Apartment Association opposes the measure with its general counsel, Dimitri Hatzifotinos, saying it won't likely work. He said the same thing about a recent Franklin County appeals court decision holding that landlords must appear in court for eviction cases to proceed.

Regarding the Bexley policy, however, his reasoning is repugnant. Hatzifotinos suggested the rule could drive up rents because landlords might raise them beyond what a federal voucher could cover, just to avoid having to accept those renters — seemingly confirming the sort of exclusion and racism the rule seeks to ban.

We hope that Bexley landlords aren't quite that intent on discrimination and that the new guidelines will help Bexley, and any other cities that follow its lead, gain some of the diversity that makes communities stronger.

Poor billionaires can't get ahead like they used to

Well. It seems that income inequality is rampant even among the fraction-of-1%. Try not to cry too ugly as you consider that, while the world's billionaires are all pretty much cleaning up during the coronavirus pandemic, some aren't doing nearly as well as the top.

It didn't used to be this way; in the past decade, according to a report by the Swiss bank UBS and PwC, "steady growth and buoyant asset prices lifted billionaire wealth in all sectors." In the past two years, however, an income gap has widened between titans of technology, health care and industry — "Innovator billionaires" — and regular old billionaires whose fortunes come from entertainment, financial services and real estate.

Meanwhile, in the real world, the pandemic is expected to deepen the income inequality that truly hurts — that leaves millions of people without adequate health care or education to get ahead.

The report speculated that super-billionaires may be "at a turning point" where they turn more attention to using their fortunes for good. If so, here's a suggestion: convert a modest fraction of profits and wealth into significantly higher wages at the bottom of the ladder and see how quickly society's seemingly toughest problems start to magically disappear.