

Young adult survey: LI needs more housing options, jobs to keep us here

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Tara Bono, 26, president of Destination LI, and marketing manager for EmPower Solar, in her basement studio apartment at her parents' house in Seaford on June 9, 2014. (Credit: Daniel Brennan)

An overwhelming majority of young adult Long Islanders can see themselves leaving the region if they do not have housing options at an "attainable" cost and cannot find jobs in line with

their skills and salary expectations, says a survey released Monday.

This does not bode well for the region, said the report's author, Martin R. Cantor, chief economist for Destination LI, a nonprofit smart-growth group based in Plainview that advocates for creating centers that support and generate economic development.

Residents in the so-called "Millennial" group, ages 20-34, "are not happy with their overall life on Long Island," citing as obstacles "the lack of housing options and high housing costs" as well as a dearth of housing "in walkable communities with public transportation," the report says.

The survey, conducted on social media Web forums between Feb. 27 and March 24, drew 413 respondents. Cantor said the group used sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Reddit, among others. The participants were anonymous and their responses confidential.

Among the survey's findings:

More than 75 percent said they "strongly agree" or "agree" that housing options on the Island may limit their ability to stay. Another 10.9 percent said they "somewhat agree" with that.

58.7 percent lived with their parents or relatives, about 22 percent lived in rental apartments and nearly 12 percent lived in illegal rental apartments.

54.3 percent said they didn't care if they stayed on Long Island, while 46 percent said remaining here was important.

The survey's respondents were highly educated, Cantor said, the sort of workforce the region can't afford to lose: 66.9 percent held associate, undergraduate, graduate or doctoral degrees, and another 24.6 percent currently were in college or have had some college education.

Cantor is scheduled to present the report Tuesday at a meeting of the Long Island Regional Planning Council. He said Destination LI "brought me on in January to start focusing on young people . . . to see what it's going to take for people to stay here."

Tara Bono, president of Destination LI, said, "Up until now, we really haven't had the opinions of young professionals documented. . . . It's just great to have the data to support what everybody's been saying."

While Cantor said the respondents were randomly solicited, an outside expert said the survey was not truly random.

"It's a sample of people who he was able to reach on social media and who decided to respond to him," said John Logan, a sociology professor at Brown University and a former Stony Brook University professor, who has done census data analyses of communities across the nation, including Long Island, for Brown's US2010 Project.

"It's a very self-selected sample," said Logan, who had not read the report but was responding to a reporter's description.

Logan, however, said of Cantor's correlation and regression, or predictive, analysis: "We can have more confidence in those associations even when the sample is not a random sample" if a

"strong pattern" emerged. Cantor's findings about young people who consider leaving the Island is "plausible," he said, and consistent with a general pattern. Cantor conceded Logan's point about the survey not being random, adding he set a "high standard" on his analysis at a 99 percent confidence level to toss "fringe" social media responses.

Jean-Marie Smith, 30, executive director of Destination LI, said the region needs "what we call bridge housing" for young professionals that allows them to live affordably while saving to buy a home. Asked if they planned to purchase their own home or condominium, nearly 85 percent of survey respondents said "yes."

Smith said her circumstances differ from many of the other young professionals she knows.

"I share a home [in Merrick] with my boyfriend. It wasn't something we could've done without two incomes," she said. "We were in a basement apartment for awhile."

Bono, 26, a marketing manager for EmPower Solar in Island Park, lives in a basement apartment in her parents' Seaford home as she saves to buy her own residence. "I made the decision to stay on Long Island while all my friends and family are leaving," Bono said. "Housing on Long Island is very unattainable" for young people in situations such as hers, she added.