Con Doherty is an economics reporter at the New York Times. He does a lot of work on the west coast, focusing on housing and wages. His book released in 2020 is *golden gates fighting for housing in America*. He also had a wonderful story in New York Times about a home in Claremont. It's called where the suburbs end a single family home from the 1950s is now a rental complex and a vision of California's future. We are very excited that he's here. He is Aprimo housing nerd, and we sat him down with our bright own housing nerd. Andy Keatts, Andy,

Andy Keatts (00:50):
What I wanted to do is go through three pieces that you've put together over the last few years. Uh, one, your book, golden gates fighting for housing in America. Uh, next was a New York Times story. You did this summer on the proliferation of accessory dwelling units. And you centered that on one house in Claremont here in San Diego, uh, which made everybody in San Diego feel, feel very good to be like the, the use case example for a New York times story about the entire state. We have a, a little city comp L here. So, uh, we appreciate that. Uh, and then your most recent story, which is sort of on the, the California Exodus of housing and how it's affecting other places, uh, specifically you wrote about Spokane, right? Okay. So to set the table, maybe you could give us a capsule summary of golden gates fighting housing in America. And in the context of how we got here,

Conor Dougherty (01:48):
I wrote golden gates

Conor Dougherty (01:51):
Thinking about how could I just explore the housing problem through a local PLA through, through, through a local government or through local government as a phenomenon. And the reason I did that at is that I, the more I had read about housing and learned about housing and covered housing, I really sort of came to believe that we all have the same problem, but it all kind of manifests locally. And so if you wanted to kind of unspool that problem, you kind of had a center on one place. I did have. It's funny. I had a lot of conversation with my publisher about like, is that the right thing to do? Is it better to like, make it seem more national or will it seem too local if you and I, and I really wanted to, but I, I just kind of came to, I wanted to kind of be rooted in a place that you could sort of understand how things happened.

Conor Dougherty (02:40):
Yeah. That place was mostly the bay area, but also California as a sort of phenomenal on post world war II growth and how California went from this place. Everybody wanted to go to this, um, kind of housing screwed up state. And I guess the premise of the book was, you know, it's funny, one thing people ask me about the book is they say, cuz when it ends, it just sort of ends and they go, why aren't there a bunch of solutions here? Why aren't there a bunch of solutions here? Why aren't, you know, and I, I sort of say to people, the whole book is solutions. The whole, the characters in the book are this woman's Sonya tr who kind of started off with this kooky group called barf, which stood for the bay area renters Federation and kind of became a housing activist pushing for trying to make housing more plentiful by making it easier to build,

Andy Keatts (03:31):
Which for whom to whom we now owe credit for the, the Y Movement. Yes. Right.
Conor Dougherty (03:36):
She was kind of the original YBI or at least in my, I view she was one of the allys. Um, and then there's other characters like a 15 year old girl who is trying to prevent her family from being evicted. Um, kind of goes from being just a regular 15 year old girl to this kind of tenant rights activist pretty much overnight. And by purely by necessity, she's got no,

Andy Keatts (03:59):
Yeah, she would does she

Conor Dougherty (04:00):
Doesn't want them to be in politics or anything she's fighting for survival there's training. Yeah. Yeah. Then there's a, a nun who's trying to start like a community land trust. And there's like a bureaucrat, a city manager of a city who's in a very suburban, exclusive city who wants to try to make them, make this city be more opening, to more welcoming to housing. Uh, and then there's a developer. Anyway, my point is, is that all of these people are trying to work on a solution, whether it's Sonya with changing the law through activism, or it's this girl, Stephanie, Guttier trying to fight a landlord and ultimately get tenant rights, uh, legislation pass. Or if it's a developer, this guy, Rick holiday, who wants to make it just cheaper to build actual housing, um, or this nun with her community land trust or this anyway, all of these people are, are, are working on some sort of solution that's right for them.

Conor Dougherty (04:55):
Um, and by kind of watching their stories and see how they unfold and seeing them often just like smash their face into a wall, you sort of see, I hope you see how hard the solutions are to implement. And, and I just feel like a list of bullet points yeah. Is just like not particularly helpful. And so I think of the book as watching kind of like how people try to make change on this problem and how hard it is, but also, you know, the, there are, there are moments of optimism, moments of pessimism, but how, how much, how difficult it is and how much it requires of you and, and, uh, yeah. And seeing it in action.

Andy Keatts (05:34):
So the, the, the observation I often have about this, maybe you agree, maybe you disagree. I think it's pretty consistent with what you decide and what what's. And what's in the book is that housing conversations suffer from the fact that the, the costs, the, the consequences are like, as real as something can be. And the proposed solutions are about as abstract as something can feel in that. Like people know when they can't afford rent. People know when they are, uh, displaced from a community because of the forces that are, that, that, that make housing unaffordable, uh, people can see the real effects of homelessness, but when you start to talk about policy solutions and it's like, well, you know, we've gotten here from 30 years of underbuilding and it'll require 30 more years of commensurate, uh, housing production to hopefully reach some sort of equilibrium decades in the future. It's like, it couldn't leave you more empty.

Conor Dougherty (06:33):
Yeah. Totally agree with all of that. Yeah. Uh, I think at some level we have to sort of reconcile with the bigness of it and which is like, we're sort of talking about civilization, you know, how do we live in large, complicated, crowded, uh, diverse places. Yeah. How do we all figure out a way to make this whole thing work together and live here, you know, make our private homes and our private lives kind of consistent with this massive, uh, kind of thing that our cities. Yeah. And that's not a thing we've ever had, like an
easy solution to, and our right. Kind of constantly fighting through and, and how you wanna structure has so much to do with like your culture and stuff like that. Like, you know, people, one, one of the things that always is interesting is people will often point to other countries, oh, Singapore, or Vienna, or, you know, other countries, Tokyo yeah. That have done housing in a different way. You're just like, I, I don't, I, I think they're certainly helpful in terms of like food for thought, but a lot of people don't wanna live in Tokyo in San Diego. Yeah. And, and they moved San Diego specifically cause they didn't want to, you know? Yes. And so how you sort of deal with that and how you sort of reconcile with, you know, what people want, what their dreams are, what their stress, you know, I mean, and, and

Andy Keatts (08:02):
I think that's why housing fights get so nasty and, and can, can be so toxic when, you know, on, on the, whether it's on the internet or at a community planning meeting it's cuz it feels like a visceral attack on people sometimes. And, and, and that, you know, those are, and, and, and that's one group of people, but there's, you know, and the there's a, or, um,

Conor Dougherty (08:23):
I mean, feeling like something's wrong in your home yeah. Is very destabilizing. Okay. Just, just, yeah. Just think about this you're good friend, a family member or someone like that can come stay with you.

Andy Keatts (08:36):
Yeah. That's fine. Right.

Conor Dougherty (08:37):
And, and you have, like, let's just say you have a big enough house that you have a guest room. Yeah. Let's say that have their own bathroom, whatever, like every luxury for having a house guest is sort of taken care of after a day or two or three days or four days, you're getting kind of annoyed with them. Yeah. It kind of sucks that they're at your house. Yeah. You, you know, you kind of just go into the kitchen and they're not even doing anything, but they're there. Right. And you're used to kind of being, and you just

Andy Keatts (09:03):
Get home from work. You're like, I just want to do, like,

Conor Dougherty (09:05):
I just, I kind of wanna just eat cereal yeah. For dinner tonight. I don't want to go anywhere with you. I don't want to like make a thing of it, you know? Yeah. My point is, is that it just get, you get really agitated having a guest in all of comfort. Yeah. Yeah. You know, in your own home, or maybe I'm, maybe I'm sort of, you know, portraying a little bit of privilege here, but my point is, is that no matter who you are, no matter what your situation, you kinda, you kinda like the consistency of home and, and even a very low grade annoyance situation like that one I just described, but one that is like not worthy of any real complaints. People get really annoyed. Yeah. So you can just imagine how destabilizing it feels to have like your neighborhoods, you know, this, this thing of home is so private to people and it's so secure and, and any attempt to mess with it is, is like an attack on you, which is why I think housing is so nonpartisan. It just does not map to ideology at all.

Andy Keatts (10:06):
Yeah. It's it doesn't map to ideology at all. It's yeah, exactly. It's it's um, yeah. Well, I we've gotten into this in the, in the, on the podcast in the past, but it's like, it's it nonpartisan? Or it's like the opposition and the support arguments are both bipartisan. If that makes sense. Oh yeah.

Conor Dougherty (10:24):
That's why it's hard. It's yeah, because there, isn't a way

Andy Keatts (10:29):
It's like conservatives and progressives find common ground on both, both sides to see housing discussion. Right.

Conor Dougherty (10:35):
Well, you know what I always say, I find that people who are like, for lack of a better term YBI or pro housing or whatever the like right term is, which is they, they have

Andy Keatts (10:45):
Struggle finding that

Conor Dougherty (10:46):
Way. Exactly. They have what I call like a kind of, for lack of a better term chill. Yeah. And what I mean by that is, is that like, let's just say there's an abandoned lot and, or, you know, it could be a nasty lot or a bucolic, you know, lot. And there is a proposal for something there. Yeah. There's a certain kind of person who is like their mind and the way that anxiety works. It's just like, can,

Andy Keatts (11:13):
What if a serial

Conor Dougherty (11:14):
Killer moves in there? You know, or whatever, like all these, where

Andy Keatts (11:16):
Will I park? What, who, yeah.

Conor Dougherty (11:18):
All these things. And then there's another kind of person who's just like, yeah,

Andy Keatts (11:23):
I'm sure it'll be fine.

Conor Dougherty (11:24):
It'll be fine and fine. You know, like I think it'll be fine, you know? Like, like, oh yeah. I don't know. You know, it'll probably be fine. Right.

Andy Keatts (11:31):
And

Conor Dougherty (11:31):
Right. I, I don't feel that that kind of those different feelings like map that well onto like other things, you know,

Andy Keatts (11:39):
Will probably be fine is not an especially great, uh, political position to take out into the world. If you're an elected official. Now I, no. Well actually I take that back. Maybe it is, maybe it is, but, but it, it hasn't been one that politicians have been, especially eager to a espouse in the past.

Conor Dougherty (11:54):
One of the things I love about the characters in this book is that they are all for as much as they fight with each other.

Andy Keatts (12:03):
Yeah.

Conor Dougherty (12:04):
They are all so similar and that they are the people who show up and do things. Yeah. Yeah. And that's just a right off the bat, a very

Andy Keatts (12:15):
Group makes it, it, it immediately renders you a, a tiny percentage of the population. Yeah.

Conor Dougherty (12:21):
Like anybody who even knows about local politics, like at all

Andy Keatts (12:24):
Is

Conor Dougherty (12:24):
Already, is already a small group. And then you're the people who show up to meetings. You do all this activism. Right. And, um, and I say this at every level and mean I met tons of tenants. Yeah. Uh, you know, low income tenants are just like, I'm not gonna bother with this. I don't even wanna deal with this. You know, I meet, you know, I met tons of like sort of young tech workers who are like, I don't, I don't have time for this, you know? Um, yeah. And so it's a pretty, like society-wide thing. It feels like that, like not wanting to deal with us the bother of like having your life, um, you know, your precious time, your free time sort of occupied by yeah. Trying to make change through the political system. And so it's funny. I just like, I love all these characters. Yeah. Simply because they are the people who show up. Yeah. Even though it's funny because, and, and I feel oftentimes like when they get in fights with each other

Andy Keatts (13:18):
Yeah.

Conor Dougherty (13:19):
It's because they're the only person around to get in a fight with. Yeah. Like I, you know, you go to a, you go to a city council meeting and, you know, there's one group saying, you know, do this and the other group saying do this. And then they're like, you're the horrible gentrifier or whatever. Yeah. And it's like, the person you should be mad at is the person who's just kind of walking down the street, not caring, but it would, of course be weird to just run down the street, yelling at random people. So like you,

Andy Keatts (13:46):
How dare you care only about your, the popular music you like, and whether you can get your kid to school on time.

Conor Dougherty (13:50):
Exactly. Like it just, and so these people find, they find the way to got their frustrations on the world, on each other, even though yeah. The, the sort of way it works out is that they're kind of much more similar than different. It's funny. I was just meeting with someone the other day that for something I'm kind of working on, maybe possibly, and, um, this person could not be, it's like, it's just like very, like, I don't know. Maybe, maybe it's a thing. Let me think. Um, and the person could not be further than you could get from a, a nibi yeah. Or I'm sorry. YBI. Yeah. But as I was talking to them, I was like, wow, this person has like so much in common with, even if you just went through the biography. Sure, sure. Sure. Like, like kind of like, particularly on the activism side, a lot of these people, like just kind of didn't have a career.

Conor Dougherty (14:44):
They were super jazzed about. Yeah. In some, in some cases the career was going from any outside appearance. Well, but they just like weren't that into it, or it just didn't fire them up. Like that was totally there with this person. Yeah. Very similar to some of the YBI, you know, it's like what causes you to go to a city council meeting and really be an activist? Of course, like I said, in some of the cases in this book, it's just outright survival, but in other times this is sort of vague. Yeah. I will want the world to be different. I wanna change this thing and I feel that I can make a difference, but then of course it becomes

Andy Keatts (15:17):
A job and a social

Conor Dougherty (15:18):
World exactly becomes this social world. It's funny. I was, I was just talking to someone about this the other day that I find the thing that I find so interesting about the YBI people yeah. In San Francisco is when I first met Sonya. Yeah. Who was kind of the main YBI in this Sonya tr in this book, I met her for breakfast at a diner in Oakland. She shows up in a, um, like a very bright orange crown Victoria that has glitter flicked in the paint, looked like a bowling ball, like a, you know, when you go to those like glow bowling ball, places like, and, uh, cosmic bowling, and she's wearing this very interesting outfit, that's like kind of a combination, kinda like a 80, like a, like looked like a white snake fan. And the, you know, she had like acid washed jeans and the snake skin belt and like this.
Conor Dougherty (16:14):
Yeah. And, um, and then she starts talking about all this economic stuff and she was just this very rough around the edges kind of showing up to meetings. And that was like the level of where it was when I first started reporting on this. Now there's this whole YBI apparatus. They've sponsored all these bills. They've, you know, I mean, the guy, Brian Hanlin, who was a, uh, you know, just kind of this guy who was like, just sort of showed up to meetings with Sonya. Right. He would hate that description, but that's like how I saw him at that time. So from an outsider perspective, that's what it looked like. Um, but he was, he was working a different job at that time. You know, now he's like running this, passing all these bills and, and it was like, I did not. And, and anyway, what I find interesting is that there's all these people kind of on the periphery that people weren't like activists, but just kind of young people sort of vaguely in that orbit. And they seem to have absorbed like, oh, it's the good thing is to have more housing. Yeah. Yeah. Well, oh, you know, part of the reasons our cities are messed up is they make it too hard to build housing that like vague notion slash value seems to have been fairly widely distributed. Yeah. And adopted at least

Andy Keatts (17:34):
In those circles.

Conor Dougherty (17:35):
Right. Even well, circles beyond I meant beyond certainly in those circles, but beyond like the hardcore members, like just the, yeah. And I like, I go to this farmer's market in Oakland and they have like a, uh, like a booth set up to like protest some like 19 story tower. They want build on this. So college campus near me, and you will hear people walk up and go like, well, we need the housing. Yeah. You know, the way, the way that someone says we need the, we

Andy Keatts (18:02):
Need the rain. Yeah. Exactly know.

Conor Dougherty (18:04):
And, and, and it's like, well, maybe it's unfortunate, but we really need the housing, you

Andy Keatts (18:08):
Know? And I think 10 years ago that what, you wouldn't have heard

Conor Dougherty (18:11):
It. No, it would've been like

Andy Keatts (18:12):
Stop.

Conor Dougherty (18:13):
Yeah. Crazy developer sign. Totally. And I just, I like watching that kind of permeate yeah. Has been. And I think about it not to get, you know, too historical.

Andy Keatts (18:24):
Yeah.

Conor Dougherty (18:25):
Cause we're on a newsroom dam, but, um, but you know, in the 70, I feel like environmentalism, like all the kind of NIMBY values were kind of like coded then. I mean, I know we're not supposed to use that term, but, um,

Andy Keatts (18:38):
Yeah, no, they,

Conor Dougherty (18:39):
It, the kind of environmentalism stopping housing is good. Like that was encoded as a value. And it probably at that time, time

Andy Keatts (18:46):
Democratic value that it it's kind of both, but yeah, she are. But, but like the, the, the early California, uh, environmental housing movement was an outgrowth of the, of the, like the student activism, you know, but with, with Tom Hagen at, at was actually an early activist against housing in Santa Monica. And so, like, it was very like in, in keeping with the conception of, if you were a good Democrat with good liberal values, that this was the side you would be associated with. And the YBI the YBI like project in some ways to me seems to be basically just dismantling that gut level association. Yeah.

Conor Dougherty (19:28):
And I think you're starting to see, this is something I'll probably like, keep reporting on, but like, I feel like that's starting to permeate, that's starting to filter up. I have, you know, there's been this new, like at a, at a federal level, infrastructure's kind of become for lack of a better term. Sexy. Yeah. Um, you know, you've heard people say I'm a supply side liberal, which is a term you might start hearing more, but it's,

Andy Keatts (19:56):
It's, it would've been unthinkable in the Bush.

Conor Dougherty (19:58):
Well, yeah. And it's, it's a way of saying like, I'm a liberal, but I want to be very pro-growth.

Andy Keatts (20:03):
Yes. Yes.

Conor Dougherty (20:04):
And, and I feel like this sort of like generalism growth is this, we need to create more jobs. We need to, if we, if we want super trains and bike lanes, we do have to actually build them. You know, like I think people are sort of, there is this sort of backlash to that, like 1970s, why do we even need growth? Why is growth a thing? Like we live, we we're, we all have enough material, um, sort of surplus that we shouldn't even be thinking about this anymore. Why are we worrying about like, like that kind of seventies mindset is sort of getting,
Andy Keatts (20:42):
I guess, it's in some ways, it, it you're, as I'm hearing you talk about it, it's like that seventies mindset was such a reaction against the fifties era suburban building. And this is such a reaction against that, that it's act maybe it's no more different than we all hate our parents.

Conor Dougherty (20:55):
Yeah. No, no, no. I, it's not more complicated. Believe that. I absolutely. I mean, it's, it's, it's more, um, anyhow, we're often somewhere. I, you know, it's funny, I just read a Clausons book about the nineties. Yeah. Yeah. And not obviously that has nothing to do with what we're talking about, except that it really got me in the mindset of like, how do things change over and

Andy Keatts (21:14):
Decades? How different a

Conor Dougherty (21:15):
Yeah. What are, what is the like root of backlashes and like, you know, and

Andy Keatts (21:20):
I think there it's possible that we're seeing the beginning of the, the a YBI backlash too, as it, especially as it grows more Sunon

Conor Dougherty (21:27):
I like a yes, but I

Andy Keatts (21:29):
Don't yeah. Like a left nimbyism almost,

Conor Dougherty (21:31):
If that happens, it will, in my mind, if that happens, Y bism would've never been a thing. I think something has to persist for a couple decades for it to be a thing.

Andy Keatts (21:41):
It would be a very fleeting movement if a

Conor Dougherty (21:44):
Thing. Yeah. But I, I don't think, I think that, or maybe we call it some other thing. Yeah. Yeah. And when you and I look back in 50 years, if we're so fortunate, um, if I'm 94, um, that will go, oh, that thing we talked about, Y bism was the beginning of that thing. Like, meaning it might become some other thing. Right. But what I mean is, is I do think there is a sort of broadly held view that growth does not always have to be bad. Yeah.

Andy Keatts (22:16):
Well, so that's a good segue to the, your piece, uh, from this summer on, uh, accessory dwelling units, the growth of them, the embrace of them in California, uh, alongside that sort of, uh, policy cousin to
that, the SB nine. Yeah. Um, which allowed single family lots to be split and allowed duplexes to be built on single family, lots, essentially ending single family zoning in the state. And so you sort of, um, in the, in there's a paragraph I'll I want to read here cuz you, you set up the, a normal development discussion dealt with two types of development. Basically one was sprawl development where you take sub Virgin land, you plow it, you put, uh, leafy cul-de-sac, uh, with cul-de-sac and uh, houses on them or building towers or rises in already developed urban areas, always involving large developers who need to go through a complicated political, uh, process to do so.

Andy Keatts (23:20):

And you're right in the vast zone between those polls lies existing single family neighborhoods like Claremont, which account for most of the urban landscape yet remain conspicuously untouched. The emission is the product of a political bargain that says sprawl can sprawl and downtowns can rise, but single family neighborhoods are sealed off from growth by the CUDL of zoning rules that dictate what can be built, where the deal is almost never stated so plainly, but it is the foundation of local politics in virtually every us city and cuts to the core of the country's deepest class and racial conflicts. So that puts in context the, what the ADU project and the SB nine project is going for in a, in a, in pretty significant terms that we're driving to the heart of the American dream and asking questions about it. Uh, and so what do you like, what do you like a year later coming up on a year later, what do you, what do you make of, of how this is being received and, and how promising it is as a, a solution to this intract intractable problem?

Conor Dougherty (24:25):

I think that, well, I, I don't think we know yet. So let me start by saying, I don't think just to answer the question directly, I don't think it's gonna be, I don't think we're gonna say, oh, this was the solution. Yeah. But I don't think anything is gonna be the solution. And I, and I think sometimes, you know, even independent of housing, this sort of idea that something has to be the solution is often the problem, you know, like we're seeing this now with, you know, energy, like is, is coal always bad? Like I, I mean, the thing about

Andy Keatts (24:59):

Ideas is that there aren't

Conor Dougherty (25:00):

Yes, exactly. Like there, it's always about like, if you just, if everything has to be the one thing, it, like, you know, it, its

Andy Keatts (25:06):

Everything suffers under the

Conor Dougherty (25:07):

Yeah, exactly. You know, be flexible, whatever, you know? Um, anyway, so, so just to give you a little bit of a backstory on how I came to that story, cause I do think it's kind of important. Um, I've been covering housing for about 10 or 15 years, but I've only been covering it like in this, uh, really California housing crisis, you know, intensely thing for about five or six years. And uh, at each stage of the story, as, as you know, you're kind of like your MI, your MI where the story is living kind of changes. Yeah. So, I mean, when I met Sonya at that diner in the sort of little description I gave you a second ago, Previous to
meeting Sonya, I had been writing a lot about economic reports about, oh, we have a housing problem in this country and, you know, putting

Andy Keatts (26:03):
Numbers to it.

Conor Dougherty (26:03):
Like that was, yeah. It was like, it was,

Andy Keatts (26:05):
If people get the right numbers. Yes. Then they'll understand.

Conor Dougherty (26:07):
But I mean, meaning the story really lived there. It was a reporting on a report. Yeah. Grade reporting. Right. Then I met Sonya and I was like, oh, this is really interesting. This is like a normal person. Yeah. Uh, who's really become animated to activism about like these very dry economic and zoning reports. Right. Yeah. Okay. Then it became like a legislative story. Yeah. You know, I wrote a lot about out Scott Wiener. Who's a California state Senator trying to pass, uh, you know,

Andy Keatts (26:38):
SB 50 and the predecessor

Conor Dougherty (26:39):
To that bills. Yeah. Okay. And then writing about that around the country. So it's sort of a statehouse story at that point. I mean, you can see, see the story moving. It's like, you know, intellectual leaders, activists, statehouse. Okay. When I went to Claremont and when I really came to San Diego for that story, it was the first time I had felt like, oh wow. You can actual surely see this. Yeah. You can drive down a block. Yeah. And say, uh, okay, there's that? There's that there's that, you know, like, wow. I have never seen building quite like this. And the story is now taking on like a physical wow. They're really actually building new stuff and it looks the water

Andy Keatts (27:22):
Way down to the pipe and now it's stripping.

Conor Dougherty (27:24):
Yeah. And you're like, whoa. Okay. And the reason I think that that description of where the story is living is so important is for a lot of neighbors. Yeah. And for a lot of people kind of like I was telling you before, you know, the number of people who go to Sacramento or go to their local city council to complain about something is still a small all number. Yeah. Okay. Once it's next door to you, that number multiplies. Yeah. Like a lot, you know what I mean? People who are not aware of a single thing happening yeah. At the San Diego city council or Sacramento are very aware of it. Yeah. When it's being built next door to them. So how that plays out. Yeah. And how people accept it will be like incredibly interesting to watch because it, the optimistic version of it is people go like, huh.

Conor Dougherty (28:12):
You know? Yeah. Like they built the thing next door, like wasn't that big of a deal. Um, the pessimistic version is, you know, all the parking problems and all these things that people worried about, you know, the party next door, whatever, all those things really do come to fruition. Um, and I think you're seeing this here in San Diego, it'll be really interesting to watch this. Yeah. Um, you know, in over by San Diego state, cuz it's nuts over there. Like I went, I thought Claremont was really a great place for that story because Claremont though, it just looks like a neighbor it's

Andy Keatts (28:44):
So the it's so the classic

Conor Dougherty (28:46):
Postwar postwar, I mean it's, it was like, according to this thing I read, it was like the largest master plane community outside of Levittown. Yeah. That must have only been true for a second cuz I bet you that Lakewood quickly eclipsed it. But I mean, for that, you know,

Andy Keatts (28:59):
For that moment that it was true.

Conor Dougherty (29:00):
It was true. And it's like, it is just the classic post world war II kind of subdivision that we now think of as a neighborhood. But it was a many subdivisions at the time.

Andy Keatts (29:10):
Claremont is like the, you know, the, the, the joke about like, well we need to, the vote's gonna come down to turn out in, in, in pivotal Shaw county. Yeah. Claremont. Is that for San Diego?

Conor Dougherty (29:20):
Yeah, exactly. And so, but, but, but when you drive over by San Diego state, it's pretty nuts. I mean, I remember I was driving around over there while I was doing that story and it was like, wow, like you can just drive down a block. And it's like, there's like a big old side house ADU they're building, which is across the street from the, um, ADU that's OB that's like bouncing, you know, peeking up over the back of the ranch house. And then, and then every garage seems to be under conversion that it was funny. I was having a conversation with, um, your, the city Councilman over there, Sean Yolo Rivera

Andy Keatts (30:01):
Now council present.

Conor Dougherty (30:02):
Oh, so there you go. He's moved up in the world since I last talked to him. So, uh, and he, he was saying, oh, people over there are very unhappy about it. And I was like, I remember saying to him, I was like, who's unhappy about it. Looks like they're all doing it. Yeah. Like

Andy Keatts (30:17):
I was like, exactly.
Conor Dougherty (30:19):
And he was like, no, it's literally everybody who is not doing it. And is the one who, and I was like, I mean, cuz it is truly stunning, the number of ADUs and the amount of construction going on just in that neighborhood, around San Diego state. Yeah. And kind of when I was saying before about like, this is the first time I could see it, like you drive through those neighborhoods and it's, it's like, whoa. Yeah. You know, like you, you can perceive, you know, and, and like as a reporter, that's always like an exciting moment because like, up to that time, all the like, like, I don't know, Scott weyer passed this law, Scott Wiener, Senator Scott weyer passed

Andy Keatts (30:52):
And its debate entirely about hypotheticals. Right?

Conor Dougherty (30:55):
Yeah. Whoa. And it would be like, he passed this law called SB 35 and in his version of like this being successful, it'd be like, oh, well we cut six months time. Like it was all like this very abstract stuff. I'm not saying that's not important. Yeah. It's just to say like, you could not drive down a street and be like, there you go. You know, there there's

Andy Keatts (31:10):
The six month savings in time. Exactly.

Conor Dougherty (31:13):
It was like, whoa, like when you drive around San Diego state, it was shocking. Yeah. And um, how that shocking, you know, filters through the political system is a new, like, like step in the process. And I don't know how it'll shake out

Andy Keatts (31:29):
Well, in one part that's interesting about it is that the, and this is sort of a YBI talking point, but I think it's a true one is that often the previous conversation left out the, uh, would be new residents of housing that the, the, the debate over a new mid rise complex in your neighborhood was people who live there now versus the developer who wants to build the thing and left out of the discussion was the a hundred people who would live there were it to be built. Right. And, and so the, the speed with which these ADUs can be built, um, while it generates immediate reaction from local residents who see and feel it happening, it also gets new residents into those units quickly. And I wonder if that will create essentially a new political constituency that had always had to be like a, you know, they always had to have a proxy representative in the, in the form of activists, like taking up for them.

Conor Dougherty (32:29):
Totally. So while I don't let me just to put a point on it. Yeah. While I don't think that ADUs are gonna be the solution by any means. And

Andy Keatts (32:40):
I think in your story, you said it's, they're like 10% of units right now, but

Conor Dougherty (32:44):
That's like from basic

Andy Keatts (32:45):
Zero.

Conor Dougherty (32:46):
Yeah. Right. I mean, function, we went from like a couple hundred units a year, which is basically zero in a market where you build like a hundred thousand a year. Yeah. Uh, to like 10, 12,000. Right. Like that's and it'll, and it'll be 14. Well, so good segue. Right? Yeah. So what I, I think ad yeah. Are gonna be a big deal. And here's why I think they're gonna be a big deal, California, as everyone in California likes to say is the fifth largest economy in the world. Yeah.

Conor Dougherty (33:16):
It's to say it. Yes. It is 40 million people. Yeah's basically England. Yeah. You know what I mean? It's, it's a little bigger than England in terms of the size of the economy. Yeah. Um, and, and we have passed pretty, it's not perfect, but you know, pretty stringent, pretty uniform, statewide regulations, uh, you know, making it much easier to build ideas. And they are some local things tacked onto that. But it's like in most places in this state, you can build at least one detached IU fairly easily. Right. And that process has created a big market, a big, big, big, big market. It's funny. I was talking to some of my YY friends in Portland the other day and they were like, well, Portland was ahead of you guys. And I'm like, not to like dunk on you, but it kind of doesn't matter. Yeah. Yeah.

Conor Dougherty (34:07):
Like, because nobody is gonna go start raising venture capital, right. For their ADU company on the Portland market. Right. Multiple companies have raised hundreds of millions of dollars, probably more at this point, um, for ADU companies purely because they have faith in these statewide regulations. Right. You know, they're like, I can now make a market out of this. Yeah. To say nothing of all the little companies that are, you know, that aren't, there, there a bunch raising bank loans. Um, you know, there there's all this activity. Now the big hold up in a lot of ADU is financing right now that said, Californians have trillions of dollars in equity under their homes right now. Um, you know, many of those people can pull it out and build the house with it. Even the people who don't have that much equity or have a difficult time getting to it. There's this whole apparatus that's financing is the thing that we haven't done yet. But as the market becomes more mature yeah. It will become easier. So part

Andy Keatts (35:09):
Of that's part of what scares me, but yeah.

Conor Dougherty (35:10):
Well, we're going through the slow motion. See, it's, it's

Andy Keatts (35:13):
Interesting. That's my, my scars from the recession there, when I, I start hearing like, well, we'll come up with the, with sophisticated financial instruments to, to unlock this. I, I, I go,

Conor Dougherty (35:23):
Yeah,

Andy Keatts (35:24):
I remember that

Conor Dougherty (35:24):
Sophisticated instruments I'm seeing like, well, you were already kind of seeing it, people do those ones where they split the savings with the, or split the investment with the homeowner. You know? I mean, no, and I'm sure one day someone's gonna steal someone's house or whatever, and it'll be horrible, but I just meant, um, you know, what I'm seeing is, is that one of the things ad use has really opened my eyes to, is that like we have talked about the housing problem in California in mostly legislative terms, uh, oh, zoning. If the zoning weren't X we'd have Y are

Andy Keatts (36:00):
They gonna be able to deliver the votes from LA

Conor Dougherty (36:02):
Or, or just like this general thing? Like, oh, if you could build more densely here, everything would be so, yeah. Yeah. But to really change how housing is built, like legislation is just like one step on the road to all these other things that happen, you know, financing, labor, you know, building new material, you know, different kinds of design. I mean, all these things have to happen to build a house and you kind of need to have to build homes in a new way. You kind of need to have like effectively a new industry. Now I'm not saying it has to be built from whole cloth, but you know, it's, you have to kind of stitch together this new industry. It has to have its own kind of sense of loans. It has a own sense of like labor and design and, and all these things are happening right now.

Conor Dougherty (36:46):
And the creation of that fifth largest economy in the world, 40 million people mark the, the sort of foundation of having that one market and having people be confident enough to, to basically start businesses premised on it. I think that, I don't think we've totally wrestled with the implications of that just yet. And to sort of, you know, acknowledge the Nies out there. Yeah. I mean, it could totally overshoot too and get to some like crazy places. But I actually think we're just at the very beginning, because we're only talking about legislation right now, but as all those other things, I mean, I was thinking about this the other day, now I'm off on a complete place, but there was, as some people know, there was a attempt to create a, uh, a ballot initiative. Yes. This year that would've undone ESP nine, uh, ESP nine and a bunch of other laws. It would've essentially said local governments can do whatever they want on land use. Right. Yeah. But each year that we get further and further from these ADU laws from ESPs nine, there are more and more people buying into, um, or

Andy Keatts (37:57):
Living in them

Conor Dougherty (37:58):
As renters, more companies more, I mean, you saw this with the Airbnb, one of the, like, most, we were just you and I had lunch. Yeah. Just before we came into this podcasting studio. And, um, we were
talking about Airbnbs and Airbnb regulation and blah, blah, blah, something the cities are still wrestling with. But one of the most powerful things for Airbnb is they have these hosts who are, are really powerful constituency for them who will show up. And they're like, what do you mean? They, I couldn't afford my house if it wasn't for the, you know, like, yeah. Yeah. So I think that as this becomes more mature, as more people start doing it as more businesses raise money to build things this way, you are seeing like a huge constituency be formed. Yeah. And, um, and how that all plays out is gonna be really interesting to see, but it's, um, it's not gonna be, I, I, I, it, we have set in motion, something from which I believe we will not be the same. Yeah. And exactly how we're not gonna be the same. I don't predict cuz I just report in real time. But I'm, I'm I feel confident saying we have the ADUs have set us on a path to something different. Um Hmm. I that's the first time I feel like I've been able to say that, um, in a, in a sort of, like I said, in a whoa, they built that there kind of way, not just a legislative way. Right. You know, since I've been covering this,

Andy Keatts (39:29):
Uh, Connor, where is, what's the best place for somebody to buy your book in, in order to

Conor Dougherty (39:33):
Bookstore their favorite bookstore go, your

Andy Keatts (39:36):
Favorite

Conor Dougherty (39:36):
Bookstore is the, is the least to get it. Um, you know, any local bookstore, you

Andy Keatts (39:41):
Know, verbatim books would be a good one. I like that place. Okay. Cool. Golden gates fighting for housing in America. Uh, Connor, thanks for coming in,

Conor Dougherty (39:49):
Man. Thanks for having me.