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Joe Steckler



What do Florida Budgets Contain for Seniors?

This really is a topic that more seniors should address, because an honest discussion would reveal the lack of support seniors need. Our state budget, like the national budget, could more fairly support those who bear the cost of it. The reason I say this is because the State of Florida has had about 65,000 seniors on a waiting list for various services for many years. The problem is exacerbated by an almost complete lack of local government programs available to assist the elderly.

My words may sound harsh but they are true. Development of programs that would reduce the overall numbers waiting for assistance is needed. While the word taxes strikes terror in the hearts of many, without it we would not have local governments to provide for services needed by all. For my article I want to focus on our County budget, for it is the one most capable of developing both the plan and necessary funding to support assistance to the elderly in Brevard.

Although the general community is not responsible for the care of an aging community, we should be more concerned with doing "the right thing". Two critical and unmet needs of seniors are affordable housing and major house repairs. But there are other serious problems that elders and those living on fixed incomes experience after age 65, so many that I could never list them all here. I assure you that there are many in Brevard who fear their ability to exist from day to day, and that is not right. We can and should do something about it.

Several years ago a basic planning paper was developed by a small group advocating for seniors and submitted to the County for action. Nothing was done to address this effort, but the document still exists and points out the need for the County to start planning for those aging in Brevard. Why can't the County assess

the needs of those growing older and living on a fixed income? We pay many on the County staff a decent living with a guaranteed retirement, whose job it should be to act on what I am discussing in this article.

We have a conglomeration of organizations taking action on piecemeal parts of the problem. Think what could be accomplished if the County developed a plan to build affordable housing and address other needs of the elderly and those living on fixed incomes. I am not talking another 1965 Older Americans Act, rather a Brevard County plan to support local citizens who will need help to age with a semblance of dignity. Brevard is expanding in all directions, and the County will increase taxes to cover this expansion. Why not do the same for seniors?

Addressing the need for affordable housing will cost money but it should be done. And, if we effectively plan for this and other aging needs, we can be far ahead of a problem that will one day explode. This issue needs the attention of our County Commissioners. Continued failure to build affordable housing and plan for the needs of an aging community does not make sense nor is it the right thing to do when we invite people to come to live in our community. Find out for yourself what the budget contains for seniors.

**Joe Steckler, President
 Helping Seniors of Brevard County**

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