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Joe Steckler



Affordable Housing Part III

by Joe Steckler
 President, Helping Seniors of Brevard

As I wrote this article, I thought about how long homelessness has been with us. This realization truly upset me. In the past, we viewed the merry band of Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood as saviors of the needy. Well, times change and so does our thinking. I hope through this series of articles that readers will become aware of more than homelessness. We should ask ourselves some hard questions. Why haven't we been able to develop affordable housing? What is holding us back from establishing alternative ways of living to care for our aging population and prevent homelessness?

The City of Palm Bay recently asked for input on how to use the \$18 million they received in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money to address homelessness and affordable housing. How much is available from all cities in Brevard? And, does the county have similar money that could attract major foundation funding for a unique new plan to build affordable housing? Anything is possible, you just need a good plan that will appeal to funding sources.

There is a lot of unused land in Brevard County, much of which is controlled by the cities and the county. And there is a lot of government money available to help fund a well thought-out plan. Perhaps we need to think outside the box. What if we avail ourselves of some of the millions in the Sadowski Fund set up by Governor Chiles to build affordable housing (1992)? Oh, I forgot, the Fund was raided by legislators for pet projects! Think what \$200 million donated annually to counties across Florida could have

accomplished if used for the purpose intended.

Although I have long been a supporter of building affordable housing, I was unaware that the City of Melbourne had created a new staff position to study and present solutions to homelessness in the city. They hired Casey Gilbert as Community Affairs Liaison on October 11, 2021, and she resigned four months later. No reason was given, even though Ms. Gilbert's qualifications seemed appropriate for the position. This all is a little surprising, in that Helping Seniors has long advocated for affordable housing and was not aware of the position nor of any meetings to discuss the issue. In my opinion, pulling panhandlers off city roads and turning Daily Bread into a 24-hour operation will not solve the problem.

I know that the County Commission on Aging is aware of the lack of affordable housing. I believe it should take the lead in developing a plan to build affordable housing. For my part, I intend to keep writing articles to make more of us aware of the need for affordable housing for seniors and for those who are homeless in Brevard. I would certainly be available to help build the plan, but it will necessarily be a challenge from start to finish and will require a small group of informed citizens to make it happen, leaving the politics of the effort at the front door.

Contact Helping Seniors at 321-473-7770, at www.HelpingSeniorsofBrevard.org, or at P.O. Box 372936, Satellite Beach, FL 32937.



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