



Affordable Housing, Part V

In the past four articles in this series, I have highlighted an issue that affects many different age groups in our community. How many of you have noticed that we're actually talking about not one, but two simultaneously occurring problems? Namely, these are a lack of affordable housing and homelessness.

For many years, "affordable housing" was a term applied primarily to persons aged 20 to 50 who needed a place to rent because they could not afford to buy a home. The homeless were those who asked for a handout to get by. However, I believe that now we have an almost categorically shifting age grouping that is eliding a lack of affordable housing with homelessness in all demographics.

My belief is based on actual calls we get on our helpline. We are seeing a rising need for housing, whether it be for a place we pay for to lay our heads at night or a place that costs us nothing. Imagine a person who can not afford to pay a security fee plus first and last month rent, much less other living costs. How do you assist a 90-year-old woman who lives in her car? What would you say to a mother and father who live in a tent with their three children and have been flooded out? These are real life situations. They are not the result of anyone's choice.

I will say that a program called Saint Stephen's Way is under construction in our community to offset family housing needs—but what about the other untold number who need assistance? Saint Stephen's Way is a privately funded project. What about the millions of dollars that are available in government and public funds? Now is the time to develop the funding necessary to build housing that will meet homelessness and affordable housing needs. These needs will grow because we ask people to come to Florida to live.

Like you, I am the constituent of some legislators. My tax dollars go for their monthly pay. I doubt any of them live in the woods or are concerned where they will sleep each night. Legislators have nice offices and good salaries. The person who for any number of reasons needs affordable housing, who has \$1,200 or less a month to spend on housing (the amount considered by law enforcement unsafe for raising a family) deserves a fair shake.

There are ways to build a plan to make it work for all, but it will take money, cooperation, and leadership. Let's use government funds like the Sadowski Fund to develop a matching grant type program where the 67 Florida counties could benefit fairly from an annual distribution of the fund. Use them for affordable housing and also serve to reduce the homelessness problem. Or, County Commissioners could develop a program similar to the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a New Deal program started by President Roosevelt circa 1935. This might put some seniors to work at a second job doing county work at an acceptable rate that would reduce homelessness or pay for affordable housing. More to come.

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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