

Affordable Housing Advisory Committee
St. Johns County, Florida
Regular Meeting

April 21, 2021
Minutes

The Affordable Housing Advisory Committee of St. Johns County met at 3:00 pm at the Health & Human Services Center, in the Kingfisher Conference room, at 200 San Sebastian View, St. Augustine, Florida 32084.

The meeting was called to order at 3:07 pm by Chair, Bill Lazar.

Members Present:

Jay Braxton
Steven Ladrado
Bill Lazar
Michael O'Donnell
Alex Mansur
Harry Maxwell
Nizam Emamdie
Commissioner Henry Dean

Members Absent:

Brittany Coronado
Tracy Hayes
Karl Vierck

Guests Present:

Shawna Novak, Director, Health & Human Services (via Zoom)
Joseph Cone, Assistant Director, Health & Human Services
Michelle Lawlor, Housing Support Staff
Mary Garcia, Social Services Support Staff
Roberto Ortiz, Manager, SJC Housing
Virginia Campbell, Credit Counselor, SJC Housing
Joe Cearley, SJC Growth Management
Sarah Butler, Assistant to County Administrator, Brad Bradley

Notices regarding the meeting were sent to all members. No press was in attendance.

- 1) Introduction of AHAC Members and SJC Staff: Committee members and County staff were acknowledged and quorum was present. Mr. Ortiz introduced new member, Nizam Emamdie. Mr. Emamdie provided some of his background and expertise and talked about his connection to affordable or workforce housing.
- 2) Approval of Minutes: **Motion** made by Alex Mansur to approve minutes of February, 2021 (there was no March meeting); motion seconded by Steve Ladrado. **Motion passed unanimously.**
- 3) Affordable Housing Projects: Roberto Ortiz gave a brief synopsis of the two new affordable housing projects, San Marco Heights and Victoria Crossing. Mr. Ortiz stated the developer of the San Marcos Heights project will be giving a brief presentation before the HFA on April 22nd, and he said he expects the ground breaking for the project to be announced soon, and he will pass that information on to the AHAC and the HFA. Mr. Ortiz also spoke about Victoria Crossing and said the developer submitted the bond application to the HFA in late March.
- 4) AHAC Annual Report – 2021: Bill Lazar explained the State is now requiring the AHAC to produce their report on affordable housing incentive strategies annually instead of triennially. Mr. Lazar stated County staff recently sent out a survey to all Committee members asking that they rate the affordable housing incentives listed in the AHAC's 2019 report by priority. Mr. Lazar said the survey results were included in today's meeting packet and would help the Committee to determine which incentives they

would like to focus on for this year's report. In keeping with this plan, Joe Cearley, Growth Management Department, was in attendance to discuss flexible densities, which was rated by survey to be one of the top five highest priority incentives. Joe Cone reminded the Committee that approximately one year ago, the Board of County Commissioners approved the workforce housing zoning designation, which would allow a developer increased density when 40% or more of the project's units are priced at or below \$210,000. Joe Cearley added that the designation has no open space requirements other than what is in the Land Development Code (LDC), and he said there are reduced setbacks, lot sizes and widths, and all housing types are allowed. Mr. Cearley said six dwelling units are allowed per acre in this special zoning rather than two and commented that even six is not excessive as he said other communities and jurisdictions have upwards of twelve to twenty-four dwelling units allowed per acre. Mr. Cearley went on to say that the County Commissioners recently approved a modification of the workforce housing district zoning to include an increase in the price cap to \$240,000. Mr. Emamdie asked if purchasers of these properties are income qualified, or if there is a requirement that they own the home for a certain period of time. Mr. Cearley said there are no income requirements or provisions that keep an owner from selling the home at any time, but the homeowner must have homestead exemption. Mr. Emamdie pointed out this would allow anyone to purchase these homes, and therefore, does not necessarily benefit the workforce. Mr. Lazar acknowledged this but said prior to the special zoning district, there were very few homes being built at the \$210,000 price point. There was some discussion with regard to making income qualifying a required part this special workforce housing zoning. Mr. Ladrado made the point that big builders typically have their own mortgage companies and perhaps a requirement should be added that requires purchasers to be screened to ensure they are not financially over qualified, since the purpose of the zoning is to provide more housing for the workforce. Mr. Cearley and Mr. Cone said that this and other possible modifications to the zoning could certainly be discussed.

Mr. Cearley stated the workforce housing zoning district overlay has been used in the Stokes Landing and Ravenswood developments and those rezonings have been approved. Bill Lazar said the St. Johns Housing Partnership has also used the designation, albeit on a much smaller scale. Mr. Cearley said they have also been looking into allowing increased density for affordable rentals and they are waiting on direction from County Administration as to where this special zoning might be offered. Joe Cearley passed around a density guide which provided aerial photos of low, medium, and high density areas for reference. Bill Lazar asked about opportunities for smaller builders of affordable housing, such as individual lot opportunities and allowing, for example, duplexes in single family zoning districts. Joe Cearley said there are some antiquated provisions in the LDC that Growth Management has brought to the attention of County Administration, such as restriction of allowable housing types in single family districts, and he said these are being evaluated. Mr. Cearley said an important consideration would be keeping building compatible with surrounding development while allowing multiple housing types. Discussion turned to accessory dwelling units and Mr. Cearley said there has been direction from the County Commissioners to move forward on relaxing provisions. Mr. Lazar said allowing these units to be rented to someone other than a family member would be extremely beneficial to affordable housing.

- 5) Survey Results: Bill Lazar once again addressed the recent survey taken by all AHAC members to target the top priority incentives and he shared the results. Discussion ensued and it was determined the AHAC would address up to five of the highest priority strategies, two at a time, at upcoming monthly meetings. A **motion** was made by Harry Maxwell to discuss the modification of impact fees and impact fee transfers at the May AHAC meeting; motion seconded by Alex Mansur. **Motion passed unanimously**. Commissioner Henry Dean offered to invite County Attorney Patrick McCormack to the May meeting in order to discuss impact fees, as they relate to affordable housing. After more discussion, Committee members agreed that at the June meeting the discussion will revolve around development near transportation hubs. Jay Braxton asked how the AHAC annual report will be presented to the Board of County Commissioners in December, 2021, and Joe Cone said he will direct staff to send out a copy of the Power Point from the presentation of the 2019 AHAC incentive report to the Committee for reference.
- 6) Recent Recommendations Outcome and Current Vacancies: Mary Garcia advised the vacancy postings for the seats held by Bill Lazar, Karl Vierck and Harry Maxwell have closed and all applications received from the County Commission office were provided in today's meeting packets. Ms. Garcia made note that positions on the AHAC are very specific and dictated by Florida Statute so not all applicants will be suitable. There was some discussion and review of applications. There were

no applicants that fit the descriptions for Mr. Maxwell's or Mr. Lazar's positions on the Committee. There was one application for a real estate professional, which is the position currently held by Karl Vierck. A **motion** was made by Steve Ladrado to recommend Harry Maxwell to serve another term as provider of for-profit affordable housing; motion seconded by Alex Mansur. **Motion passed unanimously.** A **motion** was made by Steve Ladrado to recommend Bill Lazar to serve another term as a not-for-profit provider of affordable housing; motion seconded by Harry Maxwell. **Motion passed unanimously.** A **motion** was made by Steve Ladrado to recommend Karl Vierck to serve another term; motion seconded by Harry Maxwell. **Motion passed unanimously.** Mary Garcia stated she will prepare a letter to the Board of County Commissioners with these three recommendations for the Chair's signature. Bill Lazar said he would like to contact candidate Ellen Rogers, who works as a real estate professional, to thank her for her interest and to invite her to attend AHAC meetings as a member of the public.

Nizam Emamdie asked about the possible sweep of half of the state's affordable housing budget this year. Bill Lazar stated the budget has not yet been approved but that he would not expect Sadowski to be fully funded this year. Mr. Cone said if he had to hazard a guess, he would expect the County could receive approximately \$500,000 in SHIP funding. Joe Cone also informed the AHAC that the County is currently in contract negotiations with a consultant chosen through RFP process to administer the \$7.9 million in rental assistance funds that the County accepted from the Treasury Department. Mr. Cone said this consultant has advised him there may be more affordable housing funding coming through the state and Mr. Cone said it is rumored to be a substantial amount and he hopes it might cover mortgage assistance or possibly construction of affordable housing.

7) Public Comment – None.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.