

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

February 16, 2022
Minutes

The Affordable Housing Advisory Committee (AHAC) 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 3:05 pm by Vice-Chair, Bill Lazar

Members Present:

Jay Braxton- St. Johns County Resident
Tracy Hayes- Citizen engaged in banking or mortgage banking industry
Bill Lazar- Citizen actively engaged as a not-for-profit provider of affordable housing
Alex Mansur- Citizen actively engaged in areas of labor in home building
Harry Maxwell- Citizen actively engaged as a for-profit provider of affordable housing
Dr. William McCormick- Citizen actively serving on Local Planning Agency
Michael O'Donnell- HFA Chair/ Citizen actively engaged as an advocate for low-income persons
Karl Vierck- Citizen actively engaged as a Real Estate Professional

Members Absent:

Henry Dean-Locally elected official
Steven Ladrado-Citizen representing employers within St. Johns County

Guests Present:

Joe Cone, Assistant Director, Health and Human Services
Julie Voorhees, Housing & Community Development Support Staff
Mary Garcia, Social Services Support Staff
Sarah Taylor, Assistant County Administrator
John Frank, Resident

Notices regarding the meeting were sent to all members. No press attended.

- 1) Introduction of AHAC Members and SJC Staff: Committee members and County staff were acknowledged and quorum was present.
- 2) Approval of Minutes: **Motion** made by Harry Maxwell to approve minutes of November, 2021 meeting; motion seconded by Alex Mansur. **Motion passed unanimously.**
- 3) Administrators Report: Joe Cone mentioned that the AHAC's annual report received very good feedback and he said Commissioner Henry Dean in particular commended staff and Committee members for their hard work. Mr. Cone reported on new affordable housing projects located in the State Road 207 corridor, San Marco Heights and Victoria Crossing, and he said both projects are running on schedule. Mr. Cone said San Marcos Heights will be the first of the two projects to be completed and the leasing process is expected to begin on the first completed structure in March or April, 2022. Mr. Cone also spoke about the Affordable Housing Roundtable, held on

February 16th and sponsored by Habitat for Humanity. Mr. Cone stated the event was originally designed for the financial community and local developers, however, a number of service providers also took part in the event. Bill Lazar mentioned a number of presenters that were in attendance such as Habitat for Humanity, St. Johns Housing Partnership, St. Johns County Legal Aid, St. Johns County Credit Counseling, USDA, and three financial institutions. Mr. Lazar stated two of the financial institutions that are not currently involved with affordable housing in St. Johns County discussed offering new products to help off-set the cost of mortgages for lower income individuals, as well as a down payment assistance program.

Bill Lazar went on to speak about how St. Johns Housing Partnership and Habitat for Humanity received assistance by the County to purchase land for affordable housing. Bill Lazar stated there is a workshop scheduled at the Health & Human Services Center on Tuesday, February 22nd, at 9am, to discuss the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding the County has received. Mr. Lazar stated there will be opportunities at this workshop to make suggestions as to where the \$47 million in ARP funding should be spent, and he stated this provides a great opportunity for a substantial amount of money to be set aside for affordable housing. Mr. Lazar also encouraged everyone present to go online and participate in a survey being conducted regarding the distribution of this funding. Mary Garcia stated she will send out the link to this survey to Committee members. Bill Lazar suggested the AHAC come up with a five-year plan that provides allocations to best help alleviate the affordable housing crisis in the County. Karl Vierck said he believes there should be more emphasis on the need for rental housing and less on home ownership since in his estimation, half of the workforce in the County can't afford to buy homes here. Mr. Vierck went on to say a more direct and concrete approach should be taken toward the ARP funding and he suggested drafting a letter with specific recommendations to benefit affordable housing, with a total request of \$10 million. Discussion ensued and several affordable projects were discussed. Mr. Lazar and Mr. Vierck will work on drafting the letter with very specific recommendations and funding amounts and it will be sent to County staff for review, before ultimately being sent to County Commissioners.

- 4) AHAC Annual Report 2022 Review: Joe Cone suggested that this topic be tabled until the next meeting due to time constraints.
- 5) Current Vacancies and Recommendations: The Committee reviewed all eligible applications received for the vacancy of the "citizen representing essential services personnel". After some discussion, **Motion** was made by Karl Vierck to nominate Lindsey Rodea; there were no other nominations and motion was seconded by Jay Braxton. **Motion passed unanimously.**
- 6) Public Comment: John Frank, a resident of northwest St. Johns County, spoke about the Greenbriar Helow project. Mr Frank stated the proposed project is a combination of 3,500 residential units and 2.5 million square feet of nonresidential space in northwest St. Johns County. Mr. Frank advised that Mr. Helow, the property owner, would like to sell to developers interested in building affordable housing and Mr. Frank encouraged the AHAC to engage with him on this subject. Bill Lazar asked if Joe Cone would let the Committee know when Growth Management has a proposed affordable project coming up for discussion and Mr. Cone advised that he would do that.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:03p.m.