

The Workforce Housing Crisis in Collier County – *April Update*

The Board of County Commissioners finally begins to address this issue as countywide and state political pressures mount after years of neglect

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After years of neglect and inaction at the state and local government levels, workforce housing has finally become a major issue prompting the legislative and executive branches, along with local boards of commissioners in several counties to finally take measures to address the housing crisis.

Collier County Commissioners at long last took a significant step at the Commission meeting of March 28 toward adopting a package of land use changes designed to incentivize the building of more workforce housing, also referred to as affordable housing. Commissioners voted 4-1 in favor of proposed amendments developed by county staff over the last year.

The long-awaited proposals, many included as recommendations for the county in a housing plan developed by the Urban Land Institute in 2017, have been discussed for many years and include the following:

- Allowing more affordable housing by right in certain commercial zoning districts
- Increasing density allowances for affordable housing in activity centers
- Establishing a new subdistrict that allows more residential density in mixed-use projects that offer market rate and affordable housing, along with significant job opportunities
- Raising density allowances for affordable housing projects built along county bus routes

The proposed changes to the county's Growth Management Plan must by state regulations now go to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity for review and approval, before a final adoption hearing by the Commission. If ultimately approved by the Commission, the amendments will require land development code changes, spelling out the details.

The county's planning and zoning director stated at the same Commission meeting, according to reports of the Naples Daily News, that the new initiatives could allow the development of more than 20,700 additional affordable units in the county. This would be a significant step forward to address the county's acute and growing shortage in workforce housing.

The significances of the above-mentioned proposals are the following:

1. Allowing affordable housing by right – means the proposed right would protect landowners' ability to construct affordable housing, so long as it is designed to be accessible for low- or middle-income individuals and would prevent municipalities from using their regulatory powers to reduce access to affordable housing.
2. Increasing density allowances for affordable housing in commercial activity centers – means 1) lowering the development costs per unit and in turn potential rental rates and 2) generating less

traffic than strictly commercial use. Commercial activity centers (also called Downtowns, Central Business Districts, and Urban Villages) is a term used in urban planning and design for a mixed-use urban area where there is a concentration of business, civic and cultural activities, creating an environment that promotes interaction and exchange.

3.