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Commission delays decision on impact fee deferral program

By Larry Hannan

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Collier County commissioners will hold off on making any decisions to a countywide impact fee deferral program until the county's Affordable Housing Commission looks into the issue.

On Wednesday, county staff members told commissioners they need to look into changing the deferral program because there is no cap on impact fee deferrals for rental properties.

The county has allocated about \$2.3 million for deferrals, but staff members worry that it won't be enough money for everyone who applies because of the rental properties rule.

Staff asked commissioners what they wanted to do about the issue, but the commissioners decided they didn't want to make a decision before the Affordable Housing Commission, an advisory board to the county commissioners, looked at the issue.

"They made the right decision," said Sam Durso, president of Collier County Habitat for Humanity.

Durso lobbied the commissioners to send the issue to the advisory board.

The issue needs to be looked at comprehensively, and there wasn't enough information to make an informed decision on Wednesday, Durso said.

"I would love to see rental housing at a lower level," said Durso, before adding that he still believed low-cost homes were a better option for people than rented housing.

Durso disagreed with Collier Commissioner Fred Coyle, who wondered if the county should focus on rental housing for people making less than 60 percent of the median income for Collier, while focusing efforts to build affordable homes for people closer to the median income.

"The need for affordable housing is greatest for people making less than 60 percent of the median income," said Durso, before adding that is why he wants the advisory board to look into the matter before commissioners make any final decisions.

Tammie Nemecek, president of the Economic Development Council of Collier County, also lobbied commissioners to send the issue to the advisory board before making a decision.

"Not everybody is suitable for home ownership," Nemecek said. "You need rental properties (that are affordable)."

Commissioner Donna Fiala said the cost of rental properties is too high in the county, and there needs to be a way to bring the cost down.

At the moment, a two-bedroom house or apartment rents for \$1,200, and that's too much money for a lot of people, she said.

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