

Bonita Springs

City considers imposing new fee for pricey homes

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Bonita Springs residents who build homes worth at least \$500,000 may someday have to pay a fee to address the city's affordable-housing shortage.

City officials are considering an affordable-housing ordinance that could add \$4 million annually to the city's affordable-housing trust fund.

It would be similar to an impact fee, the one-time charge that pays for roads and parks.

"The pool cleaner, the lawn maintenance guy, they need housing," Mayor Jay Arend said.

He said workers who commute from Lehigh Acres, for example, will someday have enough jobs nearby because of the growth in Lehigh.

"People won't need to drive to Bonita for work," Arend said.

Owners of existing homes worth at least \$500,000 would not have to pay a fee, Arend said, but he believes the city has a justifiable reason to charge new homeowners.

"It's generally the gated communities, the expensive homes, that employ those kinds of people," he said.

And those people, who may make only \$25,000 to \$30,000, cannot afford a home.

According to the Florida Association of Realtors, the median cost of a home in the Fort Myers-Cape Coral area, the only Lee County listing, was \$288,700.

City Attorney Audrey Vance found that Islamorada, a village in the Florida Keys, is looking into a similar ordinance.

Michael Reitmann, head of the Lee Building Industry Association, said that kind of ordinance would not be fair.

"Legally, you can't just single out one segment of the industry or the population," Reitmann said. "Lee County is looking at this, too.

"Government never solves an issue. They just impose more regulations."

Arend's response?

"He has a job to do, and he does it well," Arend said. "But he has not come up with a solution for affordable housing."

Reitmann said government officials should offer developers an incentive: they can build more units if they

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contribute money to affordable housing.

Arend said that system is there, but if it doesn't get used, the affordable housing shortage is not solved.

In 2003, Bonita leaders created the affordable housing trust fund, mostly paid for by city taxpayers each year. The \$200,000 collected this year will push the total to \$1.14 million.

The money is helping. It is paying for roads and drainage in the Renaissance at Rosemary, a 40-home community in Rosemary Park.