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## County Report Says Government Must Help Solve Housing 'Crisis'

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TAMPA - Government should encourage high-density developments, increase incentives to lure developers to build cheaper homes and create an affordable housing trust fund.

Those are among the dozens of recommendations contained in an affordable housing task force's 17-page report on the state of housing in Hillsborough County. Commissioner Tom Scott formed the task force more than a year ago to find solutions to what he considers an affordable housing crisis.

"The crisis is here now in Hillsborough County," Scott said. "Two hundred thousand dollars for a little, old shack is crazy."

Hillsborough County and Tampa are years behind some other governments in addressing the issue.

Scott's goal is to increase the affordable housing inventory by a rate of 1,000 new units a year. The units, he said, should be priced between \$160,000 and \$185,000, and the county should work with nonprofit groups and builders to make that happen.

The task force's report comes as more than one in four Hillsborough families spend more than the recommended 30 percent of their income on housing, and nearly 50 percent of Hillsborough's poorest families spend more than half of their incomes putting a roof over their heads.

Meanwhile, income increases are lagging far behind home price increases.

"The lack of available affordable housing in the county and its cities' neighborhoods will force many workers to find homes far from their jobs," the report says. "This leads to longer commutes, increased energy consumption, air pollution and traffic congestion for all of us. Ultimately, if this continues, employers will find themselves without workers because housing is not affordable."

Joseph Narkiewicz, executive vice president of the Tampa Bay Builders Association and a task force member, said he wants to ensure that developers who want to provide affordable housing in their projects will have less red tape.

"That's why people don't step up," he said.

Community plans, Narkiewicz added, should encourage, not deter, low-cost housing.

Among other recommendations:

- Increase incentives for affordable housing by awarding density bonuses and granting parking reductions, height increases and impact fee waivers. Density bonuses allow developers to build more units than the existing zoning allows.

- Establish a program in which nonprofit and faith-based organizations can donate land to affordable housing developers.

- Increase down-payment assistance to first-time home buyers.

- Hire a liaison to conduct an annual summit on affordable housing, to work with other governments on the issue and to advocate for state and federal funding.

That recommendation caused debate at Monday's affordable housing task force meeting. Members agreed that the person hired should have far-reaching authority within county government and should report directly to the county administrator, but a suggestion to give that person the title of "deputy county administrator for affordable housing" raised concerns.

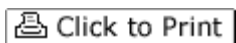
Scott said he didn't think the conservative-dominated county commission would endorse a measure that could bring another layer to government. Also, don't expect to hear Scott ask the commission for millions of dollars for affordable housing.

"I want to be careful about asking for too much money," Scott said.

The county commission is expected to discuss affordable housing at its meeting May 17.

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