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Q&A: Affordable housing decision

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By [Hector Florin](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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Q. Simply put, what did the county commission do Tuesday?

A. Commissioners supported a new program that requires developers to build a certain number of workforce-priced homes, ranging from \$164,000 to \$304,000, for each new housing development.

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In most cases, at least a quarter of those homes have to be built in the same development as the market-priced homes. In all cases, builders may choose to buy existing homes, buy land and donate it to the county, or pay money into a trust fund.

Q. How many affordable houses will this create?

A. It depends on how many homes are built and the density of those developments. But 5,000 is an optimistic estimate, far less than the demand for workforce homes.

Q. How can I get one?

A. Once developers plan to build the workforce homes, those who meet the county's targeted income bracket can apply with the developer.

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The county is also creating a community land trust to buy vacant land and existing homes, and qualified residents can apply. Assistance is available through the county department of Housing and Community Development.

Q. Why don't many developers like the idea?

A. They feel it places the burden of creating workforce homes on their shoulders. And with land and construction prices rising, building a less-expensive, workforce home will simply shift costs to market-rate homes, making those houses more expensive.

Q. The commission discussed buying or setting aside land for affordable housing. Where would that be?

A. Nothing is decided yet, but even buying one lot could be a start. Commissioner Burt Aaronson said three county-owned acres north of the government center could work, but that space might be needed for courthouse expansion or parking spaces. Commissioners also mentioned land is plentiful in and around Belle Glade, Pahokee and South Bay.

Then there's Mecca Farms, originally considered the home for The Scripps Research Institute. Aaronson talked about building 4,000 homes on Mecca, with half at workforce prices.

Q. What are the issues surrounding building on Mecca Farms?

A. The same delays that forced commissioners to look elsewhere to build Scripps — a federal judge's order to complete a thorough environmental study of the 1,919-acre site before roads and basic services can be provided. That could take about two years to finish.

Q. What else is the county commission discussing regarding affordable housing?

A. Builders won't necessarily have to do it all. County officials will look at a voter-approved bond issue, with the money used to buy vacant land and possibly existing homes. No pricetag was decided, but Aaronson mentioned an amount of \$200 million. Commissioners approved hiring a consultant to look at a luxury home fee and a non-residential development fee. Cities also must be brought into the program since land is available within their borders, commissioners said.


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