

Posted on Wed, May. 03, 2006

COUNTY COMMISSION

Study to scrutinize jobs-housing linkage

Broward will study whether there is a connection between the creation of low-wage jobs and the lack of affordable housing.

BY ERIKA BOLSTAD
ebolstad@MiamiHerald.com

Broward County will pay up to \$200,000 to study whether there's a link between the region's growth in low-wage retail and service-sector jobs and the shortage in affordable housing.

The study will examine whether the county can justify taxing or assessing large retailers an impact fee for the hidden costs of bringing low-wage jobs to Broward County. Such fees would go toward affordable housing programs, and could be assessed on retailers and other employers when they build new stores.

The concept of linkage is not without controversy; in other parts of the United States, such linkage fees are usually assessed on retailers such as Wal-Mart.

"The results of the survey and how we react to it is the \$64,000 question," said Commissioner Josephus Eggleston, one of several commissioners reluctant to approve the idea last week. "Because what you're talking about, and you've got to be upfront with folks about it, is a tax."

Several commissioners struggled with linkage, saying it could be considered unfriendly to business and even harmful to people living here already.

"The more taxes and fees out there, the more you're going to raise the cost of living for the folks already here," said Commissioner John Rodstrom. "That's what everybody's complaining about."

But commissioners decided to vote for the survey after they broadened it to look at all identifiable causes of the low-income housing shortage.

The study was backed by Commissioner Kristin Jacobs, who heads the county's affordable housing committee.

Almost all of the job growth forecast for Broward in the next several decades is in low-paying retail and service sectors, Jacobs warned.

If those types of companies want to do business here, Jacobs said, they must accept that there is a social cost to low wages that needs to be mitigated.

"Minimum-wage jobs are not Broward-friendly," Jacobs said.

``They do nothing to help us grow as a region, in a county that's loaded with low-paying jobs and an escalating cost of living. That just means you lose your middle class.''

The study, to be conducted by Florida International University, also would determine how the county could go about assessing linkage fees.

© 2006 MiamiHerald.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.miami.com>