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Expansion proposed for housing rebate program Higher wage earners may get eligibility

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A proposed change to an affordable housing program could give more households a \$2,000-plus reimbursement on a new home.

Moderate-, low- and very low-income families have been able to recoup as much as half the Lee County school impact fee when they purchase a new home. The Affordable Housing Committee will debate Friday whether to make the next higher income level eligible as well.

An eligible household can get up to a \$2,150 reimbursement on a new home, or one built since 2005 but not occupied.

Income classification is based on the median household income, which is \$54,700 for a four-member household in Lee County. Very low income is a household making up to half that amount. Work force income, which would become eligible, is a household making up to 140 percent, or about \$76,500.

"Sometimes a couple thousand dollars on a sale price can make the difference between a sale happening and a sale not happening," said Walter Fluegel, a committee member.

Impact fees are one-time charges on new construction to defray the cost of providing and expanding services and facilities that benefit development. The fees are generally paid by the developer or builder and passed on to the buyer in the home price.

Gloria Sajgo, principal planner with Lee County's Department of Community Development, said nonprofits such as Habitat for Humanity use the program regularly to get eligible buyers reimbursed. She said more builders and developers have been asking about the program.

"Sometimes that is what would enable a family to get into a house," Sajgo said about the reimbursement.

Since 2005, the county has reimbursed almost \$185,000, Sajgo said.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Lee County has about about 50,000 households earning between \$50,000 and \$75,000.

If approved by the committee, the recommendation will go to the Lee County Commission and school board for approval.

Fluegel said the county's higher-than-normal jobless rate and weakening housing sector could make more

IF YOU GO

- What: Lee County Affordable Housing Committee

- When: 2 p.m. Friday

- Where: Public Works building, 1500 Monroe St. in downtown Fort Myers.

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people eligible for the reimbursement.

"You are going to see more people falling into work force housing," he said.

Where people were on the sidelines during the housing boom, "they may be able to get into the market."

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