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## Pitkin County ready to spend its housing funds, but where?

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ASPEN – Pitkin County commissioners are willing to put the county’s money where their mouths are when it comes to worker housing.

At a discussion Tuesday, commissioners directed staffers to find out what, specifically, can be done to acquire housing with \$3 million in available funds, though one commissioner expressed a willingness to spend more than that and one wasn’t ready to commit to that sum before specific opportunities are on the table.

The \$3 million is a proposed phase 1 expenditure from some \$8 million sitting in the county’s housing fund. The commitment from commissioners to spend some of the money is enough to move forward with discussions, starting with a scheduled meeting next week with U.S. Forest Service officials who are looking for partners in a redevelopment plan for the Aspen Ranger District site in Aspen’s West End, according to Phylis Mattice, county internal services director.

The Forest Service is contemplating a new headquarters on its 3-acre parcel, in conjunction with housing, and has been in contact with the city of Aspen, the county, and Aspen School District and hospital officials, she said.

“It’s time to get rid of our money and put it into housing,” said Commissioner Michael Owsley.

“If we get out in the community and say we’ve got some money and we’re ready to play, I think people are going to be knocking on our doors,” added Commissioner George Newman, urging staffers to find ways to effectively leverage the money to get as much housing bang for the buck as possible.

Staffers have recommended the county focus first on acquiring rental units, including housing that can be used to recruit new county employees as staff turns over. However, a suggested 50-50 split between housing specifically designated for county workers and housing for the workforce in general didn’t necessarily appeal to commissioners. Owsley and Commissioner Jack Hatfield voiced a willingness to be flexible on the 50-50 split, while Commissioner Rachel Richards urged flexibility in the allocation of units within specific projects. Overall, she urged spending the funds evenly between housing for county employees and housing for the greater workforce.

Staff will seek opportunities to partner with other entities that have plans to build housing, identify already constructed worker housing that the county could buy and then rent out, and watch the market for free-market units the county could buy or “buy down” – pay part of the purchase price so a worker can afford to take out a mortgage for the rest.

Commissioners declined, though, to consider participation in any project to be built outside of the urban growth boundaries that surround municipalities in the county.

“I’m not going to invade the rural areas to build housing,” Hatfield said.

### Housing impact fee redux

Commissioners also directed County Attorney John Ely to start over in coming up with a new Employee Housing Impact Fee, which the county charges new development and puts toward worker housing. The fee has helped generate the \$8 million now in the county’s housing fund.

They discussed raising the fee – which hadn’t kept pace with the price of construction and real estate – last year, but the economy tanked before anything was done. Now, the fee needs to be recalculated, said Ely, but so

few real estate transactions are taking place that coming up with accurate land costs will be difficult. An outside appraiser will be needed, he said.

Though the fees may not go up as much as the county originally contemplated, commissioners said they still want to see the fees revised and directed Ely to find out the cost of the appraisal work.

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