



Affordable Housing: Meeting the Need in Northeast Florida

On November 30, 2021, The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida hosted a Donors Forum to address the issue of affordable housing in our region. Foundation Senior Program Director James Coggin, who oversees the Supporting Neighborhoods initiative, began the program with a [snapshot](#) of the current state of affordable housing:

- The health, safety, and welfare of Florida and the strength of its economy hinges on an adequate supply of housing that is affordable for working families, elders, and people with disabilities living on fixed incomes ([Florida Housing Coalition Home Matters report](#)).
- Myths about affordable housing include that it is unsightly, only for the un-employed, an unfair giveaway, and brings in outsiders to neighborhoods. In reality, affordable housing includes many types, most people living there are employed, and 70 percent of residents already live within a few miles of the area. Affordable housing also stimulates the economy, allows workers to live near jobs, and helps kids stay in school.
- More than half the workers in counties served by the Foundation are not earning a housing wage, as designated by HUD Fair Market Rate, posing a significant challenge for many populations.
- Rent has increased more than 18 percent in the past year and home values are on the rise, greatly outpacing wage growth; inventory is also down in both single-family and multi-family markets.
- Generally, the market is not meeting the demand for housing that is affordable to significant portions of the workforce. The benchmark of affordability is recognized as housing expenses up to 30% of AGI.
- The housing market is currently a very difficult environment for developers of affordable housing, with intense competition for land, housing units, and materials.

Below are highlights from nonprofit leaders of four area nonprofits who were panel participants:

Shannon Nazworth, President and CEO of [Ability Housing](#):

- The market is currently so hot that it is creating a difficult environment for nonprofits, who are competing with a lot of interest from investors and dealing with sellers who can make demands.
- Affordable housing can often get rezoned, or affordability restrictions can expire, making properties ripe targets for developers who are not going to build affordable housing.
- If the Build Back Better plan passes at the federal level, it will include a lot of investment in affordable housing, which will be very helpful for organizations such as ours.
- While government support is critical to addressing the need for affordable housing, it can only do so much. Community support is essential for it to be a non-negotiable issue that outlives administrations. Affordable housing is also not a one-sector issue; it needs to be a partnership between government, private sector, and non-profits.
- In order to address affordable housing, two things have to happen: housing must be more affordable, and incomes must increase so people can continue to afford housing. It is a “both and” situation, not either or.

Paul Tutwiler, Executive Director of [Northwest Jacksonville Community Development Corporation](#):

- Community development corporations have the responsibility to be protectors of the community. Owning a home is not simply a form of housing, it is an investment in future equity. We try to educate residents so they understand this and help them take advantage of this investment.

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- We face a wide range of challenges, including providing enough affordable rental opportunities that people can work their way out of bad conditions, controlling the high rental-to-owner rate, encouraging long-term investment in the neighborhood, and helping increase a sense of ownership and pride, which leads to less crime.
- America needs increased gentle resettlement of neighborhoods, as opposed to displacement of current residents commonly known as gentrification, which would bring huge benefits in terms of uplift and investment.

Dr. Irvin “PeDro” Cohen, Executive Director of [LISC Jacksonville](#):

- We constantly grapple with how to make our neighborhoods destinations where people want to live, while not disenfranchising the people who are already there – encouraging both new residents and retention of existing ones.
- The current gap that often exists between home appraisals and sales prices is incredibly challenging and detrimental. There needs to be a good look taken at the current algorithm being used to appraise homes.
- Attracting people to a neighborhood by expanding affordable housing provides children in the community opportunities that are not found in areas of concentrated poverty.
- We are encouraged by the city beginning to utilize community land trusts, which put aside land in reserve to help with affordable housing.

Bill Lazar, Executive Director of [St. Johns Housing Partnership](#):

- We are constantly trying to maintain the affordable housing we do have and keep it in the community, rather than it being sold to investors. This is difficult to do in the current market.
- Home values are based on what people will pay, not what the value should be. This causes issues such as understaffing in our schools (which draw people to St. Johns County and are currently very overcrowded), because teachers can’t afford to live here, and people getting overpriced out of the rental market because rental prices are so high.
- While SHIP (State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program) does help with land for affordable housing, a lot of times it is not in ideal locations – like near good transportation, etc. The government has the potential to play a more major role. I wish we could ask every developer to set aside some of their inventory for affordable housing. It is the biggest market in America.

Immediate Needs You Could Support:

- **Ability Housing’s** most immediate need is access to capital and the ability to be financially competitive with for-profit companies. Please contact [Shannon Nazworth](#) to start a conversation.
- **NW Jax CDC’s** current most immediate need is encouraging new growth and people coming to the neighborhood, while at the same time staying true to our vision of being a place where existing residents want, and can afford, to stay. Please contact [Paul Tutwiler](#) to explore ways to partner.
- **LISC Jax** needs access to capital, in particular a revolving loan fund to allow us to serve our CDCs and compensate them for the houses they are building. Contact [PeDro Cohen](#) to learn more.
- **St. Johns Housing Partnership’s** most immediate need is education. Affordable housing is not charity; it is an important facet of economic development and a bedrock of every community. Businesses will go under if staff cannot afford to live in a community and work there. We need a groundswell of people talking about this, and we need buy-in from business leaders. Feel free to contact [Bill Lazar](#) to explore projects underway and advocacy opportunities.

The entire Donors Forum was recorded—you may access the video [here](#).

For more information, please contact Joanne E. Cohen, J.D., Vice President, Philanthropic Services jcohen@jaxcf.org or (904) 356-4483.