

# Orlando Sentinel

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## Horrors highlight need to protect housing funds: Editorial

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*(Red Huber, Orlando Sentinel)*

Central Florida doesn't have nearly enough decent, affordable housing. That's an inescapable conclusion from a heartbreaking series of recent Sentinel stories about residents stuck living in two deteriorating condominium complexes in Orange County: Blossom Park and Tymber Skan.

Stories such as these underscore the need for lawmakers to reject a proposal to shrink state funding for affordable housing.

At Blossom Park, whose residents include more than 100 schoolchildren, all seven buildings have been condemned. Engineers have found that the stairwells are unsafe. The county has been offering residents assistance to relocate, and is considering an evacuation order.

At Tymber Skan, residents are living with rodents, rotting floors, leaking pipes and exposed wires. Landlords have racked up \$21 million in fines for building-code violations. So far the County Commission has spent \$190,000 in public money for repairs at the private complex.

Yet many residents in both complexes haven't moved because they don't have decent, affordable alternatives. Like too many other Central Floridians in substandard housing, they feel trapped.

Affordable housing also is a challenge for many moderate-income families in the region, like police, nurses and teachers.

Florida lawmakers approved a plan more than two decades ago to respond to the need for affordable housing. With the cooperation of a coalition of developers, real-estate agents and local governments, lawmakers raised Florida's documentary-stamp tax on real-estate transactions and dedicated the dollars to state and local housing trust funds.

When the Great Recession took a bite out of state tax revenues, lawmakers raided trust funds to pay for other, unrelated expenses. But the budget is now back in black; state economists are projecting a surplus of more than \$1 billion next year. There's no need — or excuse — to plunder the funds again.

The housing trust funds are in line for \$267 million from doc-stamp taxes next year — about 16 percent of the total. But a Senate bill would use voters' passage last year of Amendment 1, which earmarked 33 percent of doc-stamp revenues for land and water conservation, to reduce affordable housing's cut. Its trust funds would end up with \$154 million — more than \$100 million less than they are owed.

But there's more than enough in doc-stamp revenues for lawmakers to meet their new obligations under Amendment 1 and maintain the current funding formula for affordable housing. The only reason lawmakers wouldn't do both is because they'd rather spend the money on something else.

That'd be a poor choice, and not just because of the need for affordable housing. Fully funding the trust funds would generate a positive economic impact, statewide, of more than \$3 billion, and support nearly 25,000 private-sector jobs.

Lawmakers shouldn't fall for the bogus Amendment 1 excuse. They need to give affordable housing its due.