



the full amount, which is dedicated state revenue collected on the documentary stamp tax paid on all real estate transactions. The compromise came down to an \$81 million sweep, still a steep reduction in a state where homelessness abounds — with the third largest homeless population in the nation.

Had there been full funding from the trust this fiscal year, Manatee County could have received almost \$4 million under the State Housing Initiatives Partnership Program, according to the Sadowski Housing Coalition, a nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated to affordable housing projects. That translates into 419 homes either built, sold, renovated or retrofitted under SHIP, and the number of people housed would have been around 1,048.

Fiscal year 2015-2016 was worse, with \$175 million allocated for the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund out of a total \$256 million available from the trust. And that was an improvement from the previous budget year.

Another statewide Sadowski program, the State Apartment Incentive Loan Program (SAIL), produces living quarters for workers, rehabilitates existing apartments in desperate need of repair and keeps the frail elderly, the disabled and other vulnerable populations in their own housing rather than being forced into institutions or homelessness. Both programs are essential to mitigating the state's growing affordable housing dilemma. State subsidies on affordable housing projects is highly competitive among developers. Without those subsidies, the economics of some prospective affordable housing projects are impractical.

Manatee County and Bradenton have put a high priority on creating affordable housing. This year, the county launched its Affordable Housing Advisory Board to review codes that create barriers to such developments. This board is a state requirement of local governments in order to qualify for state funding. The county already offers impact fee reductions, but other incentives are under discussion — such as greater density per acre to spread out the cost of land and the county's surplus property and infill lots. As discussed last month at a board meeting, cost effectiveness and feasibility are key factors for builders. The county is on a sensible path to addressing this issue in a substantial way.

Bradenton, too, is now focused on the problem — for one thing, by keeping watch on county strategies. Streamlining codes to remove unnecessary hurdles to development, incentive programs, home-buying assistance with government grants are among the ideas with the city's Planning and Development director, Catherine Hartley, new to the job this year, being a strong proponent of creating more affordable housing in order for future growth.

State business and industry organizations wholeheartedly embrace Sadowski, including the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Bankers Association and Associated Industries of Florida. The potential economic benefits statewide should convince the Legislature and governor of the wise investment in affordable housing, with full Sadowski funding this year estimated at creating 32,000 jobs and pumping \$4.6 billion into the economy.

While Manatee County and Bradenton engage the advancement of public policies to address the lack of affordable housing with vigor, the state lags behind. As we've opined before, the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund is a wise investment into local communities and a wise investment in families, veterans, the elderly, the disabled, the homeless and other needy Floridians. The Legislature and governor should recognize all these benefits and stop diverting funds elsewhere.