

Don't raid Florida's affordable housing trust fund yet again



Officials still like the Village Lofts concept of a live-and-work affordable housing community in the 1400 block of 14th Street West. On Tuesday, the DDA recommended to allow a third attempt at tax credits to make the project viable.

Bradenton Herald Editorial

The lack of affordable and workforce housing is not a Bradenton dilemma. It's not a Palmetto hardship. It's not a Manatee County predicament. Just about everywhere in Florida it is a political question. Nobody has come up with a solution.

The Sunshine State has a meritorious partial answer, if only it is allowed to work. The Sadowski Act, passed into law in 1992, pumps money into affordable housing programs statewide through the documentary stamp tax paid on real estate transactions. But those dollars are basically stolen by Tallahassee politicians more interested in funding their goals — by explaining the money was needed to balance the state budget.

This year is like many others. The Legislature has yet to rob the c Trust Fund bank, but Gov. Rick Scott has set his sights on the easy money. His budget proposal, which he titled "Fighting for Florida's Future" to "create opportunities for generations of Floridians," sweeps about two-thirds — 77 percent — of the lawfully dedicated money supposedly going into the Sadowski fund back into his \$83.5 billion state budget plan.

Scott's attempted heist amounts to \$224 million earmarked for low-income housing from state and local housing funds this coming fiscal year — for his priorities. Last year, lawmakers stole \$200 million out of the

trust, cutting Scott's raid down from almost \$240 million. The year before, the Legislature allocated \$175 million of the \$255 million that should have been spent on affordable housing.

The political message is crystal clear. Housing for the poor is not a priority, not even a low one, not by any measure.

The powers that be ignore the outcries from the Associated Industries of Florida, AARP, the Florida Realtors Association, the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Home Builders Association and other organizations — all members of the Sadowski Housing Coalition — to fully fund Sadowski. The coalition includes also represents local governments, churches, veterans, people with disabilities and the homeless.

The coalition estimates should the trust be fully funded, it would bring \$3.78 billion in positive economic impact for the state's economy and 28,700 jobs. Our "jobs" governor appears to be deaf to that.

"Fully funding affordable housing goes a long way toward enhancing our state's workforce and business climate," Brewster Bevis, senior vice president of the business lobbying group Associated Industries of Florida, stated this month. "If we can ensure that Florida's employees, at all income levels, can find a safe and reliable affordable home near their job, our state can continue to be one of the best places to do business."

The governor has expressed similar views about the workforce and business. Where is he now?

Manatee County and the municipalities could use the legally endowed state funding.