

Barbara Glass: Use affordable housing fund as intended

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Barbara Glass/Special to The Guardian

This is a test: Is the Sadowski Trust Fund meant to support affordable housing, or is it a slush fund to balance the state's budgetary shortfalls?

What is the Sadowski Trust Fund? The fund was enacted in 1992 with bipartisan support to create a dedicated revenue source for affordable housing. It is funded through an addition to the documentary stamp tax on real estate sales.

Since around 2003, the trust fund has been raided ("swept") routinely of about a third of its revenues by Tallahassee lawmakers for other uses such as hurricane recovery and transfer to the general fund for undefined purposes.

Two programs were created to distribute trust fund revenues: the State Housing Initiative (SHIP) and State Apartment Incentive Loan (SAIL) programs. Gov. Ron DeSantis' 2020 budget proposal repeats his call for full funding of the SHIP and SAIL programs.

The 2018 housing statutes of the state of Florida (Chapter 420) state the intention of the law: "... to begin the process of articulating a state housing strategy that will carry the state towards the goal of assuring that by the year 2010 each Floridian shall have decent and affordable housing." That goal has obviously not been met as 2010 is in the rear-view mirror!

The situation has only deteriorated during this decade. From 2008 to 2017 the Sadowski Fund generated \$1.9 billion, but only \$578.5 million of that went to affordable housing.

In the last year the Sadowski Fund raised about \$325 million. The Legislature appropriated and "swept" \$125 million (38%) from the fund to the general fund, \$115 million (35%) to Hurricane Michael relief, and only \$85 million (26%) toward statewide affordable housing.

As the distributions of funding above demonstrate, instead of supporting affordable housing, the Florida Legislature continues to make it more difficult for cities and counties themselves to do so.

Preemptive 2019 laws state that if inclusionary housing, defined as a given share of new construction required by municipal and county planning ordinances to be affordable by people with low-to-moderate incomes, can only be mandated if a county provides "incentives to fully offset all costs to the developer of its affordable housing contribution." (Chapter 125.01055) And rents on privately owned properties cannot be controlled unless found "to eliminate an existing housing emergency which is so grave as to constitute a serious menace to the general public." (Chapter 166.043)

The answer to our test: The Sadowski Trust Fund is a trust fund intended by law to support affordable housing, and the Legislature should take the steps necessary to restore our trust in them by honoring the purpose of the Sadowski Act.

The League of Women Voters of Alachua County, as the Gainesville Sun's editorial board has done in the past, calls for the full proceeds from the Sadowski funds to be spent as intended, to help house the neediest 50% of our county's citizens.

Barbara Glass is president of the League of Women Voters of Alachua County/Gainesville.

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