



# Legislative raiding of affordable housing fund

Citrus County Chronicle | January 28, 2020

“First, do no harm.”

**THE ISSUE:** Fixing the affordable housing mess.

**OUR OPINION:** It’s important for community building, including jobs.

Florida — and Citrus County — have an affordable housing problem.

This is important: When we talk about affordable housing, we’re really talking about community well-being.

Multiple studies observe that communities with sufficient clean, safe, affordable housing are far more likely to see better health outcomes, less hunger, children doing better in school, and — underlying all this — greater job growth and better economic conditions.

What is affordable housing? It’s more than just government-subsidized shelter, which is outside the experience of most readers of this newspaper.

Housing is affordable if costs are no more than 30% of income. That means a full-time hourly worker making the minimum wage of \$8.56 per hour could afford a rent of around \$445. According to updated U.S. Census data, Citrus County’s most recent per capita income was \$25,983, or \$12.49 per hour. At that level, affordable housing would be about \$650. The census update also notes that the county’s median gross rent is \$815.

The Florida Housing Coalition reported recently that nearly 1 million Floridians, or almost 5% of us, spend more than 50% of income on housing.

Citrus County has a service economy, heavy on tourism, and service jobs are notoriously low-paying. Workers wanting a good life need a dependable job, affordable housing, and a convenient way to get to work. Citrus County has room for improvement on all factors.

It’s not just an individual issue; lack of affordable housing affects economic development as well. A number of central and south Florida cities and counties are facing the facts spotlighted in a recent National Association of Realtors report titled “Home Affordability Index Ranking and Payroll Job Growth.” That report found “areas with unaffordable home prices are starting to see a decline in job growth.”

Tampa was among the metro areas ranked by the NAR. It dropped dramatically in affordability between 2014 and 2019: home prices jumped 58%, three times the growth of median family income. As affordability declined, the job growth in Tampa, previously a shining star among Florida metros, dropped almost 1%.

People displaced when housing is not affordable include those integral to community building, for example teachers, health workers, servers, cashiers, and a range of other working-class employees. How can individuals — or businesses — be interested in places where there’s little affordable housing or convenient ways to get to work?

Florida has had a great program since 1992 called the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund. A portion of documentary stamp taxes on real estate transactions goes into this fund, so as the real estate market improves, more money is generated. It supports the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (locally administered SHIP program) to help families, and the State Apartment Incentives

Loan (SAIL program) to incentivize affordable housing developers.



The problem? Twelve times, legislators have raided Sadowski funds for various uses including to balance the state budget. Last year, for example, the Legislature swiped nearly half. It's shameful that Florida's leaders have contributed to what many now recognize as an affordable housing crisis.

Gov. Ron DeSantis is again asking legislators not to raid the Sadowski funds. And though we shouldn't have to make laws to ensure that legislators do the right thing, in the current session, SB 306 and HB 381 would essentially prohibit them from sweeping monies from the trust to the general fund.

Contact Rep. Ralph Massullo and Sen. Wilton Simpson. Tell them that Sadowski Trust funds should be spent as intended, on community building through support of affordable housing.

Article last accessed [here](#) on January 29, 2020.