

naplesnews.com

Consultants push for more affordable housing in Lee

By Charlie Whitehead

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

Consultants talked to Lee County's Affordable Housing Committee on Wednesday before a standing-room-only crowd, using phrases like "demand for work-force housing," "identifying linkage" and "subsidy required."

What Michael Reitmann heard was impact fees, impact fees, impact fees.

Reitmann, executive director of the Lee Building Industry Association, believes the information a team from Clarion Associates told the committee will be used to justify yet another development fee.

"I go to the bottom line," Reitmann said. "I live in the real world."

The study, done in part by James Nicholas, the University of Florida economist behind much of the impact fee formula in Florida, does peg new proposed fees, as well as identify options like inclusionary zoning and incentives for low-cost development.

Nicholas said he used real local statistics on people employed in specific types of buildings and in specific types of jobs and how much they make. Using the price of a below-median cost home, he calculated the affordable housing demand created by each square foot of specific commercial and residential use.

The bottom line is an impact of \$1,110 on a 2,000-square-foot home. It's also \$36.63 for every square foot of tourist-related commercial space — hotels and restaurants — built.

"Who is poorest paid in Lee County?" Nicholas asked himself.

"People who work in the tourist industry. Who sweep out the hotels. And there are the most of them. Does it surprise you that tourist workers have the greatest need?"

Reitmann said he doesn't doubt the data collected by the consultants is accurate, but he thinks he knows how it'll be used.

"The assumption is we have this need and we're going to be charging it to new construction," he said.

The reports received by the committee Wednesday do outline other affordable housing options. Other communities have made higher densities automatic for lower-cost housing, for example, and development reviews streamlined.

"A multi-dimensional approach is critical," consultant Craig Richardson said. "There is no silver bullet."

The committee will hear from Clarion again next month. The consultants will also make a visit to the Horizon Council, the county's economic development committee.

© 2007 Naples Daily News and NDN Productions. Published in Naples, Florida, USA by the E. W. Scripps Co.