

Sussex approves affordable rental plan 121508

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Developers will get density bonuses to build low-cost units

By DAN SHORTRIDGE

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Sussex County has approved an affordable rental housing program aimed at boosting the number of moderately priced apartments on the market.

The pilot project, approved last week, gives bonus densities and expedited review of rental housing projects that have a certain percentage of units priced at affordable levels.

For a family of four, the affordable range would be between \$400 to \$900 for a three-bedroom apartment or town house.

Housing activists said affordable rental housing is a long-term issue, and the county's plan is a good one.

"We believe that things could get worse before they get better," said housing advocate Sandy Spence. "It is our hope this

will give private developers an incentive."

Developers must apply to the county for approval under the three-year pilot program.

County Council President Finley B. Jones Jr., D-Greenwood, said Sussex needs a stable supply of affordable housing, particularly for workers in the service sectors.

"Jobs are no good if we don't have somewhere for people to live," he said.

Under the project, unanimously approved by County Council, developers would receive speeded-up review of their projects -- a few months compared to a year -- and a 20 percent density bonus for sites in development areas and around towns. Units would have to remain in the program for 30 years.

Developers with between 25 and 64 rental units must put at least 40 percent of those into the county program; projects with 65 or more units must put 15 percent into the program.

The affordable-rate apartments must be "fully integrated" into the communities and not look substantially different from

the market-rate units. They also must include any appliances that the market-rate units do, such as washers, dryers, ovens

and refrigerators.

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Renters would have to meet income guidelines, work within the county for at least a year before applying, have a clean criminal record and be U.S. citizens.

William Lecates, the county's community development and housing director, said while rental prices have gone up, wages

have stayed low or stagnant.

"As we've seen with the mortgage problems in recent months, homeownership just isn't possible for millions of

Americans. Instead they have to look at renting as an alternative," Lecates said. "But even affordable rentals elude many

people in the marketplace."

Additional Facts

FYI

For more information on the Sussex rental program, call 855-7777. A copy of the ordinance approved last week can be

found at <http://sussexcountyde.gov>.
