



David O'Keefe
LEON COUNTY COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 5

Dear Friend,

Here is a sneak preview of my op-ed that is scheduled to be published tomorrow in the Tallahassee Democrat. I want you to see it before anyone else.

If you want to see this proposal approved to bring needed affordable rental housing to Leon County, let your County Commissioners know by emailing ccattach@leoncountyfl.gov.

Sincerely,

-David

Stop the Insanity: Let's Lead on Affordable Housing

We cannot continue doing the same thing and expecting different results. We cannot continue to oppose more affordable rental housing for our neighbors who live on low and very low incomes.

In 2024, 16,000 families in Leon County had to spend more than half their income on housing, a significant increase from 14,000 families in 2022. Despite our efforts to date, the crisis keeps getting worse. The situation is dire, and we must act now.

When my dad developed a nervous system disorder, it devastated our family's financial stability. We lost our home after bankruptcy, car repossession, and payday loans. I can tell you that these experiences shape every child who goes through them. This drives me to fight for affordable housing for our neighbors: the parents working double shifts, retirees who spent their lives contributing to this community, and young professionals who want to build their lives here.

On January 28th, the County Commission will vote on a proposal to double the annual production of affordable rental units by setting aside \$1.3 million annually to buy land and lease it back to developers in exchange for guaranteed affordable units. By enacting this program, we can follow the lead of Pinellas County and others who are already investing in their community's future.

Even those who can afford stable housing are impacted by our housing crisis. This crisis underlies every societal problem we face and say we care about solving. Without affordable housing, our kids cannot learn in school and will

fall behind their peers. People forego medical care to pay rent, our communities become less diverse, and instability worsens public safety.

Our affordable housing crisis has a staggering impact on our economy. A recent study found that the shortage of affordable housing in major cities costs the American economy about two trillion dollars in lower wages and productivity yearly. Businesses suffer when we cannot develop a workforce since workers cannot afford to live here. Rent-burdened families are unable to contribute to the local economy when everything goes to rent.

The benefits of investing in affordable housing are not just social but also economic. According to the National Association of Home Builders, constructing 100 affordable rental units can generate \$11.7 million in local income, \$2.2 million in taxes, and other revenues and create 161 local jobs in the first year alone. This sound investment will pay off in every area of our community.

We desperately need more affordable housing now. If other counties can do it, we can too. We need to stop finding reasons to say no and find ways to say yes. Approving this proposal gives hope to the more than 1,000 homeless children in our schools, the families who cannot get needed medical care, and the local economic progress that is being stifled.

The time is now to say yes to this incredible investment in our community's future. Let your County Commissioners know that adding more affordable rental units is important to you.

-David O'Keefe

All County Commissioners can be reached at ccattach@leoncountyfl.gov.

Affordable Housing Proposal

At our November Commission Meeting I received unanimous approval to have our staff collaborate with the [Capital Area Justice Ministry](#) (CAJM) and prepare an agenda item with a proposal amending our 5-year capital improvement budget to set aside 20% of the county's annual Blueprint surcharge revenues, beginning in 2026 to fund an Affordable Rental Housing Land Acquisition and Leaseback Program modeled on the [Penny for Pinellas Land Assembly Fund](#).

If approved, this proposal would set aside nearly \$1.3 million for affordable rental housing projects each year that include rental units for extremely low and very low income families.

How it Works:

The plan that CAJM is proposing allows the Leon County Housing Finance Authority (HFA) to review developer applications and obtain appraisals for the land that is proposed for the project. If approved, the HFA commits to purchase the land and then lease it back to the developer for 99 years for an annual fee to the property taxes they would pay.

In exchange, the developer would agree to set aside a specified percentage of units for renters with extremely-low and very-low incomes. The purchase-leaseback arrangement reduces the developer's upfront capital costs by the amount of the cost of the land. This reduces the debt the developer must incur to begin the project and frees up money to be devoted to other capital costs of the project.



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