

Delray seen as housing model Affordable homes subject of symposium

By George Andreassi
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PORT SALERNO · Looking for innovative ways to cope with skyrocketing home prices, more than 300 people packed a symposium on affordable housing held Friday by the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council.

Experts from Delray Beach, Chicago and the Silicon Valley in California, shared their methods for helping middle-class families buy homes even though they could not pay market prices.

Investors have fueled the doubling of home prices on the Treasure Coast in the last three years, making it increasingly difficult for middle income workers -- such as teachers, police officers, middle managers and skilled workers -- to buy homes, several experts said.

The quality of life will decline in a community where middle-class workers cannot afford to live because the services they provide will become increasingly scarce, several experts said. On the Treasure Coast, middle-income ranges from \$32,000 to \$75,000 per year.

"This is not a bubble. This is actually a crisis," Michael Busha, executive director of the planning council, told the symposium at the Chastain Campus of Indian River Community College. "I think everyone has accepted the fact that something needs to be done about it."

In Florida, Delray Beach seems to be at the forefront of efforts to promote affordable housing.

The city has a voluntary density bonus program that allows developers to build up to 24 houses per acre -- although growth rules ordinarily allow no more than 12 homes per acre -- in exchange for building affordable housing, said Joe Gray, a city redevelopment official.

Delray Beach also has a community land trust in which the city accumulates land for use as affordable housing, Gray said. Developers can gain the right to build additional homes in exchange for donating land or money to the trust.

In Chicago, a nonprofit agency recruited businesses and governments to help build affordable housing for their workers, said Robin Snyderman, of the Metropolitan Planning Council.

Businesses in the Silicon Valley contributed money to a housing trust fund that augmented other funds to help more than 5,000 middle-income families obtain affordable housing, said Carl Guardino, of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group.

Innovative architecture can make affordable houses look like more expensive houses and help them fit into almost any neighborhood, said Kathleen Dorgan, who has designed affordable housing in cities nationwide.

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