



**Habitat
for Humanity®**

of Pinellas & West Pasco Counties

Legislative Priorities

Board Approved - February 2021



Introduction

Access to safe, decent and affordable housing for many in our service area, in our State and throughout much of the Country remains elusive. All too often families struggle just to afford the basic cost of a home. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected low to moderate-income households, further exacerbating the ever-growing need for affordable housing. Unfortunately, hammers and nails alone cannot fully address this social ill. Both broad-based and targeted policies need to be enacted (and sometimes repealed) to enhance access to affordable housing and ultimately accomplish our vision in which everyone has a decent place to live.

Thus, in alignment with Habitat for Humanity International (HfHI), Florida's Affiliate Support Office (ASO) and countless affiliates across the US, our affiliate is both setting policy priorities and actively working to meet established policy outcomes. Together as a collective voice and taking collective actions, we seek to make a measurable impact in the lives of those we serve.

Our policy priorities will focus on all three levels of government (federal, state & local) and will be detailed below. Our federal priorities will align with HfHI's policy solutions, assisting in amplifying the national message throughout our service area and to our federally elected officials. Our state-level priorities will align with both Florida's ASO statewide policies and localized policies that specifically impact our service area. Lastly, we feel like we can have the greatest impact and influence working with our local municipalities. It is this work on the local level to influence policy where we will spend most of our time

and efforts, believing this is where we can have the greatest impact.

Recognizing that no single policy can solve our housing challenges, our policy priorities are organized into four categories of needed solutions:

Supply and Preservation • Access to Credit • Land Use • Communities of Opportunity

Addressing challenges in each of these focus areas, our policy agenda shines a spotlight on policy solutions that:

- increase the affordability of both homeownership and rental housing;
- lower the cost of homebuilding and land use regulations;
- expand public investment to meet the affordability and credit needs that the market cannot address on its own;
- allow every community to participate in economic recovery;
- connect more families to opportunities for economic mobility; and
- help close our nation's racial disparities in housing.

Local Priorities

Pasco County

Annexation of Town & Country Villas to New Port Richey: We believe it is in the best interest of both the current residents in Town & Country Villas and for the future redevelopment of the area to annex into the City of New Port Richey.

Reduction of Impact Fees throughout New Port Richey: Although strides have been made to reduce impact fees with not only the City of New Port Richey, but also the Pasco County School Board and Pasco County Board of County Commission, we are still seeking impact fee reduction for properties outside of our Town & Country Development within the City of New Port Richey. An expanded area of impact fee relief will assist building capacity within the City of New Port Richey, reducing fees for the homes we build.

Ensuring 10-Expedited Permitting: Pasco County affordable housing incentive strategy states “the processing time for single-family permitting is reduced from 21 days to approximately 10 days.” We aim to remove the ambiguity of “approximately 10 days” to be replaced by a more definitive timeframe and seek to ensure adherence to stated policy.

Municipal Lien Forgiveness Program: Currently, Pasco County does not offer municipal lien forgiveness to build affordable housing. This can be a powerful tool to aid in land acquisition and spur development. Successful implementation of such a program will open up additional land/lot opportunities and assist in building capacity.

Lot Disposition Program: A regional model has been created by another municipality to take possession of

unattended and blighted properties to be provided to affordable housing developers at minimal cost if redeveloped into affordable housing. Initial conversations within the County have started about creating such a program. Pasco County has a significant amount of distressed properties and has the potential to set up a robust program to advance affordable housing within the county.

City of Clearwater

Creation of Greenwood CRA: A Community Redevelopment Area (CRA), is a special taxing area that promotes reinvestments to revitalized areas that have long seen disinvestments and blight. The creation of a CRA in the Greenwood area would help ensure investments into the neighborhood in areas such as infrastructure and housing, thus advancing access to affordable housing in the area. The creation of a Greenwood CRA could potentially mean millions of dollars annually in reinvestment to the neighborhood.

Streamlining Level I Flexibility (Variance) Review: The current Level I Flexibility Review is cumbersome for affordable housing developers and time-consuming for even a fairly basic setback variance request. Applications are only accepted by the first business day of each month and take about 6 weeks to process (if all goes well). “The Flexibility process is calendar-based with strict deadlines.” If the application is submitted on the second business day of the month or later, it is moved to the next month’s applications, effectively delaying another 30 days. When flexibility/variance is needed, it is only after this process is completed that we can then apply for permitting. We aim to streamline as well as expedite this process.

Expedited Permitting: The City of Clearwater expedited permitting incentive states “Target dates and permit status are posted via the ePermit system and review time has been generally reduced to 14 days”. We aim to remove the ambiguity of “generally reduced to 14 days” to be replaced by a more definitive timeframe and seek to ensure adherence to stated policy.

Reduction of Permitting & Impact Fees: Currently the City of Clearwater does not have affordable housing incentives for the reduction of either permitting fees or impact fees. Approximate permitting costs average over \$2,000 per home. A reduction to a \$250 permitting fee to align with other local municipalities would have significant savings over time.

City of Gulfport

Municipal Lien Forgiveness Program: Municipal lien forgiveness to build affordable housing can be a powerful tool to aid in land acquisition and spur development. Successful implementation of such a program will open up additional land/lot opportunities and assist in building capacity within Gulfport, which historically has lacked affordable housing investments.

Lot Disposition Program: The neighboring City of St. Petersburg has created a regional model to take possession of unattended and blighted properties to be provided to affordable housing developers at minimal cost if redeveloped into affordable housing. The City of Gulfport is currently exploring the possibility of developing a similar program, yet on a smaller scale.

City of Largo

Expedited Permitting: The City of Largo expedited permitting incentive does not

provide any definitive timeframes for review, yet does state that projects are “marked for priority”. We aim to remove the ambiguity of “marked as a priority” to be replaced by a more definitive timeframe and seek to ensure adherence to stated policy.

Reduction of Permitting Fees: Currently the City of Largo does not offer affordable housing incentives for the reduction of permitting fees. Largo is currently offering a fee reduction due to the impact of Covid-19, which reduces permit fees by 50% until March 31st 2021 and then by 25% until August 31st, 2021. However, after the reduction period ends, the approximate permitting costs average over \$2,000 per home. A reduction to a \$250 fee to align with other local municipalities would have significant savings over time.

City of St. Petersburg

Rezoning Commercial/Industrial Property for Affordable Housing: Recently enacted HB 1339 allows local municipalities to create a specific process to approve developments of affordable housing on any parcel zoned for residential, commercial, or industrial use. Currently, the City of St. Petersburg is in the process of both reviewing and potentially creating such a process. Enactment of such regulation would increase the availability of re-developable land, especially along/near transit corridors.

Affordable Lot Disposition Program Scoring: St. Petersburg offers a process to distribute foreclosed properties to build single-family affordable housing. This is a competitive process open to for-profit developers, not-for-profit developers, or private citizens if they so choose. The process entails a formal application and a selection committee (1 staff and 2 citizens)

who review then rank applications based upon a standardized set of criteria. We feel the criteria used needs to be revamped to better weigh an organization's experience as well as performance specifically in the construction and sale of affordable housing.

Amend Expedited Permitting to Address Review Time-Frames: The City of St. Petersburg expedited permitting incentive states “will provide 10-day response time on the initial plan review”. While having an expedited and defined timeline for the initial plan review is exceptional, expediting the entire permitting process is desired.

Reduction of Permitting Fees for Homes >1500sqft: The City of St. Petersburg has reduced permitting fees for single-family homes built under 1400sqft to a flat rate of \$250. Homes larger than 1400sqft are subject to normal permitting fees, which typically range \$1,500 to \$2,000. Approximately, 25% of our homes built are between 1400sqft – 1500sqft and thus subject to increased fees. We aim to increase the threshold for reduced fees from under 1400sqft to under 1500sqft, which will cover almost 100% of the homes we build and save thousands of dollars annually in permitting fees.

Vision 2050: Vision 2050 is a community wide planning initiative that informs the updating of the City’s Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations (LDRs). We will seek to ensure both the supply of affordable housing is increased as well as the preservation of housing is maintained. Additionally, we will seek to ensure affordable homeownership remains a priority and is not replaced by other goals. Lastly, we will seek an update to the LDRs to allow for increased density where appropriate, ability to incorporate different housing typology, allow for the combination of parcels, and LDR amendments that will

lower the cost of homebuilding within St. Petersburg.

Pinellas Housing Compact: Pinellas County Government has launched an initiative for “development and joint implementation of a community housing compact between local governments.” This is a significant development for our community and cannot be overstated. A county wide approach would provide more consistency between municipalities, streamlining approaches/processes and work towards reducing barriers. Additionally local municipalities enhancing coordination could better align various incentives, development regulations and fees, while coordinating a truly cohesive county wide plan.

Work with all local municipalities for adoption

State Policy Priorities

Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund: The goal of the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund was to create a dedicated fund that would support both the construction and preservation of affordable housing throughout the state. Trust fund revenues come from an incremental increase of taxes paid on all property transactions. Recently, the trust fund has generated over \$300 million annually for affordable housing throughout the state. However, the trust fund can be ‘swept’ by the legislature to fill budget gaps or meet other needs throughout the State. Last year for the first time in over a decade the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund, was fully appropriated by the Florida Legislature. Unfortunately, due to the growing Covid-19 pandemic, Governor

DeSantis decided to veto the funding in the spring of 2020. Although the funding was vetoed, it was not (yet) 'swept' into other areas and remains held in the trust fund. For the legislative session beginning in March 2021, there will be an estimated \$600M of funding that should be appropriated for affordable housing. If fully appropriated, our service area would receive approximately \$30M with the majority of that funding earmarked to support affordable homeownership.

Position: Support Full Funding of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund

HB 13/SB 510 – State Funds: This bill language protects the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust from being 'swept' for Budget Stabilization or General Revenue Fund purposes. This would in effect 'lock' the trust fund to only be used for its specific and intended purpose, affordable housing. If enacted, this could mean hundreds of millions of dollars in funding over the next several years as over \$1B has been swept from the fund during the preceding 10 years.

Position: Support passage

Penny for Pinellas – Glitch Language

Amendment: Amends 'glitch' language within current statutory language related to "round four" of the "Penny for Pinellas" surtax. The Mayor's Council of Pinellas County as well as other local municipalities are supporting this proposal. Amendments would directly expand access to affordable housing, by clarifying certain terms and removing ambiguity. Examples, clarify that "land acquisition" may be accompanied by demolition and site preparation work needed to make the land usable for affordable housing. Clarify the scope of housing types by replacing the term "residential housing project" with "residential housing." This would remove an undefined

term used nowhere else in the Florida Statutes and eliminate the stigmatized term "project." Most importantly, it would clarify that affordable housing built on the land is not limited to large and mid-rise apartment complexes and can be tailored on a pre-development basis to fit the needs of each community and directly impacts Habitat for Humanity as a single-family affordable housing developer. Clarify how long land acquired according to this statute must be used for affordable housing by explicitly providing a minimum compliance period that starts from the time the land is acquired with surtax proceeds.

Position: Support Glitch Language Amendment(s)

Fees for the Enforcement of Florida

Building Code HB 1017– Pursuant to FS 553.80 (7)(a) a local government may only utilize fees earned by the building department for carrying out the local government's responsibilities in enforcing the Florida Building Code. Any unexpended balances shall be carried forward to future years for allowable activities or shall be refunded at the discretion of the local government. A local government may not carry forward an amount exceeding the average of its operating budget for enforcing the Florida Building Code for the previous 4 fiscal years. Any excess funds that are prohibited from being carried forward must be utilized to rebate and reduce fees. The proposed Building Permit Special Revenue Fund Bill would create a one-time exception to allow for excess funds to be utilized for affordable housing purposes. Such allowance would provide local municipalities flexibility to come into compliance with funding regulations while expanding affordable housing within their localities.

Position: Support Bill to be filed

Federal Policy Priorities

- Lower the down payment barrier to ensure everyone has a fair chance at becoming a homeowner. Many Americans are ready for homeownership but lack the deep savings or family wealth needed to assemble the down payment for an affordable home. This prevents credit-worthy households of all backgrounds from building a better life for themselves and their families. We need solutions that give all of us a fair chance to purchase a home, generate wealth and secure our families' future.

Approaches include:

- 1) Advance-able tax credit for low-wealth, first-time homebuyers;
- 2) Expanding down payment assistance in places where existing programs are insufficiently resourced to meaningfully reduce barriers to affordable homeownership for all renters, including homebuyers of color;
- 3) Scaling up successful savings programs like Assets for Independence and the Family Self-Sufficiency initiative; and
- 4) New, low-down-payment mortgage options that build on the success and lessons of Habitat for Humanity's homeownership model.

- Spark economic recovery through housing investments that enable everyone to prosper. Too many of our communities have been left behind, including formerly-redlined neighborhoods, towns devastated by deindustrialization, and other places experiencing high poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic has broadened and exacerbated this economic distress. Abandoned and deteriorating homes

deepen and accelerate a downward spiral in these communities. We need new tools to revitalize the housing stock in distressed and changing communities in ways that leave no one behind.

Approaches include:

- 1) adopt the Neighborhood Homes Investment Act tax incentive to unlock the housing market in communities with low home values and enable the private sector to rehabilitate homes for modestly priced homeownership; and
- 2) launch a major new initiative to repurpose vacant, dilapidated and foreclosed properties for affordable homeownership and affordable rental housing in disinvested neighborhoods and gentrifying communities.

- Significantly expand the availability of Housing Choice Vouchers to promote housing stability and economic mobility for low-income families. Housing vouchers are a highly efficient strategy for increasing housing affordability for very low-income households. But demand for vouchers far outstrips supply. A first step toward addressing the unmet need is passing the Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act. This legislation would create 500,000 housing vouchers coupled with mobility services to help very low-income families access affordable homes in neighborhoods with opportunities to move up the economic ladder. HUD should also find ways to enable more families to use their vouchers for homeownership—especially in markets where it is less expensive to own than to rent—without undercutting overall voucher availability.

- Strengthen the HOME program through robust federal funding and program improvements. The HOME program is a powerful and flexible resource for building affordable rental homes and homeownership options in a wide range of

communities. It should be strengthened through expanded funding, reauthorization, and regulatory changes to improve its availability and workability for affordable homeownership.

- Create federal incentives for states and local governments to improve zoning and reduce the cost of home in a diversity of neighborhoods. Habitat supports using supplemental grants for transportation, infrastructure, parks, and schools to spur competition among localities and states to lower the cost of building housing and reduce segregation through zoning and other regulatory reforms. Designed well, these incentives can reinforce existing fair housing law while enabling localities to devise locally customized solutions.