



Our community focused on our future

Affordable Housing Executive Summary

SCOPE (Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence) is a volunteer-driven, nonprofit organization dedicated to engaging community members in approaches to improving the quality of life in Sarasota County. Through its annual study of two important community issues and publishing an annual *Community Report Card* our community celebrates its successes and tackles its problems.

Affordable Housing was one of two topics studied in 2001-2002. The Affordable Housing Study Group convened in July, 2001 and was comprised of any community member who wished to participate. Nearly sixty individuals participated on and off throughout the seven months of weekly meetings; a core group of 42 individuals saw this rigorous process through to the end. The study group's focus was on low to moderate-income households (those earning less than 80% of the area median income or \$40,400 for a family of four in 2001). Their charge was to explore current efforts by private interests, local governments and nonprofit organizations to provide affordable housing, consider approaches taken by other communities and recommend actions that will ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing for low to moderate income residents of Sarasota County.

Fourteen meetings were dedicated to hearing presentations from key resource people on various aspects of affordable housing. Speakers included representatives from the Sarasota Office of Housing and Community Development, for-profit and nonprofit housing developers, residents affected by the lack of affordable housing, real estate industry, private lenders, Florida Housing Coalition, county government and each municipality within Sarasota County. The study group devoted twelve additional meetings to reach consensus on their findings, develop conclusions from those findings, and create recommendations for change.

The study group advanced 18 recommendations ranging from public education and advocacy, data collection and reporting, incentives for private sector builders to produce affordable housing, stronger code enforcement to preserve the existing affordable housing supply, making land available for affordable housing and reducing the time and expense associated with certain regulations. The following highlights emphasize some of the key conclusions and recommendations for change.

Major Problems

- A historic lack of community awareness and commitment has contributed to social and regulatory barriers to providing a sufficient supply of affordable housing in Sarasota County.
- Public subsidies alone are not sufficient to encourage the private sector to produce housing for low to moderate-income families, and local governments provide few incentives or local resources to support the production or rehabilitation of affordable housing.

- There is a need for greater commitment, coordination and collaboration by local governments, private interests and nonprofit organizations to ensure that specific actions are taken to provide an adequate supply of affordable housing
- There are public and private financing mechanisms available to housing developers that are not being maximized, in part due to lack of experience with affordable housing programs, technical complexities associated with securing and administering the funds and insufficient human resources.
- The extent to which the existing supply of affordable housing is substandard is not clear, but local resource speakers agree that the condition of housing is a much greater problem than available data indicates.

Recommended Solutions

- All local governments should make efforts to modify or eliminate regulations that create barriers to the production/rehabilitation of affordable housing or add significantly to its cost. These efforts should be balanced with specific, actionable, comprehensive plan policies for affordable housing and incentives for private sector involvement.
- The role of the Sarasota Office of Housing and Community Development should be expanded beyond the administration of federal and state funding programs and a new organization representing affordable housing interests should be formed to provide advocacy, public education and technical assistance. These two organizations should work together to coordinate and maximize the affordable housing efforts of the public, private and nonprofit sectors.
- In order to ensure the preservation of the existing housing stock, local governments should adopt a policy that strongly promotes the rehabilitation of deteriorated, substandard housing.

Implementation of the Recommendations

The next step in the SCOPE process is to use the volunteer, citizen influence of SCOPE to seek implementation of the recommendations contained in the study report. This process includes the tasks of education, advocacy and monitoring. Education is aimed at increasing the awareness of the public and officials about the study. The advocacy efforts are recommendation specific and will help build public support or target key decision-makers regarding their capacity to implement a recommendation.

Over the next few months, a volunteer Implementation Task Force will develop an implementation strategy, including a general timetable, priorities among the recommendations and some measurable objectives to assess progress. This task force will spend up to two years advancing the recommendations to appropriate decision-makers and organizations within the community. The task force will assess its progress at periodic intervals and report on the outcomes of its efforts to the SCOPE Board and to the public.

To download a copy of the full report visit the SCOPE website at www.scopexcel.org