

Top Five Wins for Workforce Housing

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Photo courtesy Gulf Coast Community Foundation: Family Promise of South Sarasota Countyâ€™s Parkside Cottages in Venice for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

A lack of workforce housing is a national issue and deeply impacts our Gulf Coast region. At [Gulf Coast Community Foundation](#), we have heard the call for help from residents, nonprofit organizations, and business leaders.

For years, we have been working behind the scenes on a systemic solution to reduce the imbalance between the demand for and available supply of workforce housing. Our community has built many workforce housing units over the past few decades, but with the large-scale creation of market-rate units, demand overwhelms new supply efforts.

The key to workforce housing is market-based, matching the supply with the demand. We must consider all policy decisions that increase the demand for service workforce housing.

The good news is there are some recent, local workforce housing wins I want to share with you today.

1. We have a *Blueprint for Workforce Housing Action Plan* that Gulf Coast co-commissioned with the City and County of Sarasota Government. It provides tested, feasible solutions. We are making forward progress on some of these best practice strategies, including using government surplus lands for accessible, quality workforce housing.
2. Together with some of our generous donors, Gulf Coast Community Foundation funded the development of a 10-unit apartment complex for veterans in the City of Sarasota on land provided by the city. Alongside the City of Sarasota, Office of Housing and Community Development, and St. Vincent de Paul CARES, we are building permanent workforce housing, owned and managed by a nonprofit agency providing safe housing for veterans in need.
3. The Sarasota Herald-Tribune noted Sarasota County recently approved tiered impact fees for developers building workforce housing. This is a big step forward in incentivizing the market to build workforce housing, and we thank the Sarasota County Commission for this important step.
4. Jon Thaxton, Gulf Coast's senior vice president of community leadership, serves on Sarasota County's Affordable Housing Advisory Committee. The committee's report is a guide that can be implemented now. One of the most important recommendations from the advisory committee is the adoption of an inclusionary zoning code that requires developers to build workforce housing units to meet the demand created by the new market-rate housing they are creating.
5. The community successfully supported the allocation of \$25 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds that could catalyze the creation of over 700 units of workforce housing. Those projects are in motion, including the two developments mentioned below.

Community & Assisted Supported Living, a nonprofit partner who provides safe, affordable and supportive housing for adults with developmental differences and mental health diagnoses, proposed a new development in northern Sarasota County. The project is moving forward with federal, state and county support.

Family Promise of South Sarasota County is a strong and innovative nonprofit partner of Gulf Coast. They have stepped up to meet the needs of residents in southern Sarasota County. Gulf Coast awarded \$400,000 to FPSSC for 12 Parkside Cottages in Venice for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Collaboration with housing developers and using surplus government-owned land creates public-private partnership that works.

Gulf Coast identified the critical need for workforce housing in 2017, and it was the top priority in the 2019 and 2021 Gulf Coast Regional Scans which are conducted periodically with stakeholder input.

The first step in solving this social issue is acknowledging the problem. Many sectors are now working together to address the need for additional housing for all income levels. It will take significant and consistent effort to remedy the imbalance of housing stock available so that the supply meets the demand. Celebrating wins helps us to reinforce what is working and build momentum, to achieve more together.

Mark Pritchett is President and CEO of Gulf Coast Community Foundation.

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