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Units needed: 130,000

Housing summit to focus on 10,000 — a fraction of the solution

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Despite the voices calling attention to the need for more affordable housing, only about 3% of the 2019-2020 Miami-Dade County budget is dedicated to solving the crisis.

And a crisis it is.

Researchers say 130,000 new housing units are needed; the county has plans for 10,000.

The Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners passed the budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which has \$8.9 billion allocated and \$263 million for affordable housing. Community organizers are calling on elected officials to do more for housing.

"We had a lot to say about the county budget," Adrian Madriz said.

Madriz, 31, has been a community organizer since 2014 and became Miami Workers Center's affordable housing coordinator in February 2019.

"The total need far exceeds the goal," Madriz said. "It's too low, absolutely. They're not dedicating nearly enough, not even close. You would need to spend five years of the county budget to cover that expense, to make it so we can have the 130,000 units needed right now."

At least, the public and the private sectors are willing to discuss the housing problem.

District 9 Commissioner Dennis C. Moss will host "Closing in 10,000 - A Housing Summit" at the Wolfson Campus of Miami Dade College on Oct. 7 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tickets are \$30. Moss is also chairman of the County's Housing and Community and Economic Development Committee.

Moss was unavailable for comment as of press time.

Daniella Pierre is chairwoman of the NAACP Housing Committee and thinks it's unbelievable the county is charging residents.

"I think that's unfair that the people in dire need of housing have to be charged to attend to voice their concerns about how to make it better," Pierre said. "Residents shouldn't have to pay to attend that. It's in a public space they're meeting."

District 5 Commissioner Eileen Higgins, where the event will take place, said she was surprised at the \$30 and assumed it is to pay for food and to pay MDC for the conference.

"When I went on to register, I was surprised," Higgins said. "I don't have anything to do with setting it up."

Higgins said Moss, the chair of the housing committee, and PHCD Director Liu set a fee.

"You cannot have a meeting like this in a field," Higgins said. "It has to have conference rooms. "It has to have break out rooms."

PHCD Public Information and Intergovernmental Officer Annette Molina said for the fee attendants get breakfast, lunch, reception and expenses such as rent have to be paid.

Speakers will include U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos A. Gimenez, Miami-Dade County Chairwoman Audrey M. Edmonson and Executive Director of the Housing Opportunity Commission in Montgomery County Stacy Spann.

The summit will consist of five information panels on housing projects and two policy panels. Employees of the County's Public Housing and Community Development, including Director Michael Liu, will moderate the projects panels. The housing projects to be discussed at the summit are among 80, which will have at least been paid for by November 2020, an election year for dozens of local seats in addition to state and federal offices.

Liu responded via email a list of the 80 identified projects will not be available until the housing summit.

"The projects that will be addressed will have units in the affordable and workforce categories, meaning from 0% to 140% of area median income (this is the definition set by state and local laws and policies)," Liu wrote.

The policy panels will be about resource allocation and funding ideas for housing and transforming neighborhoods with inclusivity in mind.

Madriz will be a panelist on "Policy Panel 2: Inclusivity Strategies for Transforming Neighborhoods."

"The housing summit is a step in the right direction," Madriz said.

Miami Workers Center has a femme agenda, which demands that poverty be defeminized.

"Places with the deepest amounts of poverty are places where women and girls are not able to access any kind of poverty-alleviating services, all of the things that an economy needs to survive," Madriz said. "Women are not receiving those benefits and services equally, and it's a result of poor housing planning."

Plans for the summit coincided with the March 2019 publishing of a report titled "Miami's Housing Affordability Crisis," from city planners and researchers Richard Florida and Steven Pedigo. The County's Housing and Community and Economic Development Committee had two meetings - one in March and April - about the affordable housing summit.

In the report Florida and Pedigo, using Census data, wrote that nearly 60 percent of working people in South Florida are cost-burdened spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

Pedigo said in a subsequent interview with The Miami Times income is the factor that makes Miami different as a metro area as far as housing costs.

"What's unique in Miami is the income," Pedigo said. "Other metro areas have expensive housing but Miami is not expensive like D.C., San Francisco or New York. But Miami's wages and income are quite low compared to other metro areas."

The determinant is how much of someone's income does the cost of shelter take up.

"There's a huge debate around what is affordable housing," Pedigo said. "We can talk about it for the poorest of the poor, or for workforce housing. That whole definition of how we deal with it is up there. A general rule of thumb is, how does someone live with a good quality of life. You don't want residents spending more than 30% of income on housing."

A person qualifies for affordable housing if they make up to 60% of the area's median income, workforce housing is 60% to 140% of the median income. Qualification for public housing is up to 80% of area median income, according to Liu.

As solutions Pedigo suggests rent control, devoting public money to pay for affordable housing construction, inclusionary zoning and an increase in wages.

"It all has to be done together," Pedigo said.

Racial minorities feel the drought of affordable housing worse than white people, the report repeats what the community knows.

"African-American homeowners have, on average, less than \$4,000 in income left over after paying for their housing each year. And Hispanic homeowners have less than \$5,500 left over after paying for housing. Compare this to the nearly \$20,000 (\$19,685) that white homeowners have left over after paying for housing."

Madriz works with members of the community to get them to know their housing rights.

In helping people in general secure housing, most are women and girls, and "it's mostly women of color," Madriz said.

Pierre said the NAACP is very concerned about the lack of affordable housing.

"The lack of affordable housing negatively impacts and impairs women of color in their search for fair housing, causing them to end up in vulnerable situations, dangerous environments and keeps them from moving forward."

The summit is described as a "unique opportunity to engage with specific affordable and workforce housing project stakeholders (e.g., developers, local government department heads, bankers, investors)."

There are real estate developers or an architecture firm on four of the five panels about housing projects.

"It's fine," Madriz said. "However, we need to emphasize equitable development, which means a process of engaging the community. Typically, only developers and architects are consulted about urban planning issues. Residents are only consulted when developers need their approval. Residents should be a part of the process from the very beginning."

Higgins said both bigger companies and nonprofits have to be a part of the process.

Higgins said bigger development companies have specialties that need to be used for the sake of providing housing.

"If I weren't able to collaborate with them I would not be able to bring new units to market," Higgins said. "They have the expertise in land use, architecture and design, structural, managing big projects, putting together the financing of big projects. These are complicated financial deals.

We have to work with them, with constraints, so they put together the units as promised. We have to work with developers, we have to, particularly on big developments."

Higgins acknowledged private for-profit developers want to make money with market-rate units, and that desire is what elected officials use to get some affordable housing.

"These are private sector companies. They are in business. We are in government. I'm not in the profit making business, I'm in the public good business. What makes housing complexes work is mixed income. In areas where there's density, we can say 'you can use the top floors and make those market-rate.' We have to leverage the private sector to help us solve problems."

At the county budget hearings on Sept. 5 and 19, members of Miami Workers Center spoke about how they wanted to see more money devoted to the County's Affordable Housing Trust Fund, a pool of money that subsidizes construction costs.

Madriz said there should be a fund created to cover impact and permitting fees and a separate fund created to stabilize rent for families who are displaced because of gentrification.

"The County needs to make it a fixed line item and that number should be at least \$60 million per year," Madriz said to The Miami Times.

Higgins said there is enough money dedicated to housing in the budget and disagrees with giving that amount to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

"There's plenty of money in there," Higgins said. "Every year we've had similar amount of money."

Higgins said the amount in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund was about \$9 million and said the county has not yet found a way to spend the \$263 million allocated to affordable housing in the 2019-2020 budget.

"That means what we have to do is activate that money. If we would have added more money to the budget it doesn't mean we would have the capacity to get it all out. It takes a long time, it really takes a long time."

Madriz said developers share in the blame for the lack of affordable housing.

"Developers do not want to build affordable housing unless they are incentivized to do so," Madriz said. "We have a drought in affordable and a surplus of luxury and market-rate housing."