

# ST JOHNS COUNTY CIVIC ROUNDTABLE

## MINUTES OF MEETING

July10, 2017

The meeting was called to order by President Lofgren at 9:00am. The minutes of the June meeting were accepted as read. The Treasurer reported a balance of \$880.68.

President Lofgren introduced our guest speaker William (Bill) Lazar, executive director of St. Johns Housing Partnership.

Mr. Lazar discussed the lack of affordable housing in St Johns County, which is needed to sustain the strength of our economy. Rapidly rising home prices and impact fees are freezing out opportunities for home ownership for many low income residents in our county. Rentals are also beyond the means of many service workers in the county earning near the minimum wage. Many may work in Palm Coast or other communities where housing costs are lower.

Some solutions:

Improve substandard housing.

Work with COA and other social agencies to provide assistance to elderly and others with low incomes. Bill

noted that many seniors are too proud to ask for help even when reduced to living in their cars.

Foreclosure modification: Help folks get off the foreclosure list by refinancing or other assistance. Help is available for those that are in difficulty due to illness or job loss.

Mr. Lazar said that Hurricane Matthew decreased the rental stock by as many as 4000 units. As they come back at a rate of 100 to 200 units per month, they are often updated and more expensive.

Ideas for the future:

- 1) A guaranteed basic income or subsidy for those in need.
- 2) Programs to encourage developers to increase the mix of low cost housing in future projects. Government regulations and fees make up about 18 to 20 percent of housing costs.
- 3) Strip mall/housing combos and duplex construction can bring down housing costs and let service workers live near where they work.

Of the 4000 new homes in St Johns County only 2% were designed for low income people. According to Mr. Lazar, federal government assistance is needed to turn things around.

## Civic Roundtable Business:

A motion was made and seconded to send a letter to the St Johns County Commissioners from the Civic Roundtable, supporting the placing on the ballot at the next general election, a 1% sales tax increase in St Johns County. This will allow the electorate to decide to increase (or not) the funding for our county government which is facing serious budgetary shortfalls. The motion was passed unanimously, and Rick Lofgren and Dennis Froio were directed to craft the letter.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dennis Froio, Secretary