



Changes continue to emphasize affordable housing

By Scott Unger Key West Citizen

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City of Key West officials continued their recent push to address the affordable housing crisis with amendments to the city code and Land Development Regulations approved Thursday by the Planning Board.

The board unanimously approved changes to the LDR's emphasis on affordable housing over green building initiatives in future Building Permit Allocation System applications and a change to city code to eliminate transient units from the remaining approximately 700 BPAS units the city will receive through 2023.

Anyone hoping to build using BPAS units must apply through the city and units are awarded based on a scoring system. Changes to that system will provide more opportunities for the construction of affordable housing by increasing weight for affordable aspects, according to Planning Director Patrick Wright.

"The only single means of control, other than the city coming in for units on its own, over how we allocate these units is by the way we rank them," Wright said. "It's open, you're going to get the applications that you get."

The changes eliminate bonuses for designing a roof with 50 percent vegetation and obtaining designs by a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design architect and make the requirement to add a rainwater catchment system an option.

The changes add points for developers who voluntarily exceed affordable requirements for both the low and median income categories. It also includes a mixed use bonus for commercial property owners looking to build affordable units.

"What we wanted to do was kind of remove hurdles or impediments to a commercial property owner wanting to put affordable housing ... on their site, so we struck that out of the code," Wright said.

Point weighting was also lowered for obtaining LEED platinum certification and other environmental aspects while affordable points were raised.

City Commissioner Sam Kaufman has been pushing to eliminate transient allocations since 2016, but the city previously had problems implementing the change.

Currently, transient rentals make up 10 percent of allocations, but if the changes go through, the remaining five years of allocations will go strictly to the development of market rate and affordable units.

Board members praised both initiatives as steps in the right direction.

"Transient rentals is something I'm basically opposed to. Therefore, when you eliminate those from years six through 10, I think it's definitely a step in the right direction," Greg Lloyd said.

Board members Peter Pike and Ed Russo applauded the changes to emphasize affordable housing, as the environmental requirements are outdated and frequently lead to escalating costs in projects.

As an architect, Pike said he only achieves bronze LEED certification in projects and obtaining platinum adds approximately 30 percent in construction costs to obtain.

“The idea is great but to pass that on to an affordable project becomes difficult,” he said of the certifications.

Russo said the changes are a step in the right direction because technological advances in environmental technology such as wind energy development and solar concentrators will drastically change the landscape of being green in the coming years and the current bonuses are already outdated.

“We should not feel the least concern in refocusing our interest from green ... into affordable housing,” Russo said.

The changes are still “scratching the surface” of combating the affordable housing crisis and the city should continue to look at other changes to zoning and developer and density bonuses, Russo said.

Wright made a point to mention that green initiatives won’t be completely eliminated, but the emphasis right now has to be affordable housing.

“The green building initiatives are a good thing and we want people to incorporate them, but we are currently in an affordable housing crisis,” Wright said.

sunger@keysnews.com