
LOCAL

150 affordable housing units proposed on Strafford County land near jail



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Key Points

- Strafford County Commissioners have selected a parcel of county-owned land to build an affordable housing complex.
 - The proposed project includes three five-story buildings with a total of 150 apartment units.
 - Officials plan to fund the project without taxpayer money by partnering with nonprofit organizations.
 - The housing will be located near the county jail and a new warming center, with the goal of helping clients from the center.
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ROCHESTER — [Strafford County Commissioners](#) have chosen a parcel of county-owned land where they propose to build an affordable housing complex.

Chair George Maglaras sees it as an opportunity for affordable housing and a way to help some of the clients that will be served at the [new warming center](#) on the same property.

The plan is to do the project without any new taxpayer dollars, Maglaras said. The land is adjacent to the Strafford County House of Corrections and the warming center, which is currently under construction and scheduled to open for this year's cold weather season.

"One thing I'd like to accomplish, with the warming center right there, is to put the people we can into programs and be able to offer them a place to live," Maglaras said. "They would need to get off substances and be willing to have a job, and in return we can maybe help them with a roof over their heads. I know we cannot save them all, but maybe some. When

they come to the warming center, we can do intake and see who we can help. We can work with social service agencies to make this work."

Maglaras said the housing will also be available to the general public and even help county staff.

"Most important to me is to try to do this without taxpayer money," Maglaras said. "That's why we want to get the nonprofit sector to construct the buildings, maybe using grant or foundation money."

150 apartment units in three 5-story buildings

At their commissioners' meeting on Aug. 20, the commission decided they will send out a request for qualifications (RFQ) to area non-profits, hoping to gain a partner in the project with the means to handle the construction project, and possibly to take over operations of the new project.

"We envision three buildings, five stories high, to fit on the property," Maglaras said. "Each would have 50 units for a total of 150 new apartments."

The commissioners agreed on Aug. 6 to try to identify land for affordable housing to be built among the 300 acres owned by the county. The property is in Dover, around and extending from the county complex on County Farm Road, where the jail, courthouse and Riverside Rest Home are located.

"We have been hearing about this for years, and the commissioners want to help," Maglaras said. "We are losing the promise of the American dream, and that really bothers me. When I got out of high school, I got a job, an apartment in like, 10 minutes. That's not how it is now."

Once plans are complete, the commission will need to get approval from the Strafford County Delegation. Maglaras said it only needs a majority vote, and if they can pull it off with no cost to taxpayers, he thinks it will receive the green light.

Land by the jail seen as less controversial site

"We identified a parcel by the prison," Maglaras said. "We think it's a good place, and because of the proximity to the jail, there are utilities (electricity, water and sewer) already available there. We know it would have to be multi-story building to get the numbers up, because it's not a lot of land, but this has a lot of possibilities."

At the meeting, Maglaras said Commissioner Sean Leavitt, being in the construction business, vetted the land and said it could work.

"We want to put out the RFQ quickly and hopefully by next week we can show a plan showing how it will work without costing the taxpayers any money," Maglaras said. "We will work with nonprofits, with people with experience in this type of project. We will vet them and come in with a site plan to show what might be constructed."

Leavitt said the three buildings can wrap around Perimeter Road. Maglaras said he thinks having the land by the jail will help eliminate the NIMBY (Not in my Backyard) factor.

Strafford County Administrator Raymond Bower said that while much of the county land is in conservation easements, this particular parcel is not. He noted the original plan to build a new nursing home, rejected last year by the delegation, also included an affordable housing piece.

"That was an attempt to reduce cost for the nursing home by bringing in some revenue," Bower said.

