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## HOUSING HOPE

# Three New Affordable Projects Address Sarasota's Workforce Housing Dilemma

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By [Nancy Joy Cook](#) • 10/25/2018 at 2:24pm • Published in the [November 2018](#) issue of *Sarasota Magazine*



Downtown Sarasota

IMAGE: [EVERETT DENNISON](#)

The good news is that our region is seeing job growth and low unemployment. The bad news, says Sarasota Housing Authority CEO William Russell, is that the very people who could take advantage of these new jobs are foiled by high housing costs and limited availability. Forty-two percent of the households in Sarasota County are cost burdened, which means that they pay more than 30 percent of their family's income in rent or for a mortgage. Russell says the majority of people hired at six new hotels in downtown Sarasota—those who clean the rooms, maintain the properties, work in the kitchens—can't afford to live near their jobs. Instead, they commute from areas of Sarasota and Manatee counties where housing is less expensive.



“Commuting places an added financial burden on these workers, and it affects the quality of life of everyone in the area with increased traffic and pollution,” says Russell.

But a small dent in the need is in the works. Three projects hope to add 176 affordable housing units in the next two years for downtown workers.

### Lofts on Lemon

The SHA’s new Lofts on Lemon complex, located in the Rosemary District on three acres between Ninth and Eighth streets on the west side of Lemon Avenue, will provide 80 apartments for families with household incomes that total less than \$42,000 a year, and 50 units for families with household incomes under \$70,000. The development, slated to break ground in mid-2019, will set aside a portion of the units for teachers, health care workers and first responders who work in the area.

The total cost of the project is \$32 million. SHA received a \$3 million commitment to the project from the city of Sarasota and a \$14 million tax credit grant from the Florida Housing Finance Corporation. The rest of the funds, Russell says, will come through conventional mortgage debt, philanthropy and deferred developer fees. Rents for a two-bedroom apartment will start at \$950 for a family of three earning around \$38,000. A family of three with a household income of \$50,000 would pay \$1,250 for the same apartment. Some residents, depending on income, could also be eligible for an additional utilities allowance.



A rendering of Hammock Place  
IMAGE: [COURTESY PHOTO](#)

## **Habitat's Hammock Place**

Habitat for Humanity Sarasota, a local affiliate of the international affordable home-building charity, is slated to break ground this month on a community of 40 affordable single-family homes on the north side of 17th Street, just east of Beneva Road.

Hammock Place will offer residents a 10-minute drive to the heart of downtown. Habitat Sarasota president and CEO Renee Snyder says, "We're seeing a lot of inquiries."

In order to purchase a Hammock Place home, future owners must show that they earn between 30 percent and 80 percent of the area's median income and they must live or work in Sarasota for at least a year. They must also put in sweat equity, which means completing a minimum of 300 hours of volunteer labor working to help build Habitat homes.

Owner applicants must also attend workshops on budgeting, healthy cooking, citizenship and basic home maintenance.

In exchange for this commitment, owners become eligible to apply for down payment assistance from the Florida Housing Finance Corporation and receive a 0 percent interest mortgage held by Habitat. The new owners can expect their new homes to carry a value of around \$200,000 at the time they take possession.

The neighborhood is designed with a gated entrance, deed restrictions and a home owners association, the same amenities found in local planned communities, Snyder says. Lawn service and community landscaping will be included in HOA membership.

"Our goal is that when you drive past the Hammock Place development you are going to think that it is any other market-rate development in Sarasota," Snyder says.

The first homes in Hammock Place will be ready for occupancy in mid-2019 and the neighborhood should be completed by the end of 2020.

## **Friendship Center's Shared Housing Pilot Project**

Sarasota's branch of the Friendship Centers, a nonprofit organization serving older adults in five counties in Southwest Florida, launched a one-year pilot home share matchmaking service in August, hoping to help seniors stay in their homes longer by renting a room to young professionals who struggle to find affordable housing. Participating homeowners must be at least 60 years old and home sharers should be employed adults between the ages of 23 and 40.

Intergenerational relationships can improve the quality of life of both sides involved, says Home Share Program coordinator Evan Farrar. "A recent college grad moving to the area or someone who finds themselves recently single could benefit from the opportunity to live in a comfortable affordable home in a great area," he says, adding that offering a room to rent not only helps seniors financially but also gives them peace of mind, knowing there is someone else in the house.

The Friendship Center will facilitate the matches by taking applications, conducting background checks and vetting both sides for lifestyle matches. The actual details of each arrangement, including lease terms and house rules, are up to the prospective housemates. The goal of the first year of the program is to successfully match six homeowners with compatible renters.