

# Tallahassee Democrat.

## LOCAL

# Housing crisis: Leon County leaders pledge funding for solutions at advocacy meeting

*The county commission is set to meet next week on April 8.*



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## Key Points AI-assisted summary

Three Leon County commissioners committed to supporting funding for affordable housing at the annual Nehemiah Action Meeting.

Commissioners O'Keefe, Minor, and Proctor agreed to allocate general revenue funds for an affordable rental housing trust fund.

The commissioners also supported annual allocations to the trust fund for as long as the program remains effective.

Where others said no, three county commissioners said yes.

Leon County Commissioners David O'Keefe, Rick Minor and Bill Proctor committed to vote for funding towards affordable housing in front of a crowd sporting green T-shirts at the Old West Florida Enrichment Center Monday night.

The Capital Area Justice Ministry, a interfaith advocacy group, held its annual Nehemiah Action Meeting – though the turnout of elected officials was a smaller number compared to previous years.

The rules of the event were the same as previous meetings: If city and county leaders answered 'no' to a question, they were to be met with silence, and if they

answered 'yes,' the room would erupt in applause and cheers. Officials were provided a minute to explain their reasoning, as opposed to 30 seconds last year.

Other officials in attendance included City Commissioner Curtis Richardson, Executive Director for the Council of the Status of Men and Boys Royle King, Leon County Sheriff's Capt. Lee Majors, Assistant Sheriff Brice Google and Chief Grady Jordan and Leon County School Board member Darryl Jones.

Those missing included the remaining city and county commissions and a representative of the Tallahassee Police Department.

In a post made on X, the Leon County Democrats said City Commissioner Jeremy Matlow would be represented by aide Ryan Ray, who also leads the Leon County Democratic Party. And members of CAJM shared with the audience that some commissioners didn't attend due to conflicting schedules.

## **What was the biggest topic of conversation?**

Affordable housing has been a top priority for CAJM as the group aims to put a dent in the existing housing squeeze within the city.

Just last year CAJM approached Blueprint to gain support for a substantial amendment looking to use Blueprint dollars for housing but the measure failed. Earlier this year they went to the county commission requesting they fund their land acquisition proposal but were also turned down.

Bolstering their position was Jordan Rios, a single mother of 7 who works as a public school teacher in Jefferson County, who said she moved to Tallahassee to flee her ex-husband.

"I came to Tallahassee in May of 2023 to start over. I was pregnant, raising six children and trying to build a life from the ground up. I needed a job, I needed child care, I needed housing and I needed to do all of it on my own," she said.

"But what I didn't expect was how hard it would be to find a place to live, even with a job offer in hand. Every application came with strict rules, (you couldn't have) too many kids per room, (there were) income requirements that I met but were ignored, credit checks that held me back," she continued. "My credit had been destroyed in that toxic marriage and no one wanted to give me a chance."

The Rev. Bob Gibbs, a retired United Methodist minister, called up O'Keefe, Minor and Proctor up to the stage for their question and answer period. The three commissioners were the only ones from the county; all three also are up for re-election next year.

## **More on affordable rental housing trust fund**

The three gave an easy "yes" to the first and third questions in regards to supporting allocating general revenue funds for an affordable rental housing trust fund to provide gap funding for developers as well as supporting annual allocations to the trust fund thereafter for as long as the program is effective.

The second question of allocating sufficient funding in the upcoming budget received some lengthier responses.

"Also with respect to the homeless issue, I believe CAJM needs to get busy on Social Security, because if we don't flip some congresspeople, they are going to get ... more people homeless," Proctor said.

Minor said, "Yes (to additional funding for affordable housing), so long as we can do it responsibly in our budget.

"We are living in a lot of uncertainty for our local governments like we've never seen before. You heard Gov. DeSantis talk about eliminating property taxes? Well, that may sound good but that creates a \$50 billion deficit in this state," Minor said, referring to the amount reported recently by the Democrat.

"Up at the federal government you got DOGE and in Florida you got mini-DOGE cuts in federal budgets and grants (that) affect us here at home."

The county commission is set to meet next on April 8.

*(This story was updated to add new information and because an earlier version included an inaccuracy.)*

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