

How to solve the workforce housing crisis? More in-fill development, smoother government processes



Panelists at the Feb. 23 workforce housing community conversation, arranged by the Miami Herald and hosted by the Miami-Dade Beacon Council, were, from left, Ned Murray, co-director, FIU Metropolitan Center; Jason T. Smith, director for Miami-Dade Commissioner Daniella Levine Cava; Alberto Milo, senior vice president, Related Urban Development; Andrew Frey, founder and principal, Tecela real-estate development and Stuart Kennedy, director of program strategy and innovation, The Miami Foundation.

A complex government permitting system, zoning and the expense of meeting infrastructure requirements emerged as key roadblocks to workforce housing Thursday at a [Miami Herald community conversation](#).

About 100 community advocates, bankers, builders, developers and would-be homeowners turned out for the event, hosted by the Miami-Dade Beacon Council at its downtown offices.

Despite the obstacles, developers Albert Milo of Urban Related and Andrew Frey of Teleca development said both companies are forging ahead to provide housing options convenient to downtown at pricepoints affordable to middle-class buyers. But far more could be done if government regulations more closely matched the conditions and needs of today's marketplace, they said.

According to experts, South Florida — and Miami in particular — is among the nation's most expensive cities for both rentals and home buying. The event followed a Miami Herald series detailing the [negative economic impacts of high housing costs](#) and [potential solutions](#).

Along with Milo and Frey, Thursday's speakers included Carlos Fernandez-Guzman, president and CEO of Pacific National Bank and co-chair of a housing solutions task force at the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce; Stuart Kennedy, director of program strategy and innovation, The Miami Foundation; Jason Smith, legislative director for Miami-Dade Commissioner Daniella Levine Cava; and Ned Murray, co-director, FIU Metropolitan Center.

Attendees express concerns on a range of related issues, including educational needs and the impact of foreign luxury buyers.

Among solutions discussed Thursday:

- Small-scale infill development
- Mixed-income development
- Expansion of [community land trusts](#)
- Relaxed income requirements for government incentive programs
- Relaxed financing requirements for qualified homebuyers
- Rent-to-own programs
- Additional transit-oriented development
- Zoning changes to facilitate smaller, less expensive units in nonluxury neighborhoods
- Designating taxes collected from out-of-town buyers (who don't qualify for the homestead exemption) to home-buying programs benefiting locals.

Jane Wooldridge