

This is a printer friendly version of an article from [www.heraldtribune.com](http://www.heraldtribune.com)  
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

---

Article published Jul 13, 2007

## **Plan puts affordable housing east of I-75 1,488-home project beyond urban boundary would include affordable units**

By DOUG SWORD  
[doug.sword@heraldtribune.com](mailto:doug.sword@heraldtribune.com)

SARASOTA COUNTY -- The biggest affordable housing project ever undertaken here is being proposed for a 400-acre former orange grove near the county's eastern edge.

Memphis, Tenn.-based Kemmons Wilson Inc. wants to build 1,488 homes across from the Founders Club subdivision about two miles east of Interstate 75.

To get approval to build such a large development so far east, Kemmons Wilson agreed to make at least half the homes affordable. That means at least 50 percent of the homes will sell for less than \$231,000 and a third of those for less than \$154,000.

According to documents filed with the county, the affordable homes alone would sell for more than \$140 million total. The other homes will be much more expensive and will be "segregated" from the affordable homes by gates, the developer says.

The company will donate the land underneath the 744 affordable homes to the Community Housing Trust of Sarasota County, which uses its nonprofit status as the landowner to keep the homes affordable even if they are resold in later years.

While affordable housing has been a top priority of county commissioners for several years, the only housing trust project that is under way is a 40-home project near Sarasota High School.

The only comparable development on the horizon is the Sarasota Housing Authority's plans for about 600 affordable homes as part of redevelopment projects proposed in Newtown. However, that \$114 million project hinges on the city and county agreeing to contribute a \$15 million subsidy. While the city and county are talking, an agreement has not been reached yet.

"We're doing pittance right now," said Bo Medred, representing the developer Thursday night before the Sarasota County Planning Commission. "This is the first big push" for a major affordable housing project, he said.

The Planning Commission, which makes recommendations to the county commissioners, approved the project. It is scheduled to go before the county commissioners for a final vote Aug. 29.

Unlike other affordable housing projects, the developer is not seeking a subsidy from the county, said Martina Guilfoil, executive director of the Community Housing Trust.

The reason the developer is willing to make the commitment to build affordable homes is that the land is currently zoned to allow the construction of only 132 estate homes.

"Actual cash is in such short supply," Guilfoil said. "This is 744 units, and it's not costing the county any additional cash."

Several neighbors complained Thursday about the big project's high density and its impact on traffic in the area, particularly on Iona Road and Palmer Boulevard.

The project is well past the Urban Service Boundary, the line roughly running parallel to I-75 that is supposed to be the boundary between the county's rural and urban parts. Some of the county commissioners are reluctant to allow high density east of that line, said Commissioner Shannon Staub.

However, the commission specifically identified the Palmer Place land, along with others, as areas where it would consider allowing higher densities in exchange for commitments to build affordable housing, she said.

And there is something in it for the county, which has underused sewer and water lines in the area. More homes would translate into more monthly fees for the public utilities.

"We keep saying we want affordable housing," Staub said, while declining to predict how she and other commissioners would vote.

---