

Greenville looks for affordable housing solutions by next summer



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(Photo: File)

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The city of Greenville is moving forward with hiring a consultant to solve the city's concerns over affordable housing, with an eye toward having plans by the middle of next summer.

The city will release a request for proposals on Nov. 1 and select a consultant just before Christmas, said Ginny Stroud, the city's community development administrator.

The process should take about six months to complete, she said.

No cost has been identified.

The calls for an outside perspective come as the city faces a surge in development, particularly on the fringes of downtown where the wave of real estate interest has moved outward.

"I wish that all the developers wanted to develop affordable housing and we wouldn't have to change policies and processes to make this happen, but we know that we have to do some things a little bit different to make that happen," City Councilwoman Jil Littlejohn.

Littlejohn and fellow Councilwoman Lillian Brock Flemming have led the effort to hire a consultant.

Increasingly, Flemming said, real estate investors are buying in poor neighborhoods at low prices from longtime residents who don't know how much the land is worth.

Then, she said, the property is redeveloped with high-end housing, driving up property taxes and forcing low-income residents to move outside the city, where it's more difficult to find an a home that they can both afford and is within range of their jobs.

Flemming said the community has the perception that the city is behind the redevelopment of traditionally affordable neighborhoods.

"We want to get to the word out that it's not us," she said. "Please, get the word out: 'Don't sell your house.'"

The city has programs available and has bought land and will buy more to have a say over how housing is developed, and though its resources are far more limited compared to private investors, residents in affected neighborhoods "should call the city first," Littlejohn said.

The job of the consultant will be to assess what affordable housing is available now in the city and the programs in place, Stroud said. The consultant will be required to project 5 to 15 years into the future what affordable housing needs will be and to formulate "3 to 5 strategies" once the process is complete, she said.

The idea is to have a result that gives the city a path for direct action, unlike past efforts that have sat on the shelf, she said.

"Previous strategies have given us ideas, but not the how-to's," Stroud said. "This will be the how-to's."

In the meantime, she said, the city won't halt its current efforts while the study is under way.

The city will form an advisory committee to guide the discussion and at the end will engage the community, she said.

