

A housing market met

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Enlightened ownership, a committed developer and strong-willed county commissioners carved out a place for working families to live in southern Palm Beach County.

Green Cay Village west of Boynton Beach shows that "quality" and "workforce housing" are not mutually exclusive terms. Homes with granite counter tops, "green" appliances, a community center with a fitness room and pool are available for sale between \$200,000 and \$300,000 and for rent at less than \$800 a month.



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As demand for lower-priced homes outstrips supply in Palm Beach County and the Treasure Coast, builders and governments have to find ways to deliver. Green Cay can be an example.

Neighbors, in golf-course communities behind massive, landscaped gateways, packed meetings to oppose Green Cay and dispatched e-mails warning of crime and blight. They didn't fear the school teachers, police officers and nurses whom developers said they would seek out. They feared a single, scary term: "housing project."

Green Cay, though, is far removed from the 1960s-style housing projects that so many Florida retirees detest. It's a place, as *The Post* reported Monday, where single mothers such as Loren Mulligan, a teacher at Loggers Run Middle School west of Boca Raton, can afford her own home. Buyers must live in their unit. To deter speculators, people can buy only one home. If the buyers sell in the first year, developer Goray Communities of Boca Raton keeps the profit.

Green Cay actually started, as so many deals do, with failure. Landowner Ted Winsberg's plan to sell his farm at Jog and Flavor Pict roads for senior housing fell through. So he gave up potential profit and found builders willing to commit to workforce housing. He sold land that could have commanded \$150,000 an acre for \$97,000 an acre. The developers - Goray handles the 260 for-sale units, while the Housing Trust Group of Coconut Grove handles 160 rentals - agreed to keep costs down, trading profit margin for volume.

They lined up a Housing Finance Authority loan that required the county commission's blessing. There, the deal ran into 2004 election-year politics, with Mary McCarty, a Republican, rallying opposition to hurt Burt Aaronson, a Democrat who represents the district. Commissioner Aaronson kept the project alive and won reelection handily.

No one thing can account for Green Cay's success. But it starts with the cost of land. If a landowner won't sacrifice profits, counties can offer subsidies and impose rules to make sure buyers benefit. Green Cay is far from the stark image of tenement housing that many neighbors imagined. Instead, it is a model for Palm Beach County and the Treasure Coast of how the private and public sector can work together to meet the demand for quality affordable housing.

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