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QA county defends housing record

By LIAM FARRELL
Staff Writer

Under the cloud of a lawsuit claiming Queen Anne's County has been discriminatory in its land-use decisions, the head of the county's housing authority said today that its program is one of the best in Maryland.

"Queen Anne's County is the leader in affordable housing on the Eastern Shore," said Pete Scanlon, executive director of the Queen Anne's County Housing Authority. "We have ... one of the leading programs in the state based on our population."

Last week, developer John Stamato filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court alleging that a May vote by the county commissioners to delay access to water and sewer service violates federal housing rules and has prevented him from moving ahead with an affordable-housing development.

He says in the lawsuit that county residents have a hard time finding affordable housing. Authority officials said that's simply not the case.

Mr. Scanlon said the county currently has 187 affordable housing units available, which are doled out according to income and typically rent for \$300 to \$475 per month.

In addition, 205 more units are in the construction or planning stage, with 56 of those qualifying under the moderately priced dwelling unit ordinance, he said.

"We're just now getting the first (moderately priced) developments coming through the pipeline," Mr. Scanlon said.

The county commissioners are still planning a response to the lawsuit with the county attorney.

Mr. Stamato wants to put 218 homes on 144 acres in Grasonville, placing 67 of those units under the county's 2003 moderately priced dwelling unit

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ordinance. His complaint claims the delay is a breach of the Fair Housing Act, which forbids direct providers of homes from denying housing based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin or familial status.

"The effect of the actions of the county commissioners is to deny housing opportunities to African Americans and other protected groups that currently face difficulty finding affordable housing in the county," the lawsuit says. "The county commissioners' refusal to grant the application has a disproportionate impact and effect on

African Americans and other protected groups."

Outside of planning and construction, Queen Anne's County also provides zero-interest, no-payment second mortgages of \$50,000 for critical workers such as teachers, police officers, and emergency medical technicians, Mr. Scanlon said.

In the past three years, the county has given out about 24 second mortgages, which are repaid only if the house is sold, Mr. Scanlon said.

"We're doing a lot of other things (in affordable housing)," he said.

lfarrell@capitalgazette.com

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