



Participants gathered in the "Chautauqua Hall of Brotherhood", a historic building in DeFuniak Springs with a 100 year tradition of offering lectures on current events and community topics.



# Partnering with the Florida Department of Elder Affairs



By Michael Chaney

**T**his fall, the Florida Housing Coalition has partnered with the Florida Department of Elder Affairs on one-day trainings offered across the State in support of the Department's Communities for a Lifetime Initiative (CFAL).

Through this program, the Department helps Florida cities and counties plan improvements to benefit the lives of all residents, youthful or senior. Communities are encouraged to use existing resources and state technical assistance to make "elder friendly" local improvements relative to Housing, Health care, Transportation, Accessibility, Community education and more. At each one-day Elder Housing Forum, the Coalition has provided CFAL participants with an overview of affordable housing topics to highlight how suitable housing for elderly residents is a powerful tool to achieve an elder friendly community.

The latest forum was held in DeFuniak Springs, a central location in the Panhandle and a town historically known for its role in the Chautauqua adult education movement, which started 130 years ago. Inspired by the historic surroundings, the group of housing

professionals, planners, and elder service providers from six counties discussed several models for providing housing assistance to Elderly households. First, the group discussed rehabilitation and accessibility modifications for those who own a home. Other elderly households may benefit from development or rehabilitation of affordable rental housing.



During a group exercise, participants shared ideas about housing assistance most needed by elderly citizens in their communities.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) were highlighted as a housing assistance model that especially benefits elderly households. An ADU is an apartment within a primary residence or an attached or freestanding home on the same lot as a primary residence. It is a complete living unit that may be rented out, creating affordability in two ways: the modest-sized accessory dwelling rents at an affordable price, while this rental income helps the primary resident owner better afford his or her housing costs. If the primary homeowner is an elderly individual, an ADU may provide further benefit. The owner may choose to live in the smaller ADU and rent out the primary residence, if permitted by the local government. If the owner is a single elderly individual living on a fixed income, this arrangement provides an appropriately sized living space and a higher rental income. An ADU may provide companionship and needed services from the ADU tenant, who could provide transportation to doctor's appointments or trips to the grocery store. Alternatively, the ADU tenant could be a nurse providing the homeowner with around-the-clock health assistance. On occasion, the elderly homeowner may offer in-kind service, like child care for the tenants of the ADU.

Throughout the day, the Coalition discussed funding sources and other considerations for making these models of housing assistance successful. In an afternoon group activity, each participant was challenged to consider some new type of elderly housing assistance that would most benefit elderly residents in his or her local community. Some participants discussed the benefit of adding accessibility modification services to their local owner-occupied rehabilitation programs, while others voiced interest in offering a replacement

Section 202 or housing tax credits. A second phase of the plan could even build homeownership units on adjoining land.

The Coalition's training on housing models and the development process—along with the ideas shared by participants—focused attention on the housing needs of elderly Floridians. Some housing solutions allow elderly homeowners to “age in place,” while others offer affordable rental housing with support services. The final two locations for the Elderly Housing Forums are scheduled for Tampa (February 25) and Ft. Lauderdale (March 25).

For more information about the Communities for a Lifetime Initiative, contact the Department of Elder Affairs at (850) 414-2000. An article with more information about Accessory Dwelling Units is available in the Coalition's 2006 Special Conference Issue Journal, page 27, on the Coalition's website, [www.flhousing.org](http://www.flhousing.org).

housing strategy for homeowners with significantly dilapidated homes. Two participants shared an idea for developing affordable rental housing. In their community, there is a school that is scheduled to close soon. Working with the School Board, they would like to develop 50 units of rental housing for low income elderly tenants. Funding for the project could be provided through



**WEBSITE INFORMATION ON FUNDING, AFFORDABILITY BARRIERS AND HOUSING SOLUTIONS**

At each Forum, the Coalition discussed barriers to affordable housing that elderly residents may face, as well as funding resources to finance housing solutions. This information is summarized in the publication “Addressing the Housing Needs of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities,” available on the Coalition's website. While this book focuses on persons with disabilities, the information outlined in its first two chapters is also relevant for some elderly households with fixed and extremely low incomes.