



# THE FLORIDA HOUSING COALITION

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## **Rethinking the Shopping Center for Workforce Housing & Entrepreneurship:**

New Guidebook from Florida Housing Coalition  
Offers Roadmap for Empty (and Changing) Retail Spaces

Tallahassee, Florida: The full economic fallout from COVID-19 has yet to unfold but communities throughout Florida, and the nation, will soon be looking for new models for economic development for both big box retailers and smaller shopping centers. The Florida Housing Coalition (the Coalition), the state's premiere nonprofit providing assistance in all areas of affordable housing planning, finance, development, and ending homelessness, today announced it has an innovative solution to offer these communities and commercial developers struggling in the face of a new economic reality: Turning these spaces into new and affordable workforce housing and work spaces for low-income entrepreneurs. The Coalition today released a comprehensive guidebook, entitled ***Eyesore to Asset: A Guidebook for Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Retail***, designed to aid local governments and business leaders in their search for new and innovative models for local economic development.

Two years in the making, the guidebook's genesis was born out of the Sustainable Communities Innovation Challenge (The Challenge) awarded by Fannie Mae to the Coalition in 2018. In partnership with the Florida Community Loan Fund (FCLF), Prof. Stephen Bender (UF), Brixmor Property Group, and Crossman & Company, the Coalition explored the feasibility of adapting vacant commercial spaces into attractive and functional mixed-use spaces with apartments and shared work spaces for low-income entrepreneurs. ***Eyesore to Asset: A Guidebook for Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Retail*** is available for download on the Coalition's website at: [www.flhousing.org/adaptive-reuse](http://www.flhousing.org/adaptive-reuse).

"We've been studying creative solutions to the affordable housing crisis before COVID-19 came on the scene, and now it is more critical than ever that local communities seek out new ways to look at vacant retail spaces," stated Ashon Nesbitt, Chief Programs Officer and Technical Advisor for the Coalition. The issue is so timely that Mr. Nesbitt has been asked to present on the topic as part of the **International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC)** series of webinars on the latest topics and trends on June 9th at 2p.m. Information on the webinar can be found at: [www.icsc.com](http://www.icsc.com) under Attend & Learn, Virtual Series.

***Eyesore to Asset*** details how vacant retail spaces can be used to bolster not only workforce housing, but support small, startup, entrepreneurs as well. "By envisioning these spaces in a new way, we can see how they can serve as assets in creating much-needed affordable housing in communities



as well as providing people who may be out of work as a result of COVID-19 with affordable space to explore entrepreneurship.”

Affordable workforce housing is a pressing issue for the state. In its just released **Home Matters** report, the Coalition notes that even before COVID-19, that close to 1.97 million low-income Florida households were paying more than 30% of their incomes for housing, the maximum amount considered affordable by experts. In fact, the report goes on to state that the the gap between rents and renter incomes was wider in 2019 than it was at the height of the housing boom in 2006-7.

In a previous statement, the Coalition’s President and CEO, Jaimie Ross, says “More than ever, this next year, communities all over the state need to address supports for workforce housing...That’s why the full appropriation this year of Sadowski Trust Fund by the Governor and legislature is such an essential part of how we will be able to fight back against the economic devastation caused by the pandemic.” Transforming vacant retail is one way to utilize some of those funds along with a portion of the billions in resources flowing to the state from the federal government to expand access to affordable housing.

Both **Eyesore to Asset** and **Home Matters** are available on the Coalition’s website and each are indicative of the type of work done on the state level by the Florida Housing Coalition – innovative, data-based, and research-driven. The Coalition is commonly acknowledged as the foremost authority in Florida on housing that is affordable, homelessness, community development and related issues, as a clearinghouse for information, a provider of training and technical assistance, and an advocate at the state and national levels for people in need of housing that is affordable

As the state’s foremost affordable housing authority, the Coalition holds regular webinars and trainings for local government, non-profits and those working in the housing arena. Many of the Coalition’s in-person trainings have moved online, in fact, the Coalition just announced that their popular **Home Matters Conference**, originally planned as an in-person conference, will be changed to an entirely online digital conference. It will still take place at the same time: August 31st-September 2nd, 2020. “Our conference this year will be bigger than ever, and it will be entirely digital, making sure everyone remains safe and yet still has access to the latest in housing affordability best practices,” stated Ross. Registration for the popular conference is now open and is available at [www.flhousingconference.org](http://www.flhousingconference.org).

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To interview the staff of the Florida Housing Coalition contact Lisa Djahed, Communications Director, tel 321-368-8313. For consultation on adaptive reuse in your local community, email your request to [nesbitt@flhousing.org](mailto:nesbitt@flhousing.org).

