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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Affordable Housing in Nassau County

The lack in affordable housing has been a long-standing issue in Nassau County and with our growing population, one that needs to be addressed soon. In 2017, the United Way presented the ALICE Report which focused on individuals who are just above the poverty level and do not have services available to them. (ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). In the report, we found that Nassau County is one of four counties in which the affordability of housing dropped more than 20% from 2007-2015. We also see in the data that 37% of low to moderate income households are struggling to make ends meet. These concerns led the Nassau Board of County Commissioners to create a committee to address the vital issue and provide recommendations on how to move forward. A group of 11 community leaders have come together to form the Nassau County Affordable Housing Committee (AHAC) to ultimately serve as a catalyst for innovative solutions. However, before we can address the issue, we must first answer, "What is affordable housing?" and "Where is it needed?"

With the assistance from Nassau County and the City of Fernandina Beach, we are contracting with the University of Florida Shimberg Center to create a comprehensive housing needs study to help us define and determine what the needs in the County truly are. Once we learn of the detailed needs, we will then begin crafting policy to effectively improve affordable housing countywide.

Many people have compared affordable housing to government subsidized homes and that is not within our plan and has not played any role in our discussion. To be clear, Nassau County is not creating a housing authority, but instead working through strategic partnerships, targeted ordinances, and meaningful incentives that assure that critical members of our workforce can find safe, dignified, housing within the proximity to the neighborhoods they enrich and serve. In fact, the more common term being used is "Workforce Housing."

According to the Housing and Urban Development website (hud.gov), "Families who pay more than 30% of the income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care." Using an example of a new college grad making an annual salary of \$32,000/year, federal guidelines say that their monthly rent should not be more than \$800. With the growth we are seeing in Nassau County, we need to be proactive and encourage developers to include affordable housing within their developments. In order to thrive and encourage successful communities, we need to provide better opportunities for our residents that include affordable living.

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Housing affordability affects more people than some may realize. While we need adequate housing for all of our residents, many are on the brink of an even greater downfall. As a young child, I can remember my mom working two, sometimes three jobs just to put food on the table and a roof over our head. As a single parent she struggled just to get by. Many of the places we lived were areas with high crime and very few opportunities for success. Our living arrangement changed when I was 10 years old and we found ourselves sleeping in our car in a church parking lot. A 1986 Plymouth Gran Fury with no air conditioning is not how I envision a 10 year-old living, yet that was our home off and on for the next few years. In between sleeping in our car or at a friend's house, my mom still worked a few jobs to help provide for us, but the opportunity for quality affordable housing just wasn't there.

My personal goal for this committee is to ensure that people will not have to struggle like I did as a child and we can find quality housing that will provide opportunities for much of our county's workforce. While affordable housing may not directly affect you, I bet you know someone who it does directly affect.

The Nassau County Affordable Housing Committee (AHAC) is made up of the following community leaders: *County Commissioner Justin Taylor (Chair), City Commissioner Len Kreger, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kathy Burns, Greg Matovina, Lisa Rozier, Mary Pitcher, Lora Britt, Carlene McDuffie, Jenna Emmons, Dr. Laureen Pagel, and Betsie Huben. Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 4:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers located at 96135 Nassau Place, Yulee, FL 32097.*

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Affordable Housing Advisory Committee
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