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## Gulf Coast Fair Housing Summit Opens Doors To Affordable Housing

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BILOXI (WLOX) -- A fair housing conference in Biloxi Monday aimed to open doors to affordable housing. But first, leaders say, the mindset of "not in my backyard" has to change. Meggan Gray takes us to this year's conference, where solutions for low-income housing took center stage.

Charmel Gaulden, Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Fair Housing Center, speaks from experience as she recalled when she first came to south Mississippi and couldn't find a place to live.

"There's plenty of housing, there's just not affordable housing."

That same phrase has rung loud and clear since Katrina. But with deadlines to move out of FEMA trailers looming dangerously close, fair housing leaders are scrambling to find answers to the housing deficit.

"Well, you know, when housing becomes more scarce, discrimination in housing increases," says Gaulden.

Ward 2 Biloxi Councilman Bill Stallworth warns, "If we are looking to have any economic development in the future, we have to have housing. If we're looking to save people from homelessness, we have to have housing."

The City of D'Iberville has cleared the way for more affordable homes. It broke ground on a development known as Juan de Cuevas Homes recently, which will eventually bring 130 new affordable housing units to south Mississippi.

Councilman Stallworth says other developers are looking to build further north, but that's a solution, he says, simply will not work.

"Transportation is a major issue. I think that moving way out in the county and trying to build lower income and affordable housing units out there could be a really big mistake, until we could get the transportation issue solved," Stallworth said.

As D'Iberville is making room for its own low income housing, people like Tracy Hurt with Alfonso Property Management are doing what they can to bring affordable homes to other areas.

"We do have steps that each person has to qualify. Their income has to be at least two times the monthly rent, which used to be three. We did bring that down to try and help people," says Hurt.

Still, Hurt admits finding so-called affordable housing isn't easy.

"Because most people that are looking right now, they can't afford more than \$500 or \$600 rent, and they're just not available. And most of the people that I speak to are willing to build them, but they can't even build them



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reasonable enough to have that low of a rent price."

Meanwhile, Biloxi Councilman Bill Stallworth is challenging people to be more vocal with city leaders about their housing needs.

This was the Gulf Coast Fair Housing Center's 4th annual conference.

by [Meggan Gray](#)



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