

Housing effort aimed at teacher turnover

This is offered for the purpose of clarification in response to a letter printed in The Citizen on Thursday, June 5, regarding school housing measures. The Monroe County School Board is trying in earnest to address the district's 25-percent teacher turnover rate, the highest of any school district in the state of Florida.

Providing affordable housing opportunities for interested teachers isn't the only answer, but it's another tool to address the problem. In a high cost county like ours, teacher salaries are critical. The School Board responded with teacher salaries that are the highest in the state of Florida. But they aren't high enough to meet housing costs here, and so still they leave. The School Board has excess property it isn't utilizing for school purposes. The state of Florida has recognized that surplus school property could and should be used for teacher housing, and so the School Board took up this opportunity.

And, because the School Board already owns the property, building these homes won't cost taxpayers anything.

With these factors in mind, the School Board asked the county to approve an action that would allow its surplus property at Sugarloaf, which, as school property is currently limited to educational purposes, to be used for residential purposes. The School Board eventually hopes to build a total of 28 homes on the 2-acre site — a modest initiative of 14 homes per acre, less than the density the county allows for workforce housing. The County Commission supported the School Board. This is but the first step in a process of a thousand and one steps. The approval for this project will require public hearings and will come before the Planning Commission and County Commission many more times.

Gifted, dedicated, enthusiastic teachers continue to leave our schools and our community because they can't find decent, affordable places to live.

Lisa Tennyson

Monroe County Affordable Housing Coordinator