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St. Cloud pushes affordable housing

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St. Cloud did not meet its affordable housing creation goals in 2003, but it is making progress, city officials said Monday.

About 6 percent of new owner-occupied homes built in St. Cloud last year met a regional life-cycle housing joint powers agreement's goal of affordability, Planning Director Matt Glaesman told City Council members.

The agreement challenges cities to ensure that at least 15 percent of new development meets the affordability criteria. St. Cloud did make the goal for new rental housing, of which 33 percent was deemed affordable.

Since last year was the first for the life-cycle housing plan, St. Cloud got off to a pretty good start, Glaesman said.

"I think we're making good progress and will continue to improve our ratios as we go forward in 2004 and 2005," he said.

St. Cloud, St. Joseph, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and Waite Park adopted the five-year, voluntary affordable housing agreement in 2002.

City Council members Monday unanimously approved sending the city's yearly results to the Life Cycle Housing board.

St. Cloud has tried to encourage the new developments by offering incentives to developers to build more affordable homes in new developments and existing neighborhoods.

The city's comprehensive plan calls for all new developments to have a mixture of housing styles and prices, and the city offers a zoning option for life-cycle housing development.

But the goal faces a few obstacles, Glaesman said. Developers say the price point for new homes -- \$131,000 last year and \$135,000 this year -- is too low, there are more affordable homes being built than there are certified buyers, and some developers don't want to participate, he said.

The St. Cloud Housing and Redevelopment Authority built most of the new owner-occupied affordable homes last year.

"Ultimately, we want to see more private development and the developers buying into the program," City Council member George Hontos said.

Two of three new developments planned for this year come close to meeting the affordability goals, so this year is starting off better, Glaesman said.