

Reynoldsburg puts limits on how apartments go up

Monday, March 8, 2010 10:10 PM By [Elizabeth Gibson](#)
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Legally, Reynoldsburg city officials can't ban the construction of apartment complexes, but tonight they did their best to discourage it.

"I understand that apartments are where a lot of people get their start," Councilman Doug Joseph said. "But we want Reynoldsburg to be a place where people have a high interest in the community and we want to encourage more high-value property in the city."

Rentals already make up about a third of Reynoldsburg's housing stock.

To cope with a sluggish real-estate market, several projects begun as condominium developments have been partially or completely converted to apartments, with builders sometimes finishing projects with smaller, lower-quality units.

That meant early buyers were trapped as condo owners in a sea of rentals, and the city missed out on the prestige associated with high-end condos it originally had been promised.

Cities tend to favor homeownership because people often perceive owners as better for property values and more invested in the community, although studies by the National Association of Home Builders contend there's no truth to that.

The law passed tonight tightened design regulations for multi-unit complexes.

It established pricier building standards, specifying high-end construction materials, limiting developers to four units per building and requiring one-third of a lot to be green space.

The legislation was held up for a few weeks because the Building Association of Central Ohio wanted to be sure that the law wouldn't apply to projects already started.

Jim Hilz, the association's executive director, said it's difficult to build apartments in the suburbs because of all the government roadblocks. He said that this also would make building condominiums in Reynoldsburg more risky because developers would have to go in knowing that they can't scale back their project if they hit financial trouble.

He said that has been a useful strategy during the recession.

"Renting condos isn't an ideal situation when that isn't the original intention," he said. "But it is a way to keep money flowing so that the whole project doesn't fail."

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