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Tuesday, January 09, 2007

A study in housing

01/20/2003

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Raymond Polaski, executive director of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, did a better job Thursday explaining the need for a housing analysis. Even though the county commissioners voted to seek a consultant, we continue to question the wisdom of spending \$70,000 to analyze data that's readily available.

The study was first presented as a way to determine how best to accommodate corporate executives should business and industry flock to Fayette. The more in-depth spin though is that it would use 1990 and 2000 Census data to look at what we have and figure out where we should be heading.

Anyone with a computer and a few minutes can log onto the U.S. Census Bureau's Web site and readily take stock of what we have: 66,490 housing units, with the bulk, 67.5 percent, in single unit housing, and the second largest percentage of 12.6 percent in mobile homes. Information as to the age of housing (nearly 60 percent built before 1960), the number of rooms, the amount paid in rent and mortgages and the value of the houses (nearly half priced between \$50,000 and \$100,000).

Here's what we lack: 41 homes haven't heat; 348 lack complete plumbing, 244 homes are without complete kitchens and 1,010 homes are without telephone service.

But those who work in the real estate field from agents to mortgage makers already know much of this. They see it every day.

County officials expressed concern that there isn't much housing development activity by private investors and this study might provide the spark. In fact \$5,000 of the cost is

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coming from dues paid by members of the Fayette County Housing Consortium, a mix of housing redevelopment authorities, realtors, homebuilders and banks. The balance is coming from grants and a foundation.

The focus of the study - to pull together data on the location and condition of existing housing, trends in homeownership, vacancy rates, home prices, new construction with a look toward where new growth will occur - isn't a bad idea. We simply question the need to spend \$70,000, most of which is the public's money, to compile information that is already known.

And once it's completed, how will the analysis be put to use? If there is a plan for that, we would like to hear it.

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