

28 October 2011

To: Tom Muehlenbeck

Cc: City Council, GHA Board, City Attorney

Re: Ex Cons in Public Housing

Mr. Muehlenbeck:

The Galveston Open Government Project (GOGP) would like to request that you consider putting the following issue on the next City Council agenda:

HUD has a new policy of “encouraging” local housing authorities to allow ex-cons to return to Public Housing. Since the Galveston Housing Authority is going to need so many waivers from civil rights and fair-housing law violations to implement their rebuilding plan, the citizens of the City are rightly concerned that the GHA may adopt this policy in order to gain HUD’s favor and solicit their support.

GHA currently owns and operates 450 Public Housing units and plans to build and operate 50 more.

Do they plan to admit ex-cons to these units?

What is the extent of GHA’s and the City’s increased liability if they choose to admit ex-cons, and one or more harm the law-abiding residents of Public Housing?

GHA plans to have MBS build and manage about 1,237 mixed-income units.

Whose decision will it be whether or not to admit ex-cons into these developments?

If MBS is free to make that decision unilaterally, does the City lose all control over that policy in these units?

Will GHA pressure MBS to admit ex-cons to gain favor with HUD?

Will admitting ex-cons into the mixed-income developments make it more difficult to attract market-rate tenants putting the success of these projects in jeopardy?

Who has the liability for any bad acts committed by ex-cons admitted to the mixed-income developments?

What if MBS says no to ex-cons at this time, but later changes their mind if their developments are not filled?

What is the long term plan for admitting ex-cons into GHA and MBS managed Public Housing properties?

This Council needs to know that there is a reliable oversight process, so that the ex-con policy cannot be easily changed once their attention is focused elsewhere.

This “minor detail” is only one of many that is being ignored while the City is being treated to picturesque computer-generated pictures of the proposed developments.

Best regards,

David Stanowski
President
Galveston Open Government Project, Inc.

Background on ex-cons in Public Housing:

Excerpts from: <http://www.galvestonogp.org/GHA/Welcoming-Ex-Cons-Back-To-Public-Housing.html>

The Galveston Housing Authority, that has long been **plagued with its inability to keep felons off its properties**, when they were forbidden to be there, is now faced with a President and HUD Secretary who want to welcome them back! Can you imagine what that could mean?

"The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has not allowed ex-offenders to move in with family members after they have been released from prison.

*But in a recent letter from Shaun Donovan, Secretary of HUD to Executive Directors of Public Housing Authority's (PHA) the agency has reversed this discriminatory policy and **now supports the notion of ex-offenders living in government housing with relatives.**"*

[HUD reverses decision and allows ex-offenders to live in public housing](#)

In the [Executive Summary of their 2008 5-Year Plan](#), GHA Executive Director, Harish Krishnarao, said, *"The struggle to maintain crime-free properties in Galveston requires constant vigilance."* *"Unfortunately, without a comprehensive policing program, problems that were once dealt with reoccur as **felons return to their previous neighborhoods from prison.**"*

[A GOGP study of crime data](#) from 01 September 2007 to 01 September 2008 (i.e. Before Hurricane Ike) found that **21.28%** of all case reports (crimes) in the City of Galveston were for the areas containing and surrounding the four Housing Projects.

The total population of these four facilities was approximately 1,252, or 2.20% of the pre-Ike population of the City. It should be clear that with 21.28% of the case reports, **the areas**

containing and surrounding the four Housing Projects used a highly disproportionate share of police resources and expenses!

In his [17 June 2011 letter](#), Secretary Donovan said, "...the majority of people released from prison intend to return to their families, *many of whom live in public or other subsidized housing.*" That's not much of an endorsement for how local housing authorities screen and manage their tenants, which is what triggered the comments by Harish Krishnarao about GHA's inability to keep felons from returning home to their properties!

He goes on to say, "*The Department encourages you to allow ex-offenders to rejoin their families in the Public Housing or Housing Choice Voucher programs (i.e. Section 8),...*" Why should any city want to participate in this social experiment?

The Secretary ends with, "*We are grateful that you will join us in welcoming these deserving citizens back to their communities.*" No comment needed!

Ironically, as HUD is lowering the bar by encouraging local housing authorities to welcome back ex-cons, the Cincinnati NAACP wanted to raise the bar last year and **require all housing authority commissioners to be subject to the same criminal background checks as their tenants!**

"The Cincinnati NAACP would like to know if any CMHA Board Members have a criminal past or specifically a felony. This is important because CMHA screens residents based on their criminal records. How can CMHA screen residents based on a criminal record but not know if individual board members have a criminal past and/or a criminal record," Smitherman says."

[Corruption Within the CMHA Board](#)

[Houston Chronicle](#)

<http://www.galvestonogp.org/GHA/Welcoming-Ex-Cons-Back-To-Public-Housing.html>