

Galveston Public Housing Policy

Section 392.031 of the Texas Local Government Code authorizes mayors to single-handedly appoint the commissioners to municipal housing authority boards. Mayors select and appoint commissioners to carry out their Public Housing policy making mayors defacto Public Housing Czars.

This City's current policy is to rebuild all 569 of the Public Housing units destroyed during Hurricane Ike, in the City of Galveston, plus the additional 410 units needed to do this in mixed-income developments, AND to rebuild 50 or more of these units as scattered sites in Galveston neighborhoods.

This policy was set by Mayor Joe Jaworski. If he is re-elected, we must assume that he would continue the same policy.

<http://www.joeforgalveston.com/>

But, what if the City elects a new mayor; how dramatically will Public Housing policy actually change? Here is what the challengers have to say:

Lewis Rosen's answers and comments:

<http://www.rosen4mayor.com/>

1. Will you support a regional strategy designed to build any new Public Housing units throughout the entire County strictly in high-opportunity neighborhoods?

Of course, a regional strategy makes sense and may be part of the overall solution to Galveston's public housing needs, but

because I do not feel we should build any new public housing structures at all, the question is moot. The real solution is a voucher program that includes choice for the people who need housing, and that would not require new construction.

My overall housing platform is straightforward and simple:

- Use vouchers to meet our public housing needs immediately. Get people in homes, and use existing inventory on or off the Island to make it happen.
- Sell the property formerly used for the rundown and poorly managed public housing buildings, making it available for economic development.
- Do everything we can to create better housing for middle-income families, to grow our population and help ensure the people who work here live here.

2. Are you willing to challenge the Conciliation Agreement and ask HUD for assistance in order to implement a regional opportunity-based Public Housing plan?

Yes, I have maintained from the very beginning that the city should have challenged that agreement. It just does not make sense that we should rebuild the same number of units we had when our population was larger, and it has been shown over and over again that isolating public housing tenants in multi-family units is not good for their health, education, safety or well-being (particularly in the same locations they lived in before the storm).

3. Will you support building all 569 units in this city?

No. As I said when I began my campaign for Mayor, I am firmly convinced our public housing needs can be met with a sound, legal and well-managed housing choice voucher program, and no new buildings are needed, let alone 569.

4. Will you support building all 569 units in mixed-income developments in this city?

I repeat: From the information I've seen, no new buildings are needed, mixed-income or otherwise.

5. Will you support using Section 8 Vouchers instead of building more units?

That is my point, which I've raised now for months, to whoever will listen. Unfortunately, no one at the Housing Authority or City Hall appears to be listening. I am a proponent of vouchers, whether they fall into the narrow category you've defined as Section 8 or some other category. It just makes good common sense: If the city has an inventory of eligible residences, and if vouchers can help make those homes available to families in need, we should implement a voucher program immediately and get those people in those houses. It comes with a caveat, though—landlords must be willing to keep their properties in safe, livable condition, and the Housing Authority must do its job of monitoring both the homes and the people who live in them. It may well be that the Housing Authority can help property owners improve or rehab their units as well, thus improving our neighborhoods.

6. Will you support using Moving-to-Opportunity Vouchers, that help voucher holders find accommodations in high-opportunity neighborhoods, on the Mainland, instead of building more units?

See previous answer. It is a little-known fact that other cities provide public housing opportunities here in Galveston, and we should investigate that possibility; public housing tenants should not be forced to live in Galveston if they would rather live elsewhere.

Beau Rawlins' answers and comments:

<http://beau4mayor.com/>

1. Will you support a regional strategy designed to build any new Public Housing units throughout the entire County strictly in high-opportunity neighborhoods?

Yes. The GOGP has pointed out many times that Federal lawsuits brought by the ACLU, NAACP and local housing authority residents against HUD have resulted in the court-ordered "regionalization" of local public housing. Forcing 95% of all Galveston County's public housing residents to live on a barrier island is morally unjustifiable.

2. Are you willing to challenge the Conciliation Agreement and ask HUD for assistance in order to implement a regional opportunity-based Public Housing plan?

Yes. I will support the GOGP's lawsuit and ask our city council to do the same. In all likelihood GHA, LSLA, Appleseed, and HUD will come to the bargaining table once the GOGP lawsuit is filed. When that happens, I will steadfastly demand the implementation of the proven "Moving to Opportunity" voucher program which provides counseling and assistance to the recipients.

3. Will you support building all 569 units in this city?

No. I grew up in Galveston in subsidized housing. We have to use our existing housing stock - not build more housing! How can we ask the government for taxpayer money to build homes on an island that has over 7,000 homes that are vacant or in need of repair? That's crazy!

4. Will you support building all 569 units in mixed-income developments in this city?

No. Government should not compete with private landlords. Our current Mayor says that some landlords should be put out of business. I always thought that we lived in a country where the free market decided who prospered and who did not. I would like to see the Section 8 enforcement records of the GHA under the current leadership. If GHA did their job correctly, there should be no "slums" for GHA families to live in.

5. Will you support using Section 8 Vouchers instead of building more units?

I was the first candidate for Mayor to endorse the use of vouchers and to say no to all new public housing.

6. Will you support using Moving-to-Opportunity Vouchers, that help voucher holders find accommodations in high-opportunity neighborhoods, on the Mainland, instead of building more units?

Yes. Families who have participated in the MTO program have shown to graduate from high school and college at a higher rate and engage in less risky activity than those in public housing. Current plans will force GHA residents to live in two of the worst economic census tracts in the county.