

City to get \$300 million for housing; Federal funds set to replace high-rises, relocate poor families; Desegregation settlement; Some residents to get subsidies to rent or buy in middle-class suburbs: [FINAL Edition]

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

In meetings with city, HUD and ACLU lawyers late last year, Baltimore County won guarantees: The agreement would send no more than 60 families a year to the county as renters over six years, and none would be moved to apartment complexes where more than 20 percent of tenants already received federal rent subsidies.

The agreement provides for replacement of the four high-rise complexes as well as the long-vacant Fairfield Homes in the Brooklyn-Curtis Bay area. Lafayette Courts was demolished last year, and Lexington Terrace is to be torn down in July. Murphy Homes and Flag House Courts are to be demolished between 1998 and 2001.

Some 1,342 of the families would get rent subsidies -- good only in the middle-class areas -- under the federal Section 8 program. Tenants willing to undergo job training will have preference for the subsidies. HUD has committed \$3.4 million to recruit landlords and to offer families counseling before and after the move.

FULL TEXT

Baltimore has corralled \$300 million in federal funds to replace dilapidated public housing high-rises with rowhouse communities and to house 3,200 poor black families, many in the suburbs, under an agreement reached in a desegregation lawsuit.

The partial settlement, to be unveiled today in Washington, would give two-thirds of the 3,200 families federal subsidies to rent or buy housing in mostly white, middle-class neighborhoods between this year and 2001, say sources close to the deal.

The accord makes profound changes in the way Baltimore houses the poor, and it obligates the federal government to pay for giving families a wider choice of where to live. It is expected to be a national model for public housing redevelopment and a major test of the theory that the poor are more likely to prosper if they are not surrounded by unrelenting poverty.

Baltimore would become the nation's first city to demolish all its family public-housing towers. The crime-ridden high-rises have become a symbol of the nation's failure to break the cycle of poverty and dependency in which many residents are mired.

"It's not a matter now of if we demolish the high-rises and replace them, it's a matter of making it happen," said Daniel P.

Henson III, Baltimore's housing commissioner. "This locks up \$300 million. None of this money was a certainty to us" before the agreement.

News of a proposed settlement in October spurred angry resistance in Baltimore County. Political leaders said an influx of poor city families might plunge aging suburban neighborhoods into decline. That controversy set off a new round of talks that led to the accord being announced today.

Doris Tinsley, 43, a public housing resident and a plaintiff in the class-action suit, said: "I know it's coming to an end, but I'll believe it when I see it. The actual day I see myself going out that door, then I'll be flabbergasted."

The agreement would settle much of a lawsuit filed in January 1995 by the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland on behalf of black public-housing tenants. The accord must be the subject of a hearing in U.S. District Court and be approved by Judge Marvin J. Garbis.

The suit alleged that the city, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development illegally segregated black public-housing tenants for six decades, which the defendants deny. It said they would "rebuild segregation for generations" and perpetuate poverty if allowed to redevelop the high-rise sites as public housing.

The agreement commits the city to finish demolishing four high-rise complexes by 2001; to break up poverty pockets by putting mixed-income housing on three sites; to offer some public-housing tenants rental subsidies good for use only in middle-class areas; and to give others the chance to become homeowners.

The first moves to the suburbs under the agreement probably would not occur for months.

The \$300 million in HUD money is three times what Baltimore will get for its highly touted "empowerment zone," a designation the city won in 1994 in a nationwide competition. In addition, the state has committed \$65 million and the city \$35 million to relocating high-rise tenants and building new communities.

The agreement assures that the Housing Authority will have the money to put rowhouses in place of 18 towers in four complexes -- Flag House Courts and Lafayette Courts on the east side; Lexington Terrace and Murphy Homes on the west side.

It also commits HUD to provide \$107 million more than the \$193 million originally planned. Most of the extra funds will be housing subsidies that tenants can use in middle-class areas where streets are safer and jobs are more plentiful.

The heart of the agreement has been in place since December, but federal lawyers spent months fine-tuning it before it was complete.

County wins guarantees

In meetings with city, HUD and ACLU lawyers late last year, Baltimore County won guarantees: The agreement would send no more than 60 families a year to the county as renters over six years, and none would be moved to apartment

complexes where more than 20 percent of tenants already received federal rent subsidies.

Michael H. Davis, spokesman for Baltimore County Executive C. A. Dutch Ruppersberger III, would not comment on the settlement, saying officials wanted to study it.

Mr. Ruppersberger has opposed moving the poor to the suburbs. The county is not a party to the suit and does not have to sign the agreement. But officials say privately there's little chance the county would sue to block it.

Rep. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., a freshman 2nd District Republican up for re-election this year, called the settlement "bad policy"

and vowed to keep trying to cut HUD funding. Lisa Ritter, a spokeswoman for Anne Arundel County Executive John G. Gary, said that county officials believed that the settlement "can be manageable" and that they would work with families moving into the county "to make sure they have the proper support networks."

Twenty Jewish, Islamic and Christian religious leaders, including Cardinal William H. Keeler, wrote local political leaders last week pledging to support the agreement as "a real opportunity to break the cycle of poverty."

The agreement provides for replacement of the four high-rise complexes as well as the long-vacant Fairfield Homes in the Brooklyn-Curtis Bay area. Lafayette Courts was demolished last year, and Lexington Terrace is to be torn down in July. Murphy Homes and Flag House Courts are to be demolished between 1998 and 2001.

None of the 3,200 affected families would be forced to move to the suburbs. Families relocated from the high-rises would have first shot at moving out of the city. If suburban slots remained, other public housing tenants would become eligible. About 13,000 other families live in Baltimore's public housing.

Nearly 1,100 families would remain in Baltimore, including 779 in new public housing on the four high-rise sites (which used to house 2,700 families). The Murphy Homes and Flag House Courts sites would be evenly split between public housing and market-rate units. Lexington Terrace would offer 143 units that public housing families could afford to buy.

Under a "housing mobility" program, more than 2,100 families would move to middle-class areas with less than 26 percent minority population, a poverty rate under 10 percent and less than 5 percent subsidized housing. Most city neighborhoods wouldn't qualify.

Some 1,342 of the families would get rent subsidies -- good only in the middle-class areas -- under the federal Section 8 program. Tenants willing to undergo job training will have preference for the subsidies. HUD has committed \$3.4 million to recruit landlords and to offer families counseling before and after the move.

Over six years, Baltimore County would receive no more than 360 of the 1,342 families and the city no more than 200. The remaining 782 could move anywhere that fits the agreement's race and poverty criteria.

Home ownership project

Another 814 families would receive subsidies to help them buy homes in middle-income areas. The agreement sets up a home ownership project, the first of its kind in the nation, but it offers no details of how it would work.

A nonprofit agency will be hired to run the mobility programs. Applicants will be screened for criminal records and drug abuse.

HUD will sweeten the deal by providing an extra 500 regular Section 8 certificates to help the suburban counties trim subsidized-housing waiting lists.

Judge Garbis is expected to schedule a hearing on the agreement later this spring.

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Illustration

PHOTO; Caption: Lexington Terrace: Lt. Gregory Eldridge Jr. of Wells Fargo Security checks a stairwell in a high-rise at the public housing complex, which is to be torn down in July.; Credit: JED KIRSCHBAUM : SUN STAFF

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