

Rockford Housing Authority plans to amplify security, spread affordable housing throughout the region - News - Rockford Register Star

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ROCKFORD — The city's housing authority will increase security at its residential properties in the coming year and collaborate with developers and other housing authorities to replace old public housing with new and renovated properties throughout the region.

Those are highlights of the Rockford Housing Authority's "Public Housing Authority" plan, a set of goals the agency must submit annually to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This year's plan is due July 18, and the housing authority held a public meeting at its Winnebago Street office on Monday to hear public comments about the document.

Some measures in the plan include installing new video surveillance cameras at North Main Manor and Olesen Plaza. The authority plans to work more closely with Rockford police to reduce crime, and administrators are considering purchasing software that will allow them to pinpoint the location of gunfire at housing authority properties. The housing authority recently replaced Metro Enforcement with another private security firm, Securitas, which operates a 24-hour security command center at the housing authority office on Winnebago Street.

"We've had major change this year in securing Securitas over Metro and we are working to improve our relationship with police, youth services and Remedies for domestic abuse counseling as well," said RHA Director Ron Clewer. "(Domestic abuse) continues to be the number one call for service in our developments."

He added that the authority has offered empty housing units for police use. Lighting upgrades and a new key card access system are also on the way.

The housing authority also plans to participate in a new "Regional Housing Initiative" — overseen by Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning — that allows housing authorities to collaboratively establish affordable housing for low-income people in "opportunity areas." The federal government uses that term to describe neighborhoods that are not saturated with poverty and that have good schools, jobs and transportation options. The federal government's overall goal for creating affordable housing is to move poor people to wealthier, vibrant neighborhoods so as to break up large concentrations of poverty.

The Regional Housing Initiative vouchers are attached to apartment units — as opposed to vouchers awarded to tenants — to ensure that affordable housing is available throughout the region. The vouchers can go to no more than 25 percent of an existing or newly built housing complex, so that poverty is not concentrated in a particular area.

Developers who work with the program have a better shot at obtaining more low-income housing tax credits because of the way funding organizations like the Illinois Housing Development Authority score various projects, according to CMAP. Officials from Rockford, Winnebago County and other local housing authorities have already been meeting with each other to plan a joint application for the special voucher program, Clewer said.

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