

# New Smyrna Beach Housing Authority



## Commissioners' Report

July 2010

Rosemary Walker, Chair

Tre' Shawndra Robinson

Rosalind Little, Vice-Chair

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*Our Mission: To offer affordable housing and supportive services for low income families, seniors, and those with disabilities so they can become self sufficient and productive residents of our communities,*

News reports have highlighted some significant problems at the New Smyrna Beach Housing Authority. A recent HUD evaluation identified seventeen deficiencies. The report resulted in the resignation of all but one Commissioner and the early retirement of the Executive Director.

The mayor moved quickly to appoint new commissioners, identify an acting Executive Director and charge us with the task of addressing HUD's concerns. The Jacksonville HUD office has been helpful in providing guidance and education to the newly appointed. During July, the Commissioners received training on the role of the commission in executing its responsibility as oversight to the operations. Part of that training included a tour of the Public Housing locations.

Following the training, the Commissioners agreed that we have a long way to go before we can have a housing program that meets our expectations. Overall, we were dismayed at the condition of the facilities. In addition to a general lack of housekeeping, there are fundamental upgrades that we all agreed were long past due. Unfortunately, we do not have a magic wand or buckets of money to immediately make the changes we'd like to see.

The old saying goes that the only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. This applies to what we find at the Housing Authority. In addition to responding to the HUD findings, some immediate goals have been identified. These include:

- Better communication with our stakeholders – this report is but a first step in this process. We now have a presence on the City of New Smyrna Beach website ([www.cityofnsb.com](http://www.cityofnsb.com)) where you will find meeting announcements, newsletters and other items of interest.
- Solicit input – we want to hear from our community. Soon we will be taking steps to assist in the reformation of the Resident Council – encouraging participation throughout the housing community. The community is encouraged to attend, and participate at, Board meetings and workshops. We were very pleased to have a good turnout of residents at our July 19 meeting and thank those who took the time to share their concerns.
- Make it easy to do business with us – we want to make both the staff and the commissioners of the Housing Authority resources for the residents and the community at large. In the coming months, we will look for opportunities to increase access.
- Find out where we are – we will be hiring a contractor to provide us with a Physical Needs Assessment for all public housing units. From that assessment, we will know 1. What needs to be done, 2. How much money it will require and 3. When it can be done

- Provide opportunities for residents to improve their self-sufficiency. While not yet defined, we are hopeful that sources of opportunity can be identified through grants or partnerships.
- Increased emphasis will be placed on housekeeping; both enforcement of tenant obligations as well as measurement of the performance of the authority's maintenance function. The Housing Authority has an obligation to provide decent housing that will foster a sense of community and well-being to its residents and neighbors. We have a long way to go in this area. The Housing Authority has, quite simply, failed to meet the minimum requirements to ensure dwelling units are decent, safe, and sanitary and in good repair.

You may have heard that some things have already changed. Among them:

- All preferences have been removed from the Public Housing and Section 8 waiting lists. In the future, all applications will be handled on a first come-first served basis. This applies to the existing waiting lists and any new applicants.
- Move-In/Move-Out inspections are being completed in a timely manner.
- Lead based paint testing has been completed with an identification of steps required to mitigate any potential problem.
- Section 8 tenants in the 10<sup>th</sup> and Robert Street apartments have been notified that their vouchers are not tied to their existing apartments and are transferrable to any qualifying property.

Some projects will be completed as a result of targeted funding. In other words, the Housing Authority cannot use those funds for any other purpose. These projects include:

- Installation of gas water heaters, range hoods and energy star lighting fixtures at all public housing units. These should result in reduced energy costs for all residents. This work is currently being bid with installation scheduled for fall 2010.
- Installation of new windows in Live Oak and Enterprise apartments. . Included in this project is the removal of asbestos materials. This work is scheduled to start this month.
- Upgrades on curbs and ramps, doorway and other interior modifications to ensure compliance with handicap accessible requirements.

In the coming month, the HUD Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity will visit the NSBHA to conduct a Fair Housing Compliance Review. Each Public Housing resident will be notified in writing of the dates of the review and information will be provided detailing what you should expect from the HUD officials.

## We invite you to help us in our mission to improve the Housing Authority.

- Attend our meetings and workshops – all meetings will be announced and are open to the public. The next workshop will be held Tuesday, August 3 at 5PM at the Brannon Center. The subject of the workshop will be Resident Council and the Admissions & Continued Occupancy Policy.
- Tell us what you want to hear – drop suggestions at the Housing Authority office or email them to [nsbhousing@yahoo.com](mailto:nsbhousing@yahoo.com)
- There will be an informational session, within the month, to explain the Utility Allowance Calculation and how (and when) additional charges are calculated. The time and date will be announced soon.