

Resident Questions and Staff Responses

Resident Advisory Board and Resident Council meeting on proposed Public Housing Conversion Plan
Whispering Pines, July 9, 2019 beginning at 1:00 p.m. C.D.S.T.

31 attendees

Staff present: Kathryn Paulson, Melissa Taphorn, Ann Lindquist, Keely Perrizo, and Taylor Elert-Voss

How likely is the conversion to happen?

We cannot say for sure since the final decision is up to HUD. However, HUD has issued a statement that they are interested in seeing 10% of the public housing units converted and HUD is looking, in particular, at small agencies like the CDA that own less than 250 units. We think we have a pretty good chance because our plan is straight forward.

Will or when will the CDA look at charging different rents based on the apartment size? Some of the apartments are bigger than others.

We haven't looked at varying the rent to date. The units are pretty similar in size.

Do all of the apartments get vouchers, and can you take the voucher and move?

Yes, as it looks today, everyone is eligible, and you would receive a voucher. You can choose to remain in your current apartment or pick one elsewhere. Not all landlords accept Section 8 vouchers. Please keep in mind that you do not have a voucher right now. This would only be if HUD approves the plan.

How long would the voucher be good for, one year?

The voucher would be good for as long as you are income eligible. If approved, you would be issued a voucher right away to use on your rent here or at a new apartment. You would sign a new lease.

Is the eligibility for the voucher the same as it is at Whispering Pines?

Yes.

If approved, is there a pamphlet to explain the voucher program?

Yes, there is. If approved, CDA rental assistance staff would meet with you individually to go over how the voucher works. That meeting would be similar to the recertification meeting you have with Taylor. Since everyone's income and circumstances are different, it is best to talk about that separately. You will also have a separate meeting with the property manager to sign a different lease.

I've checked out other apartments in the area but they said they no longer accept vouchers but I know a person who has a voucher who lives there.

Yes, that is probably true. There are a few apartment buildings that used to accept vouchers but aren't going forward.

We are on a waiting list for a voucher and have been for 17 years, will this bypass that list?

Sort of. You would be issued a voucher because of the conversion so you wouldn't have to wait or be on the list to receive one. With that being said, do not remove your name from any list you are currently

on because if your name came up on the list before the conversion happens, you could get a voucher sooner and if this doesn't happen you don't want to start over. If the conversion happens and we issue you a voucher, then we can remove your name from the wait list because you will have already received a voucher.

What about the flat rent, will that change? I pay \$750, not based on my income.

We want to talk with you individually about how that will work. The new rent of the units would be set somewhere between \$750 and \$915, the payment standard. Since we don't know what the timing will be, we cannot say what the rent will be just yet.

Who is benefitting from this [rent increase after conversion]?

Any increases in the rent will be paid to the CDA but the CDA puts the money back into the property.

So, does this [conversion] relieve taxpayers?

Yes, setting the rent even at \$750 would eliminate the local subsidy of this federal program.

How or when can we object to this?

Right now. You can also make comments during the public comment period or at the public hearing. Those objections would be taken into consideration by the CDA Board as to whether or not to apply. Do you object of the plan in general or about where the new rent will be set?

The rent.

Would you like us to include a comment that you would like the rent set where the flat rent is now, \$750?

Yes.

Is there a list of places that take vouchers?

Yes, the CDA maintains a list of places that have indicated, at least in the past, that they would accept vouchers. HousingLink also has an online list of places and has check marks by the ones that accept vouchers. Senior and Disability Linkage Line's are another resource.

Can you rent a home or a townhome with the voucher?

You can rent if 1) the landlord accepts vouchers and 2) if the unit passes an inspection. There is a form that you will have the landlord fill out to tell the CDA all about the place you want to rent. Then the CDA inspects the unit and if everything checks out, you can move in with your voucher.

Are you saying rent will go up?

Most residents are paying rent based on their income so their portion of the rent will stay the same.

If it converts to Section 8 is everyone's lease void?

We haven't figured out the details yet, but we'd like to try to keep the renewal dates the same on the new leases so that Taylor doesn't have to renew all the leases at one time.

Will we have to sign a new lease every year?

Yes, it will be the same process every year.

What is the earliest date we can change?

Once we submit the application, which will likely be in November, HUD has 90 days to respond, so we will not know before January if we are approved. After that, we're not sure how long it will take to do the paperwork, but we think we'd be issuing vouchers sometime in the spring of 2020.

Am I hearing a year?

At least 9 months. Possibly March or April.

Will the new lease have the same 5-day grace period since most of us don't get our social security checks before the 1st of the month?

Yes.

Staff asked residents if anyone thought the conversion plan was a bad idea.

No one raised their hand.

Resident Advisory Board and Resident Council meeting on proposed Public Housing Conversion Plan
Washington County CDA Board Room, July 10, 2019 beginning at 6:00 p.m. C.D.S.T.

10 households represented, 16 attendees

Staff present: Kathryn Paulson, Melissa Taphorn, Ann Lindquist, Keely Perrizo, and Taylor Elert-Voss

Does everyone get a voucher or every unit, in roommate situations?

One voucher per household.

Looking at Housing Link, there are not many houses that take Section 8. Will this ever change?

In a tight rental market, it may take longer to find an apartment that accepts vouchers but landlords do take them. We have many people who are finding new units every month.

All of this [conversion plan] – it's great.

Is the voucher the same, will it cover my rent?

The amount a voucher pays is based on your income and the payment standard. This payment standard is set by the CDA and can be different for different areas; for example, payment standards could be

higher in Florida but lower in northern Minnesota. If you stay in your current unit, the rent will be set within the payment standard and your portion of the rent will be the same as it is with Public Housing.

If I live in a two bedroom unit, will the voucher be a two bedroom?

For the most part, yes. The voucher program has what are called occupancy standards. The head of household is assigned a bedroom, a second adult regardless of relationship is part of that bedroom and then two persons for every bedroom after that. An exception to that is children of opposite sex, 10 years and older. So, if you are living in a 3 bedroom unit but there are only two members, you would only qualify for a two bedroom voucher. With the tenant protection vouchers, there are provisions that if you stay in your current unit, the voucher would cover that bedroom size.

If the voucher a set amount?

Not really. The amount a voucher pays is a formula that uses 30% of your income and a rent cap called a payment standard. The maximum a voucher will pay is the payment standard minus 30% of your income.

Is there a certain amount of money or a minimum amount you need to make to qualify for the voucher?

No. If you don't have any income 30% of \$0 is still \$0 so you would qualify for the voucher even if you had no income.

What is Earning Power?

You may know it as the Family Self-Sufficiency program. It's a program that encourages people to work on personal goals like going to school, buying a car, getting a better job. As your income goes up, your rent goes up but the CDA sets up an escrow account for you, like a savings plan. If you are interested, you can sign up at any time.

When will the voucher expire?

If you're not using it, it will expire. You have 120 days to look for an apartment but if you use your voucher in a lease and continue to be eligible, it does not expire.

So does your rent go up?

Your rent won't change unless your income goes up.

Now I'm confused. If I move does it change?

The answer to this question was illustrated on the white board by a staff member. The illustration showed 30% of an example income deducted from the payment standard and two examples of rental units, one at and one over payment standard.

Is the payment standard the same everywhere?

HUD determines the Fair Market Rent by region and the housing authority sets the Payment Standard within certain parameters of the Fair Market Rent. Annually, they look at market rents in each region to determine these amounts.

What about utility allowances?

The vouchers also factor in how much you pay toward utilities; same as public housing. Staff walked through an example.

Who figures all this out; the PHA where you're at?

Yes. The amount will vary depending upon where you're living. If you're thinking of moving up North, the housing costs are lower whereas New York City's payment standards would be much higher.

What if your income gets high enough that you don't get any assistance?

If you are earning a high enough income, after a period of six months of the CDA paying no rental assistance and nothing changes, you pass the voucher on.

Is the time on the schedule going to change?

The schedule is the same as on the handout. The PHA plan must be sent to HUD by October 15th and in order to meet that date the public hearing and publication dates will not change.

How long will it take? When will we find out if this goes through?

HUD has 90 days once the application is submitted for review and a response. We don't anticipate hearing from them until early 2020. We're not sure how long the conversion process will take but it is unlikely to occur before April.

If this [conversion] goes through and we want to move but we take a while, will the voucher go away?

If you plan to stay in your home until you find a place to move to there wouldn't be a lapse in time. The voucher would be helping to pay your rent in the current unit while looking for another unit.

I have several children that are getting older and starting to move out. If the voucher goes to the household, what happens when they've all moved out?

The voucher goes to the head of household so you would still have a voucher it just might be a small bedroom size.

I wish this [conversion] would go through. What can we do to help it happen?

It helps to get your positive feedback.

Do all landlords accept a voucher?

No. The housing market is hard right now so rental units are hard for anyone to find. But there are units out there. There are additional requirements for landlords with the HCV program and some landlords do not want to deal with these requirements. One of the requirements of HUD is the unit must be inspected before in the CDA can pay rent. The voucher program requires an annual Housing Quality Standard or HQS inspection which is not as difficult as a REAC inspection. It is a requirement that the landlord maintain the unit to HUD's standard. There are still many landlord who accept vouchers.

If you find a private landlord is the lease, up-keep, all that the landlord's responsibility per HUD's standards?

Yes. They are responsible to keep up the property per the HQS standards.

If a landlord decided not to continue accepting vouchers what happens? Are they lenient with the 120 days?

There is no leniency on the 120 maximum days search time. That is a HUD rule. But there are requirements about reasonable notice if the landlord is selling so there should be enough time to find another rental unit. State law protects residents as your lease is a legal document that entitles you to live in the unit until the lease terminates.

Are the vouchers for residents currently in the home? If you put this on your website are these available to the general public?

What we need to do is put the plan, that you are helping form, out to the general public for comment. It is rare that any comments are made unless they come from a party directly affected. We are not putting out on our website that vouchers are available to the general public though. If approved, HUD would issue the CDA 105 vouchers – one for each head-of-household in each public housing unit. If at some point you no longer need a voucher, you can turn it in and at that point it will get recycled to a new household from the Washington County CDA wait list.

What are the chances this [conversion] will be approved?

We cannot say for sure as it is up to HUD to approve our plan. However, we have met with all of the cities where Public Housing units are located. They will provide letters of support to the CDA's application. HUD has made a goal of converting 10% of all units nationally. It would seem that HUD is interested in reducing the number of smaller PHA's, those with less than 250 units. In addition, we are not making anyone move and we are retaining the homes as affordable rentals. So, the chances are good

If you move somewhere else, who do you work with?

Vouchers are administered by the local housing authority. If you found a place to live outside of Washington County, you would let us know and we would send your paperwork to that housing authority. They would inspect the unit, meet with you, and make the rental assistance payment. You would then meet with that housing authority on an annual basis.

If there are only so many vouchers, how does that work?

Every family living in one of the CDA's Public Housing units will get one voucher which will go to the head of household.

This [conversion] could be a blessing if you are trying to get your life together.

Are there other Minnesota counties that have converted?

Yes, we know of a few housing authorities in the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota that have been approved by HUD to convert all or a portion of their Public Housing units.

What is the timing?

Referenced the handout and slide with the steps that need to be taken to submit an application.

Staff asked residents if anyone thought the conversion plan was a bad idea.

No one raised their hand.

Resident Advisory Board and Resident Council meeting on proposed Public Housing Conversion Plan
Washington County CDA Board Room, July 11, 2019 beginning at 11:00 a.m. C.D.S.T.

3 households represented, 3 attendees

Staff present: Kathryn Paulson, Melissa Taphorn, Ann Lindquist, and Keely Perrizo

My daughter is pregnant. How would that work if she wants to receive a voucher?

Since you are the head of household, you would receive the voucher through this process, if approved. Your daughter, if she wanted to move out on her own, would need to apply separately for a voucher to begin the process. She might want to check over at Dakota County CDA as they may be open and taking applications right now.

I think it's [conversion plan] a good idea.

Do you think it will take place next year?

If approved, yes. We will submit an application in the fall and HUD has 90 days to review, which would put us in early 2020. We are unsure what that process will entail and how long it will take.

I heard that you have to live in your unit for one year before you can move, is that the same?

That rule is still in place. If converted, these vouchers would be issued as tenant protection vouchers and they allow you to move immediately so you would not have to stay in your unit for a year, if you wished to move. Once you move, you would enter into a one-year lease.

That's really good news. My boys have gotten bigger and we've outgrown our space.

The housing market is very tight right now so it may take some time to find something, but there are definitely units out there.

How is variable income calculated, like if I work more hours one month than another?

For Section 8, we project forward what your income will be in the next 12 months.

Do they still have that homebuyer program?

The CDA has a homebuyer education class, Home Stretch. Certification is good for one year. Free classes in June and sometimes December. We offer downpayment assistance and work with the state to offer a low interest mortgage program. We have homebuyer counseling on site too.

Is Two Rivers CLT still around?

Yes, they too are a good resource for affordable homeownership.

Has this happened before in other locations?

Yes. Bloomington and Metro HRA have converted units, Carver County CDA and some Greater Minnesota housing agencies have converted subsets of their public housing units. They have not generally used the same conversion tools as Washington County CDA plans to use, but they have converted from Public Housing to another rental assistance program.

Does every public housing agency do the same thing?

No. We're in a unique situation which allows us to continue owning the units. We administer the Section 8 program and we also have affordable housing units that are only income and rent restricted. We have a great partner in Shelter Corporation to help manage all the housing units. Some agencies only have public housing and/or Section 8 vouchers.

What is the age for children to have separate bedrooms?

If you have two children of opposite sex, they do not have to share a bedroom once they reach the age of ten.

My daughter is pregnant. So after the baby is born do I have to move? There will be 5 people in a 4 bedroom unit.

No, the addition of the baby is still in the occupancy standards for a 4 bedroom unit.

Will HUD sell the house to you if you live in it for a certain period of time?

Some agencies do rent-to-own. We don't. I know Minneapolis has done some rent-to-own in the past but I don't know of any other PHAs that have that program.

Staff asked residents if anyone thought the conversion plan was a bad idea.

No one raised their hand.

Additional comments submitted by postcard, email and voicemail. Received at the Washington County CDA Office by July 26, 2019 C.D.S.T.

Received 7-9-2019 following the presentation at Whispering Pines. No contact information provided.

This is a great program – and I am excited and really hope I will be approved. I have lived here 11 – 12 years now in quite a small apartment and would like to receive a voucher where I can look forward to a larger living space. Thank you!!!

Received 7-15-2019 by email.

Hi, I wasn't able to make the 2 meetings because of work, but I am all too excited about it converting to Section 8 Vouchers. This will give us the tenant, a wider choice in keeping our housing & finding

better places to live. What makes a tenant eligible to receive the voucher? If I'm eligible, I will be able to move out of Washington county and/or find me an affordable home to rent where I can garden & live in the neighborhood of my choosing. I hope this is approved and implemented as soon as possible. This is great news for current residents & I hope this is done swiftly & fairly.

Staff provided this response:

Dear:

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback on the conversion plan. We received many positive comments about the plan. Please keep in mind, this needs to be approved by HUD before we can implement the plan. IF the plan is approved, we don't anticipate issuing vouchers until sometime next spring or early summer.

In order to be eligible for a Housing Choice Voucher you need to be living in the Public Housing unit and your household income must be at or below 80% of the area median income as determined by household size.

We expect to receive HUD's response to the plan in early 2020 and will notify all residents, at that time, of the status. It will still take time to make the change and again, it may not be until spring or early summer before we can issue vouchers.

Thank you again,

Received July 24, 2019 by postcard. From a scattered site resident, but no name or address provided for response.

I think this is great that we will be part of section 8, because it will give me more choices of where I can live instead of being stuck in the same unit I have been for years.

Received July 26, 2019 on a postcard forwarded from Whispering Pines. No name or address provided for response.

I believe this program would be very beneficial to tenants, its hard to find affordable housing. With this program it will help those in need to move if they choose. It will give them a much bigger variety that would suit their needs.

Voice message received July 26, 2019.

Hello, I am one of the residents of a scattered site property. I'm interested in providing my input for the Public Housing conversion. I'm interested in talking with someone about it or being involved with it to make it happen. I'm interested to see if I can get a voucher.

Staff called the resident back, described the timeline and explained how the conversion will work. The resident is in favor of the conversion and excited to have the option of moving.