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I N T R O D U C T I O N



Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in reading **HANO in the News: A Media Summary**.

This publication was designed to showcase the milestones achieved within the last four and a half years which were also featured in the local, regional and nation media. The stories were captured during a very critical time in HANO's history, with more than a decade of federal receivership under the leadership of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

This booklet offers an opportunity to look back at published articles ranging from the start and completion of construction projects to programming modifications and technology enhancements. Between the years of 2009 and 2014, new goals were put in place and accomplishments were attained while setting up the agency to return to local control.

Some of the most notable accomplishments include the redevelopment of the "Big Four" Columbia Parc, Harmony Oaks, Faubough Lafitte and Marrero Commons, the kick-off of the transformation of Iberville and construction at the Florida and Guste communities, and the conception of the formally adopted Criminal Background Policy. The agency also met several milestones within the HCV Program by announcing the use of the Housing Choice Connect online system for Section 8 voucher holders and the closure of the costly distant West Bank office, giving more administrative accessibility to program participants.

Other significant achievements include the obligation and use of federal stimulus funding at the Fischer and Guste sites after fearing it would be withdrawn, the transition of HANO Security staff to a legislatively, fully operable Police Department, and the published revision of the Section 3 Employment, Training and Contracting Policy which has been instrumental in providing more jobs to members of the HANO community.

But all was not perfect, and the agency withstood many obstacles. We were faced with many tough decisions on retracting more than 700 vouchers, the termination of a Community Supportive Services contractor, and the sudden delay of expenditures during the government shutdown. These instances were learning opportunities for administration and I want to personally thank the staff and Resident Leaders for their commitment to working through each and every challenge with the utmost respect and perseverance.

Again, it has been a pleasure to serve this agency and the residents of New Orleans, and to lead a very capable and dedicated staff through this unprecedented time in the agency's history. I also want to acknowledge our media partners for their contribution in providing real time news on the accomplishments and challenges as we continue to move this agency toward a full recovery.

Administrative Receiver David Gilmore

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Gilmore", written over a light blue horizontal line.

It was the year...

4100

A.P. TUREAUD

BUILDING

2009



Administrative Receiver David Gilmore speaks with a HANO resident leader

The Times-Picayune

Public housing turnaround expert chosen to lead New Orleans housing authority

By **Katy Reckdahl**
October 2009

David Gilmore, a nationally known fix-it man for troubled housing agencies, will take the helm at HANO in an unprecedented effort to right the listing agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced Friday.

Gilmore will serve as the federal receiver at HANO, overseeing day-to-day activity at the housing authority, which has been under HUD receivership since 2002. In a change from the traditional HUD receivership model, though, Gilmore will lead a team of 12 managers instead of being paired with one other HUD official.

In recent years, Gilmore has led Gilmore Kean, a Washington, D.C. consulting firm that advises public-housing agencies. He's also served as the court-appointed transportation administrator for district schools, which were charged with busing thousands of special-needs students. Gilmore's job was to comply with the order while keeping costs under control.

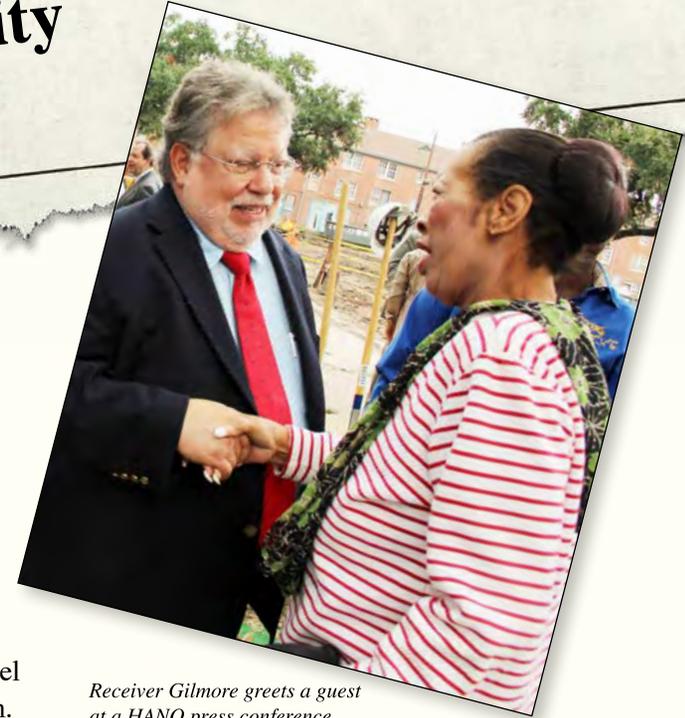
Gilmore, a senior administrator in public housing for 40 years, may be best-known for his five-year stint as head of the District of Columbia Housing Authority, where he turned around what was then the nation's worst-performing housing authority, according to HUD rankings. Gilmore has played leading roles in public housing in Boston, Seattle and San Francisco.

On Friday, Gilmore named three members of his team: Diana Smith as chief financial

officer and two deputy general managers, Leslie Dews and Keith Pettigrew.

HUD also announced a local HANO advisory panel to work with the new team.

Panel members are: John Alford, principal at Langston Hughes Academy; Rev. D.R. Berryhill, Sr. of First Zion Baptist Church; Dr. Karen DeSalvo, Tulane University School of Medicine's vice-dean of community affairs and health policy; Martin Gutierrez, who heads up neighborhood and community services at Catholic Charities; Nick Harris, who directs the Dillard University Community Development Corp.; Michael Hecht, president of Greater New Orleans, Inc.; Ellen Lee, senior vice president of programs at the Greater New Orleans Foundation; Maggie Merrill, director of policy for the city of New Orleans; U.S. Congressman Joseph Cao's deputy chief of staff Rosalind Psychaud, U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu's regional manager, LaVerne Saulny; Laura Tuggle, who heads up housing law at Southeast Louisiana Legal Services; Tracie Washington, managing director of the Louisiana Justice Institute; and Cynthia Wiggins, head of the Guste Home Resident Management Corporation.



Receiver Gilmore greets a guest at a HANO press conference

The Times-Picayune

HANO's new leader tries novel approach: listening

By **Katy Reckdahl**
December 2009



Receiver Gilmore listens to speaker at monthly board meeting



Receiver Gilmore meets with HANO cabinet members

David Gilmore, the new honcho at the Housing Authority of New Orleans, set a different tone Tuesday as he presided over his first board meeting: He asked his staff to explain agenda items, admitted past HANO mistakes and closed with a homily telling low-income residents that he and his team needed to hear their stories about the “real everyday issues that people have to contend with.”

For the past month, Gilmore and his 12-person fix-it team have focused on immediate triage of HANO problems and the creation of a comprehensive forensic assessment of HANO, slated to be completed by February and used as the basis for a yearlong plan to stabilize the agency.

Gilmore's predecessors sprinted through each agenda, typically in less than 10 minutes, followed by public questions that rarely were answered. But Gilmore, in his debut as HANO's one-man-board, asked to hear from his audience first and then took comments for an hour and a half before moving to the agenda.

Afterward, he got a hug from an unlikely ally, protester and former St. Bernard complex resident Sharon Jasper, who for years has been cut short by HANO officials in the midst of her long and winding speeches. “Some questions he didn't answer, but I felt like he listened,” Jasper said.

Protesters from STAND, the New Orleans Workers' Center project, murmured during

the meeting about Gilmore's refusal to predict when the agency would release more Section 8 vouchers, but found Gilmore in agreement with most of their key issues. Gilmore said that it had been a mistake to relocate HANO's Section 8 voucher office to the West Bank and promised to scrutinize all contracts, including the no-bid agreement that outsourced the entire Section 8 department to Houston company Mir Fox Rodriguez.

Gilmore called employees to the podium and asked them why he should approve each of the agenda's 16 resolutions, which included new construction at B.W. Cooper and the former Desire site, the sale of six scattered-site properties and apartments at River Garden, and several new contracts for repairs, accounting and legal work.

Gilmore, who last week suspended agreements with two companies with ties to convicted felons, prefaced his approval of new contracts by asking “Have we checked carefully enough that we aren't inviting into our midst parties that shouldn't be here?”

And before approving a \$680,000 legal-services contract to Baltimore firm Ballard Spahr Andrews and Ingersoll, Gilmore asked whether a New Orleans firm might not make more sense for that work and vowed to ensure that local businesspeople perceive HANO as a place with high standards that paid its bills on time: “a friendly place to do business,” he said.

It was the year...



2010

CHAPTER 2:
YEAR 2010



Guste Homes newly-installed appliances and cabinets

The Times-Picayune

HANO proves doubters wrong, lines up plans for stimulus money

By **Katy Reckdahl**
March 2010



Guste Homes

Defying earlier predictions, the Housing Authority of New Orleans on Tuesday will submit a balanced budget and obligate all of its federal stimulus money, said David Gilmore, leader of a federally hired turnaround team that arrived in November.

Gilmore had said in January that he didn't plan to return "one nickel" of the \$34.6 million in federal stimulus money awarded to HANO, despite a December audit by the inspector general for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that concluded HANO would be unable to meet a March 17 deadline to earmark the money.

On Tuesday, Gilmore -- HANO's one-man board and administrator -- lived up to his word by ratifying the final \$7.3 million in stimulus obligations. He hired contractors to re-roof the Sojourner Truth Community Center on the edge of the Lafitte housing redevelopment; install cabinets and appliances at Guste Homes; upgrade and repair the Guste high-rise building for the elderly; remediate and demolish scattered-site buildings; replace 347 refrigerators in HANO apartments with energy-efficient models; repair apartments; and replace antiquated plumbing and electrical panels and fix rutted courtyards at the Iberville complex. In all, 10 contracts were approved.

Low bidder for the scattered-site demolitions was Hamp's Construction, but the bid was removed from consideration, said Angela Anderson, vice president of contracts and compliance, who said that "the apparent low bidder was deemed non-responsible due to the bidder's history of improper business practices and non-compliance with public policy."

HANO, like other public entities in the city, has for years contracted with Charlie

Hampton's two companies -- Hamp's Enterprises LLC and Hamp's Construction LLC -- but Anderson was apparently referencing Hampton's November sentencing on criminal charges of illegal dumping and \$40,000 fine for dumping in a wetland area along Almonaster Boulevard over several years. Hampton also pleaded guilty to charges stemming from an April 2009 arrest by Department of Environmental Quality agents for submitting documents to the agency that contained false certifications of asbestos inspections that did not occur.

As recently as September 2008, HANO hired Hamp's Construction for two demolition jobs totaling nearly \$300,000, for 25 duplexes and a maintenance building at the Florida complex and 13 scattered-site buildings along Chef Menteur Highway. It was unclear if any debris from those jobs ended up in the eastern New Orleans wetland.

Also, as recently as last month, Gilmore's team had predicted a deficit of several million for this fiscal year, which ends in September. But on Tuesday, his team's deputy general manager, Leslie Dews, presented a balanced budget. To balance the \$179 million budget, Dews said she, along with HANO staff assigned to her, did a comprehensive review of the housing units eligible for HUD subsidy, recalculated administrative fees, cut contractor costs and reviewed and recalculated key expenditures. With that, they were able to both balance the rest of the budget and move \$3.1 million of non-federal money to cover an operating deficit in the agency's voucher program, she said.

"It is a real budget," Gilmore said, noting that the agency now would be in compliance with HUD's balanced-budget requirement "without sacrificing programmatic capacity."

The Times-Picayune

HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan cuts ribbon at St. Bernard redevelopment, tours 'Big Four'

By **Katy Reckdahl**
April 2010



Columbia Parc at the Bayou District

"It is a beautiful day, and I mean that in all senses of the word," Shaun Donovan, head of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, said Monday as he prepared to cut a shiny red ribbon to open 101 apartments at the former St. Bernard housing development, now called Columbia Parc at the Bayou District.

Groundbreakings and ribbon-cuttings often dominate when Donovan comes to town. But during this visit under sunny skies, he also met with the mayoral transition team, toured other Big Four complexes and announced a new social-services initiative for the thousands of families who receive housing assistance through the Housing Authority of New Orleans.

Through a significant new partnership, five local nonprofit groups -- the United Way, Literacy Alliance of New Orleans, Goodwill Industries, Volunteers of America and Via Link -- will now provide services to the thousands of families who either live in HANO apartments or receive rental assistance through the agency's housing-voucher program.

When compared with other cities and housing authorities, Donovan said later, the need for such services in New Orleans is greater, but HANO had less capacity to provide them. Donovan said improved social services has been a theme of his nationwide, noting that while HUD's previous administration focused primarily on physical and property development, he is expanding the agency's focus to include "human development, which is equally important," he said.

At the Columbia Parc event, Cantrese Wilson, president of what residents called the "new side" of the two-part St. Bernard complex, recalled how she heard about HUD's proposed demolition of her lifelong home. It was not long after Hurricane Katrina, while she was living as an evacuee in Houston, she said, noting that she was "heartbroken" and wasn't sure when her neighborhood would be rebuilt, if ever. She and other residents already saw HANO demolish complexes and then forget developments like the nearby Imperial Drive, which was razed more than 10 years ago and was replaced by nothing but tall weeds.

But in February, the first residents moved into Columbia Parc's mixed-income community, which rents to households from three different income levels: tenants who walk off the street and rent at the highest, market-level rents; very low-income families who receive the lowest "public-housing-level" rents, which are coupled with monthly federal subsidies to the developer; and moderate-income people who receive midrange rents as part of a federal housing tax-credit program.

And so now, Wilson's cell phone rings often as her former neighbors ask about the new public-housing apartments, which are offered to elderly and disabled St. Bernard-complex residents first; those with more years of tenancy also receive higher rankings. Wilson moved back to the city a few years ago and immediately returned to her church in the area, St. Bernard Baptist Mission, but she has postponed her family's complete return in hopes of being able to purchase one of the new "homeownership" houses that Columbia Parc will sell to qualified former residents.

– Continued –

After the ribbon-cutting at Columbia Parc, a small HUD entourage toured the sites of the other Big Four developments: B.W. Cooper, Harmony Oaks (formerly C.J. Peete) and Lafitte. At each site, Donovan spoke with resident leaders about what was happening -- or not happening.

In 2008, HUD demolished most of the 3,000 Big Four apartments that were occupied when Katrina hit. The agency planned to replace 1,904 by the end of this year, by using Gulf Opportunity Zone tax credits as equity. But it now looks as though HUD will complete only 60 percent of its plans, thanks to a bottomed-out financial market that left developers with financial gaps, few investors and a tough-to-meet Dec. 31 tax-credit deadline.

At the Lafitte complex in the 6th Ward, not far from the French Quarter, Donovan climbed to a second-floor balcony in one of the complex's salvaged buildings with resident-council president Emelda Paul. There, he scrutinized developers' plans to construct 1,500 homes on the long narrow 6th Ward site and its surrounding neighborhood, where construction crews are scurrying to finish a mere 181 houses and apartments on three large blocks by the year's end.

Donovan said he's hopeful that within the next few weeks, legislation extending the GO-Zone tax-credit deadline will move through a congressional conference committee and to the desk of the president. Once that happens, said Jim Kelly, head of Lafitte co-developer Providence Community Housing, he can close deals with interested investors and "we can move down the block."

Until then, infrastructure work continues at B.W. Cooper, but its larger rebuilding plans are stalled. "I do get impatient," said Judith Watson, president of the resident-management group at the complex on Earhart Boulevard, which has been the slowest of the Big Four to build on its flattened site.

But during the past year, Watson and other resident leaders have seen lots of Donovan, whose visit this week was his fifth to New Orleans as HUD secretary. "I'll be back," he promised a teary Watson, as she told him how some of her displaced residents living in apartments with Section 8 vouchers had trouble keeping up with steep utility bills.

"I want you to come back," Watson said. "Thank you."



Columbia Parc at the Bayou District

It was the year...



2011



Faubourg Lafitte housing community

The Times-Picayune

HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan thanks public housing residents for patience with rebuilding process

By **Katy Reckdahl**
February 2011

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan on Friday christened the first 134 apartments on the site of the demolished Lafitte public housing complex in the city's 6th Ward.

When President Barack Obama took office, Donovan said, not a single resident had moved back to the de-

molished "Big Four": B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte and St. Bernard.

Now, he said, 700 families live on the four sites.

"Thanks to every single one of you who stuck with us," he told several former residents, who began to move back this week.

A year ago, because of the nation's financial crisis and a federal tax-credit deadline that made investors leery, the Lafitte site was completely stalled. Then, last February, HANO jump-started the process with a \$10.5 million loan that helped the developers -- Providence Community Housing, Enterprise Community Partners and L+M Development Partners -- secure a construction loan for the first 134 apartments on the site. A total of 900 are planned.

Once construction began, crews worked around the clock to make the buildings habitable by the year-end deadline so the project's developers could collect from tax-credit investors.

On Friday, Goldman Sachs committed to investing \$35 million in Lafitte's second, 142-apartment phase, allowing the work to continue on that segment of the vast 27.5-acre site, which is anchored at Claiborne and Orleans avenues.

Once again, crews will be racing against the clock, since Congress extended the Gulf Opportunity Zone tax credit deadline by only one year, to the end of 2011. Sen. Mary Landrieu has secured commitments from her colleagues to extend it to 2012 but her bill still needs a sponsor in the House.

Plans for the former Lafitte site divided the property into 517 separate city lots, with 376 rental apartments and 141 for-sale homes and condos, 47 of which have financing so far, investors said this week.

Lafitte developers also said they are in discussions with FEMA to help finance a 100-unit building for seniors in the center of the site, which would complete all on-site rentals. Other planned rentals will be built off-site.

Residents return

Emelda Paul, 76, president of Lafitte's residents council, was contemplative before Friday's dedication. She recalled, five years ago, looking out her window at North Roman and Orleans streets and seeing a man outside in a boat.

"I really didn't want to leave. I cried, I cried," she said.

But a young neighbor named Carl Osborne told her, "MaMa, we have to leave, the water is rising."



Faubourg Lafitte housing community

So, with her family around her, Paul stepped in water up to her chest and climbed the entrance ramp to Interstate 10, where she waited until her grandson picked them up in a car to take them to the West Bank.

The whole extended family ended up at a relative's house in Phoenix and it was there that she was contacted by Jim Kelly from Providence, who

said that the developers wanted to sit down with her and the rest of her residents council.

“We’ve been at the table since day one,” Paul said.

From the start, the Lafitte rehabilitation established itself as different from the rest of the Big Four projects in key ways. Developers announced early on that they planned to do one-for-one replacement of the 896 public-housing-level rentals demolished at Lafitte, even though other developers were replacing one-third of the highly subsidized units, at best.

Lafitte’s look is also distinct, with a plan that preserves many of the existing live oak trees and architecture dominated by single-family cottages and shotgun-style singles and doubles, with porches and traditional details.

And while the ambitious resident-driven plan may be compromised a bit by its delays, developers said this week that they are still committed to building 900 total rental apartments and 600 for-sale units in the site and surrounding area.

Leslie Johnson, 29, who was one of eight renters who received keys this week, gave Donovan a tour of her apartment Friday in what is now called the “Faubourg Lafitte.” Former residents got first dibs, and more than 150 applied for the first phase of apartments, all set at public-housing-level rents.

More than five years elapsed since Johnson and her large extended family waded

through floodwaters outside the Lafitte, ending up in the Convention Center, then Houston and the nearby Iberville development.

But the end product was worth the wait, Johnson said. “Maybe if they had rushed it, it wouldn’t have been done right.”

Area attracts development

Mayor Mitch Landrieu and Kelly both noted that the area around the new Faubourg Lafitte has received a shot in the arm in recent months, with the planned Lafitte Greenway, newly paved streets, a new library and the promised Veterans Affairs hospital. “Within a half-mile radius of Lafitte, \$3.2 billion of development is taking place,” Kelly said.

Much of that is the result of heightened cooperation between the federal government and the city. While the city had other strong partners, in Donovan, “we have one great champion,” Landrieu said.

Donovan, whose visit Friday was his 10th since taking office, did bring in the HANO takeover team, which has made strides to transform the troubled agency into a functional one.

And while his predecessor, Steve Preston, oversaw the financial closings that started construction at Harmony Oaks and Columbia Parc, Donovan and his new HANO team got the Lafitte project moving and are rumored to be close to a groundbreaking at B.W. Cooper.

But the 700 households now living in the Big Four sites are still a far cry from the 1,904 apartments that HUD had planned by this time. Most of those residents also pay more than public-housing-level rents.

Of the 348 families in Central City at Harmony Oaks, built on the site of the former C.J. Peete complex, 168 live in public-housing rentals, with 87 in mid-range rentals financed by Low Income Housing Tax Credits and 93 in market-rate apartments.

At Columbia Parc in Gentilly, formerly the St. Bernard complex, 86 are in public-housing rentals, 123 in housing-tax-credit apartments and 135 in market-rate apartments.

No new rentals are open at Cooper, the longest-stalled site, where 266 families live in interim apartments in the original brick buildings.

The Times-Picayune

HANO security officers would get arrest powers under bill OK'd by House committee

By Ed Anderson
June 2011



HANO PD vehicle

Despite opposition from New Orleans residents, a Louisiana House committee gave unanimous approval late Thursday to a bill that would allow the Housing Authority of New Orleans to run its own police department with arrest powers.

The Committee on Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs sent Senate Bill 78 by Sen. Edwin Murray, D-New Orleans, to the full House for debate. The measure cleared the Senate a few weeks ago with little debate.

Rep. Charmaine Marchand Stiaes, D-New Orleans, a member of the House panel, said the bill may be amended on the House floor to address concerns of the three witnesses who testified against the bill.

Mitchell Dusset, a former top-level supervisor with the New Orleans Police Department who now runs the 13-member housing authority security force, said that he needs the bill so his officers can be better trained to make arrests.

Now, he said, they can detain suspects but not arrest or book them. Instead, they have to call the New Orleans police to pick up suspects they have detained, Dusset said.

He said he wants to see HANO's police force grow to 26 in the next two years and train them in the use of weapons and how to better protect residents.

A New Orleans activist, the Rev. Raymond Brown, asked the panel to derail Murray's bill because the people of New Orleans, especially those in public housing, had no

input on the bill.

"In a democracy, we should at least go to the people," Brown said.

Gesturing toward other opponents, Brown said, "These people were left out of the process."

Michael Howells, a member of Hands Off Iberville, said that with a diminishing number of public housing units, the authority's request to form a police force "seems to defy common sense. ... I am wary of the security detail of New Orleans' corruption-riddled housing agency being given the power of arrest and incarceration.

"The likelihood of abuse of these powers, should it be given HANO, is great given the housing authority's recent track record" of having employees arrested or fired.

"The bottom line is that it's just like the NOPD hiring a private security company to do what the residents of the city of New Orleans is already paying them to do," said Sharon Jasper, another opponent of the bill.

She said HANO's police are "very disrespectful to ... public housing residents." Murray tried to convince the opponents that his bill is designed to improve the caliber of the officers.

He said the officers will not be eligible for state supplemental pay, the monthly portion of a police officer or firefighter's salary paid by the state.

The Times-Picayune

HANO moves to collect \$1.8 million in overpayments to Section 8 landlords

By **Katy Reckdahl**
June 2011

Nearly 1,000 landlords will soon receive collection letters from the Housing Authority of New Orleans, as the agency attempts to collect an estimated \$1.8 million worth of duplicate Section 8 payments made between October 2007 and September 2009.

In April, HANO officials discovered the duplicate payments, averaging \$1,900 per apartment. Of the 956 landlords who were overpaid, 136 continue to receive payments from HANO and could face deductions in their monthly payments until their balances are resolved.

Although HANO officials said they do not release the names of Section 8 landlords for fear of violating the privacy of tenants, spokeswoman Lesley Eugene said the top 10 debtors owed between \$10,344 and \$33,783.

The overpayments ended around the same time that Section 8 administrator Dwayne Muhammad resigned. Muhammad left HANO in August 2009, after a TV story alleged that he was helping himself to a housing voucher from the program he administered.

HANO receiver David Gilmore said he would have referred the matter to the inspector general of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development if he thought it involved wrongdoing. He instead chalked it up to “administrative incompetence related to the transfer of data from one computer program to another.”



HANO A.P. Tureaud Building located on 4100 Touro Street

Last year, U.S. District Judge Sarah Vance ordered Muhammad, who sometimes used the last name Shorts-Muhammad, to serve eight months in prison, eight months on house arrest and three years of supervised parole after his prison term. He also was ordered to pay \$45,318 in restitution.

Section 8 tenants rent apartments on the private market and pay up to one-third of their household income in rent. HANO makes up the remainder, paid directly to the landlord.

HANO will use legal means and a national collection agency to help recoup the money but the agency will waive added interest, collection, and potential legal fees for landlords who respond within 10 days of receiving HANO’s letter.

The Times-Picayune

B.W. Cooper residents help rebuild development

By **Katy Reckdahl**
August 2011

It's not often that workers from the poorest neighborhoods in town get a chance to complain directly to a CEO about low wages. But recently, they did. And the CEO said, "Yes, you're right."

Two weeks ago, low-income workers from the B.W. Cooper public-housing development told Gibbs Construction CEO Larry Gibbs that laborers helping to build Cooper's new mixed-income community were being paid only \$8.01 per hour, the current federal prevailing-wage minimum.

"Too low," said Gibbs, who had convened a meeting with the workers and the 25 subcontractors he oversees as general contractor of the Cooper site. He ordered all his subcontractors to begin paying a base of \$11 per hour.

The meeting underscored how Cooper residents, who began demanding jobs for themselves and their neighbors several months ago, have moved beyond protest and into an unprecedented working relationship with Gibbs and the Housing Authority of New Orleans.

Under pressure from residents, HANO administrators have audited employment at the site, even allowing resident monitors into HANO offices to inspect files and check for compliance.

The aim is to close long-acknowledged loopholes in the federal Section 3 law, which mandates that contractors on jobs financed by the U.S. Department of Housing and



Section 3 residents construct buildings at B.W. Cooper

Urban Development give hiring preference to qualified public-housing residents, and then to other equally poor people.

The newest HANO numbers show progress: 52 percent of new hires at Cooper -- 24 of 46 workers -- are people whose low incomes have been verified. About 400 more would-be workers have completed applications.

Despite the success, Gibbs wasn't happy about the picket signs that appeared at the site earlier this year, which demanded that he hire more residents. He still believes that expectations were set too high.

"I think in some ways the project was over-sold," he said. "We can't employ every person in the development. And my job isn't to make everybody happy. But my intent is to be extra fair."

Closing Section 3 loopholes

Gibbs is coordinating what he calls "a lot of moving parts" at Cooper, where financial problems delayed construction. Now, he and two dozen subcontractors are working

under “incredibly tight” deadlines to complete 250 apartments, 175 of which must be done by the end of the year.

So he is relieved the disputes of late have been comparatively minor. Earlier this year, David Gilmore, head of the federal takeover team hired to fix HANO nearly two years ago, delayed payments to Gibbs, saying that the company hadn’t met its Section 3 obligations.

The complaints haven’t died down completely. Most recently, workers hired under Section 3 have griped that they’re working alongside people who are paid up to \$5 an hour more for the same work. Gilmore said that if the wage disparities are true, they are “patently unfair.”

So far, Gibbs has refused to arbitrate individual wages. “I believe that in the long run, things work out for the guy who works hard irrespective of the pay,” Gibbs said. But earlier this month, exasperated by reports of inequitable wages, lost applications and foremen sidestepping the Section 3 process, Gilmore hired a resident, Gary Truvia, to monitor the site and to report directly to HANO.

“This is like the Energizer bunny: it keeps going and going,” Gilmore said. “Are we ever going to get this ironed out?”

Behind the struggles at Cooper is an increased national focus on Section 3 requirements by the Obama administration and HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan. Although Section 3 was created in the 1968 legislation that made HUD a Cabinet-level agency, a 2003 report by HUD’s inspector general found that the law was almost never enforced.

Prior to 2006, HUD received only 4 percent of required Section 3 reports from state and local governments and housing authorities, John Trasvina, assistant secretary for HUD’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, said in recent testimony before Congress.

In 2009, Trasvina co-signed a letter directing HUD grantees to file reports or risk being denied money. Almost 80 percent of agencies have now filed annual reports. In February, the Housing Justice Network, a national advocacy group, proposed

changes to narrow the law’s loopholes. For instance, Section 3 requires that low-income workers total 30 percent of new hires. But it doesn’t specify how many hours each new hire must work. So some contractors satisfy requirements by “churning” -- hiring and firing a succession of workers.

HANO’s auditors will soon be scrutinizing both hours and hires, Gilmore said. But they haven’t in the past. “So the statistics may show compliance,” he said, “but if you set the bar too low, it doesn’t mean a damn thing.”

Gibbs, who has done plenty of government work, said he always thought he was doing what Section 3 required.

“But I don’t think anyone appreciated what Section 3 was about. I don’t think we did. Until this job,” Gibbs said.

Keeping an eye out

In February, as work ramped up at Cooper, residents observed that almost no one working on slabs or hammering on frames was from their community.

They felt left out, Alvin Blanton, a carpenter’s helper and Cooper resident until Katrina, testified at a City Council hearing in May.

Blanton visits Cooper often to see his daughter and grandchildren, each time fervently hoping for work.

“It’s hard for me to go out the door and not be working on the job,” said Blanton, who is still waiting to be hired.

From every Cooper apartment, eyes seem to be on the new site.

On a recent Saturday morning, carpenter Alfred Marshall looked out his window in the Cooper and was surprised to see his work crew show up. It’s another as-yet unresolved issue: Section 3 workers often aren’t told about overtime shifts, Marshall said.

Did the crew think they could work unnoticed? Marshall chuckled at the thought: he lives directly across from the sprawling construction site.

“By me having a bird’s-eye view, I put on my helmet and boots, went to the yard and worked,” Marshall said.

Gibbs hailed Marshall’s move. “Any crew that’s going to work, the whole crew will work,” Gibbs said.

But Marshall wouldn’t likely have that job -- much less that sort of a say-so in his employment -- if he and other residents hadn’t pulled together to fight for work, with the help of organizer Colette Tippy from the group STAND With Dignity, part of the New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice.

Marshall is proud of the results. So is Gibbs, who believes that their work is “setting a template” for publicly financed construction sites. “I told STAND I owe them a debt of gratitude for bringing this to light,” Gibbs said.

Residents say that they wouldn’t have gotten this far without groundwork laid six years ago. In late 2005, over HANO’s objections, Cooper’s tenacious Resident Management Corp. fought to preserve 300 of its traditional, circa-1941 brick apartments until redevelopment was done.

“We were supposed to be emptied like the other three,” said Donna Johnigan, Resident Management president. Instead, they were able to save two-dozen gray-brick buildings from the bulldozers that flattened most of Cooper’s 1,546 apartments and the rest of the so-called Big Four public-housing complexes: C.J. Peete, Lafitte and St. Bernard.

And so, while there have been complaints about lackadaisical Section 3 enforcement at other Big Four sites, residents at Cooper see exactly who’s being hired. And who’s not.

“We have a key advantage: We’re watching,” Marshall said.



Section 3 residents construct buildings at B.W. Cooper

The Times-Picayune

HANO gets \$30.5 million to re-do Iberville public-housing complex

By **Katy Reckdahl**
August 2011

The Housing Authority of New Orleans today received a \$30.5 million federal grant that could drastically change a large portion of the city's downtown. The grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development also seals the fate of the Iberville, the city's last traditional public-housing development, which sits near the edge of the French Quarter.

As the grant demanded, HANO and its partner, the city of New Orleans, expanded their plans and investment far beyond the 23-acre Iberville site to an area they call "Iberville-Treme," a 300-square-block area bordered by Tulane and St. Bernard avenues and Broad and Rampart streets. With hopes of transforming an entire neighborhood, developers will spend \$589 million in the "Iberville-Treme" area to construct nearly 2,446 new apartments, many above ground-floor stores and cafes.

HANO administrative receiver David Gilmore has said for months that he planned to re-do the Iberville no matter what and that the \$30.5 million federal grant amounted to only a "downpayment" on the overall plan. But federal support of the project also brings other needed supports, such as Section 8 vouchers for all families who need to move while construction is underway.

Developers have already been moving forward.

Construction is underway in the historic 18-story Texaco Building at 1501 Canal St., which will include 114 senior-citizen apartments and ground-floor retail. And a

group of developers filed applications today with the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency, requesting low-income housing tax credits for three segments of the plan. Nonprofit

developer Artspace filed an application for its plan to create art lofts within the historic Andrew J. Bell school in the 6th Ward. And Iberville site developers McCormack Baron Salazar and HRI Properties requested tax credits for one section of the Iberville complex and for Israel Augustine School on South Broad Street, which will be renovated into apartments.

Another historic 6th Ward school, G.O. Mondy, will also become apartments.

On the Iberville site itself, where construction could begin next fall, architects have designed streetscapes that mix new construction with 22 of Iberville's original brick buildings, which will be completely renovated.

Five cities -- New Orleans, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle -- received a total of \$122 million today from HUD as part of the new Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, which has been positioned as a "new and improved" successor to HOPE



Iberville housing development



Iberville public housing development

– Continued –

VI, the program that financed much of the widespread public-housing reconstruction seen across the country and in New Orleans over the past few decades.

Said HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan in a written statement: “Choice Neighborhood recognizes that we must link affordable housing with quality education, public transportation, good jobs and safe streets. It is the next generation of neighborhood revitalization that not only transforms distressed housing but heals entire communities.”

HANO, in turn, has positioned its plans for the Iberville as a new and improved way to redevelop public housing. Past renovations have been criticized in the past for displacing many residents but bringing few back and for focusing solely on the public-housing sites to the exclusion of their surroundings, effectively creating islands of gleaming new apartments that sit inside blighted, high-poverty neighborhoods.

At Iberville, HANO plans to do construction in phases so that 40 percent of the complex’s current households, roughly 450, can move directly from their current

apartments to renovated places. And as the grant requires, it will replace each of the Iberville’s 821 apartments with rentals that carry public-housing level rents. Another third will be market-rate apartments and a middle tier will be aimed at households with more moderate incomes.

Plans also aim to build up Iberville’s residents by delivering targeted services to put the complex’s children into high-quality schools and childcare while their parents secure better jobs, further their education and receive regular medical care.

Over the grant’s 54-month period, Urban Strategies, the social-services arm of McCormack Baron, will follow each original Iberville household and track progress toward specific goals named in the proposal. For example, the plan aims to reduce the number of residents suffering from asthma while considerably improving the number of adults with GEDs and employment income and boosting the number of children in early-childhood classes and high-performing schools.

It was the year...



2012

■ CHAPTER 4:
■ YEAR 2012



Construction at Guste Homes

The Times-Picayune

HANO taking tougher stand on work quality

By **Katy Reckdahl**
March 2012

Next month, crews should put the final touches on the last eight units in the Guste Apartments affordable-housing complex in Central City. Half of the 16 apartments are already occupied. But the real story about these buildings lies behind the walls, according to Housing Authority of New Orleans administrative receiver David Gilmore, who believes what happened at Guste illustrates a new, tougher attitude at HANO toward incompetence.

For the first time in seven years, HANO terminated a contract for unsatisfactory work.

In years past, construction delays seemed common at HANO. Some bumbling contractors submitted change order after change order, milking HANO for more money. But rarely was anyone pulled off the job.

But in August, HANO placed Olympic Commercial and Residential Repair in default of its \$2.4 million contract and ordered them to stop work.

“You have been provided numerous opportunities to satisfactorily complete the work,” Gilmore told Olympic president and former NFL star Maurice Hurst in an August letter that complained about the “slow progress of the work,” payment issues involving subcontractors and employees and “apparent lack of administrative capability.”

The letter also noted that, on Aug. 19, workers left the site without properly securing it.

When reached Friday, Hurst said he would call back in five minutes to discuss the matter. However, he had not called by press time. A \$2.4 million Housing Authority of New Orleans job is still listed on the company’s website under “state-government projects completed.”

Gilmore asked Olympic’s surety, Gray Casualty & Surety Co., to step in and make sure that the job was finished correctly and without further delays.

By that time, Olympic had completed about 70 percent of the site’s construction and was paid \$1.3 million of its \$2.4 million contract, HANO spokeswoman Lesley Eugene said.

Gray Surety hired BBL Builders as the completion contractor, and it’s expected that BBL will be paid the contract’s balance of \$1.1 million. The new crews have painted, finished drywall, laid flooring and installed electrical and plumbing fixtures, Eugene said, noting that BBL also finished other work on the site such as sidewalks, landscaping and driveways.

The Times-Picayune

Housing Authority of New Orleans closes costly, distant West Bank office on Friday

By **Katy Reckdahl**
March 2012

At the end of this week, the Housing Authority of New Orleans will shutter its expensive Section 8 office on the West Bank. The location has long been seen as a boondoggle.

Roughly 90 percent of HANO's voucher holders live on the East Bank, putting them across the river and at least two or three bus transfers away from the West Bank office at 3630 MacArthur Blvd.

But in 2009, agency executives moved the Section 8 program away from the partially unfilled HANO building in Gentilly, which the agency owns, to a 33,000-square-foot space in a nothing-special strip mall next to a dollar store.

Landlords and housing advocates were stunned. For the space across the Mississippi River from most of its clients, HANO signed a lease agreeing to pay Fidelity Investment Holdings \$27,500 in monthly rent. Its move into the space also felt hasty, and staff scurried for weeks to see clients despite unfiled paperwork, unhooked computers and unanswered phones. And it came in the wake of corruption that sent the department's director, Dwayne Muhammad, to prison.

HANO's spokesman at the time called the new space "a milestone" for the voucher program, saying it was what the growing program needed. But tenants and landlords never found it convenient.



HANO moves HCVP office to 4100 Touro Street

A few months after the office moved to the West Bank, federal fix-it man David Gilmore arrived with his team and soon described the move as "misguided," pledging to bring Section 8 back to HANO's headquarters, at 4100 Touro St. Some staff worked out of the Touro offices in recent years but most remained on the West Bank.

Then, earlier this year, Gilmore approved a \$407,000 contract to renovate the Touro street office space, to accommodate its entire voucher staff.

The re-united Section 8 department will reopen on Touro on Monday morning, spokeswoman Lesley Eugene said.

The Times-Picayune

B.W. Cooper housing site's slow march to rebirth reaches finish line

By **Katy Reckdahl**
May 2012



HUD Secretary Donovan and Mayor Landrieu cut the ribbon at the B.W. Cooper Groundbreaking Ceremony

After years of delays and a series of lost investors, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan on Friday dedicated the first replacement buildings at the B.W. Cooper housing development. Cooper's new construction -- a mix of boxy structures, most of them wooden two-story, townhouse-style buildings -- was delayed far longer than the other three public housing complexes demolished after Hurricane Katrina. Donovan acknowledged the holdup, referencing "the long road" endured by residents, some of whom, he said, "had given up hope that they'd ever move back."

Now, 13 of the 175 new apartments are occupied, most of them by residents who moved from two dozen, circa-1941 brick buildings that resident leaders fought to save from the wrecking ball.

Those original buildings are one of the ways that Cooper, recently renamed Yvonne Marrero Commons in honor of a prominent resident leader, is different from the other demolished complexes. Developers have also hired far more Cooper residents to build new apartments in what's become a national template for public-housing renovation and employment.

"It's different in a lot of ways from its sisters," said Housing Authority of New Orleans administrative receiver David Gilmore. "Instead of moving back to the city from Texas or Georgia, most of the new occupants will come from the old buildings." Gilmore also said the practice of hiring residents "propelled us into national prominence," noting that other housing authorities have called HANO asking how to ramp up hiring on their construction sites. Donovan said his agency was examining

what made Cooper's hiring process work to see whether it could become "a national model."

Flashpoint for protesters

But before Cooper became a model for the country, it was thrown into a national spotlight as the site of some of the most heated post-Katrina protests about public-housing demolitions.

In early 2008, after getting the City Council's blessing, HUD began demolitions in earnest on the so-called Big Four -- Cooper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte and St. Bernard. All together, the agency knocked down 3,077 apartments that had been occupied before the storm.

But the federal agency's first standoff with protesters came at Cooper in December 2007, where backhoes ate into 14 shoddy, 1970s-style brick buildings. The structures had been condemned before Katrina, and most residents supported the teardown. Protesters, however, viewed the move as a turning point in their fight to preserve the city's public housing. Large crowds amassed at Cooper, where protesters blocked machinery and chanted "housing is a right."

Even as demonstrators poured into their complex, Cooper's Resident Management Corp. stood firm in favor of redevelopment. But they also believed that residents displaced after Katrina should have a chance to return home faster than HUD's construction timeline would allow. So they fought to keep 350 "interim" apartments

– Continued –

in the old brick buildings until the redevelopment was done.

“We were supposed to be emptied like the other three,” said Donna Johnigan, president of the Resident Management Corp., who said she and other leaders insisted on keeping about two dozen buildings.

Today, no other original Big Four structures are in use. The Cooper buildings have been fully occupied for several years, even as the new construction stalled.

By comparison, rebuilding was fairly swift at C.J. Peete in Central City, renamed Harmony Oaks, where 468 apartments are complete. Progress has also been steady in Gentilly at the St. Bernard, renamed Columbia Parc, which finished 515 apartments and has a few hundred more in the works. Both rebuilt complexes also have rich amenities: swimming pools, playgrounds and well-appointed community centers with exercise rooms. Nothing similar has yet been planned at Cooper.

St. Bernard, C.J. Peete and Cooper all have an equal number of apartments set aside for low, moderate and market-rate renters. Lafitte, which plans to replace every lost public-housing unit, has a higher proportion set aside for low-income renters.

Economic hurdles

Shortly after the ground-breakings for Peete and St. Bernard, the nation’s housing market collapsed. Lafitte and Cooper stalled. Cooper alone lost at least two investors, including The Richmond Group, which withdrew even after it sent its representative to wield a glittery shovel at a ground-breaking during President Barack Obama’s visit to the city a few years ago.

New leaders at HANO helped loosen both logjams. Thanks to an innovative HANO loan, Lafitte, renamed Faubourg Lafitte, has 276 rentals on its 6th Ward site, with a 100-unit building for senior citizens under construction and nearly 150 offsite units done or under way.

The fix came for Cooper last year with the help of a new investor, U.S. Bank, which provided nearly \$50 million of tax-credit equity. To close the deal, HANO agreed to

pair Cooper developer Keith B. Key Enterprises with more experienced developers McCormack Baron Salazar, which built Harmony Oaks.

Still the going was tough.

Congress in 2010 only extended the Gulf Opportunity Zone tax credits for one year, so Cooper’s contractors hustled to finish the 175 apartments financed through that program by December. More are under way: The development’s two-phase, \$160-million plans call for a total of 410 apartments by July 2013.

Contractors also were hired last year to remove 60,000 tons of dirt because of pollutants. In March, Gilmore approved the disposal of 25,000 more tons.



New Orleans City Council President Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson congratulates B.W. Cooper RMC President Donna Johnigan

There also were triumphs.

Residents pick up hammer

Last year, residents living in the brick apartments realized that almost no one working on slabs or hammering on frames was from their community. And they felt left out.

“It’s hard for me to go out the door and not be working on the job,” Alvin Blanton, a carpenter’s helper, told a City Council committee last year.

So Cooper neighbors organized as part of the group Stand With Dignity. They went to HANO and to Gibbs Construction CEO Larry Gibbs to demand jobs -- and got them. In the end,

Gibbs embraced the initiatives and began training residents on his own dime.

The result is that dozens of Cooper residents and people of equally low income were hired to work on the houses that were dedicated Friday.

The training and hiring framework developed at Cooper will also be implemented at Iberville when redevelopment begins there this fall.

“B.W. Cooper demonstrated that when thoughtful people work together, they can achieve this good stuff without anyone going broke in the process,” Gilmore said.

Company late on repairs to public housing damaged by Isaac

By **Zoe Sullivan**
December 2012

Three months after Hurricane Isaac drenched New Orleans, some rental units damaged by the storm remained unrepaired at The Estates, the housing development on the site of the old Desire housing project.

All 425 units at The Estates suffered water and other storm damage. The Housing Authority of New Orleans gave the management company, Interstate Realty Management, until Nov. 30 to repair the apartments. The company missed the deadline and still had not finished the work as of Tuesday.

David Gilmore, the head of the Housing Authority, “is really not happy with the progress,” spokeswoman Lesley Thomas said Tuesday.

“He’s kind of feeling that the management company has thumbed their nose at him, so his plans now are to start with the most severe punishment and to work his way backwards.”

She said the agency was “determining what enforcement measures to make.”

The Lens doesn’t know how many units remain unrepaired; Interstate Realty Management did not respond to The Lens’ questions about that and other issues.

The Estates, built after Katrina in the Desire area in the Upper Ninth Ward, stands in an out-of-the way area near the Industrial Canal. Residents told The Lens they’ve had problems with construction quality.



The Estates, formerly Desire, community

Sylvia Norman said that even after her apartment was repaired, water occasionally seeps under her back door, flooding her kitchen. She had to buy a new dryer and put the washer and dryer up on wooden pallets. On Nov. 28, a black garbage bag was jammed into the bottom of her back door and topped with towels to keep water out of her kitchen.

A community development organization, CDC 58:12, discovered the extent of the damage and the issues facing tenants shortly after it began working with the community in October. CDC 58:12 contracts with the Housing Authority to provide social support services to The Estates’ tenants.

Residents complained of mold growing in their homes after Isaac, according to emails obtained from the Housing Authority. Some residents, like Dorothy Jefferson, told The Louisiana Weekly that gaping holes were left in the walls while the work was being done, allowing insects and rodents to enter.

As of Dec. 6, strips of blue tarp covered missing segments of siding on several houses.

One resident, a stay-at-home mother of four, told The Lens that repairs to her home were not completed by the Nov. 30 deadline, but they were finished the following Monday. (Fearing retaliation, she wouldn't give her name for publication.)

Interviews with residents found that the majority whose homes had been fixed were satisfied with the work.

Norman was an exception. She said a statue, the “prized possession” of a deceased child, was broken by workers. Workers damaged her television cable, spurring an \$85 repair. And the dehumidifiers used to dry out her apartment raised her power bill by \$100.

“A hundred dollars extra out of my budget means I don't have any pocket money,” Norman said. She said she gave copies of the bills to CDC 58:12 so she could be reimbursed.

Asked if the agency would reimburse expenses such as Norman's, Thomas said the legal department was reviewing the matter.

This story was originally published by The Lens (thelensnola.org), an independent, nonprofit newsroom serving New Orleans. It was republished with permission.

It was the year...



2013

■ CHAPTER 5: ■ YEAR 2013

Public housing residents and activists fired off a letter Friday (Jan 18.) to David Gilmore, administrative receiver for the Housing Authority of New Orleans, criticizing a proposed policy change on how the agency conducts criminal background checks on prospective residents and employees. Instead of making it easier for a former inmate to find housing or employment, HANO's new policy would expand the number of people automatically banned based on past criminal activity, according to the letter signed by Colette Tippy, lead organizer of Stand with Dignity.

The housing agency will hold a public hearing 6 p.m. Tuesday (Jan. 22) at the Helen W. Lang Memorial Board Room, 4100 Touro St., to discuss the proposed change.

"Turning people away from a job because of their criminal background is only contributing to the crime that we have," said Latoya Lewis, a student member of Stand with Dignity. "If you don't give them a chance for a job they'll go find other means to make money and take care of themselves."

The revised policy is designed to eliminate obstacles men and women face when returning to society after spending time in the criminal justice system, according to a statement on HANO's website.

"Their criminal history is likely a bar to admission to most affordable housing opportunities, making post-incarceration reunification of families a near impossible dream," HANO says in the preamble to its proposed policy statement. "(HANO) recognizes that, whether explicit or implicit, its practices have served to perpetuate the problem... and accepts that it has a responsibility to give men and women with criminal histories the opportunity to rejoin their families and communities as productive members."

The new policy asserts that applicants will no longer be automatically barred from employment or housing at HANO unless it is determined that they pose a public

The Times-Picayune

Public housing residents criticize new criminal background check policy

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
January 2013

threat or their criminal history includes acts of child abuse, sexual predation or domestic violence.

People who fall into the first category, posing a potential threat, can appeal their case before a panel. HANO will require that anyone it does business with, whether as a contractor, consultant or landlord, adopt this policy.

It might sound good on the surface, but the proposed policy will actually increase the number of people banned from public housing and HANO employment, Tippy said.

The only people automatically banned under the current policy of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development are those who have manufactured methamphetamine on public housing property and anyone subject to a lifetime status on the sex offender registry. HANO's new policy expands the automatic ban to include people convicted of domestic violence and child abuse.

Public housing residents and activists who gathered Thursday at the offices of the Workers' Center for Racial Justice to discuss HANO's proposal agreed that child abuse and domestic violence charges can be complicated and shouldn't result in a lifetime ban.

"I was outside my apartment fussing with someone and a neighbor called the police, not the person I'm fussing with, but I go to jail for domestic violence," said Stand

member Sean Lawson. “It doesn’t have to be physical to catch that charge. So now if I want to get an apartment I can’t.”

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s policy on lifetime bans covers only housing but HANO’s includes employment and demands that its contractors institute the same policy, further hindering the ability of ex-convicts to turn their lives around, Tippy said.

“Why would you ban anyone who has a domestic violence charge from working on a construction site? That’s not going to decrease the violence,” she said. “If you have someone who is actually violent, removing their ability to take care of themselves will cause significantly more stress. It’s important to understand the impact on people’s lives.”

HANO met with Stand several times last year to discuss the need to change its criminal background check policy and asked the group to submit a draft proposal. Stand sent 15 pages of requested changes in October; HANO officials responded in early January, presenting the group with a one-page policy statement.

“Unfortunately, Mr. Gilmore just ignored everything we sent and wrote something not even in line with what we submitted,” Tippy said.

Gilmore declined to comment on the policy revision before the public hearing. Stand proposed that background checks be limited to three years; only be conducted after a job is offered and not during the application or interview process; and should only take into account convictions and not arrests. Stand also insists that families should not be evicted or banned because of the actions of one family member and that the housing agency should not ban people for categories of crimes that are vague and do not pose a public threat.

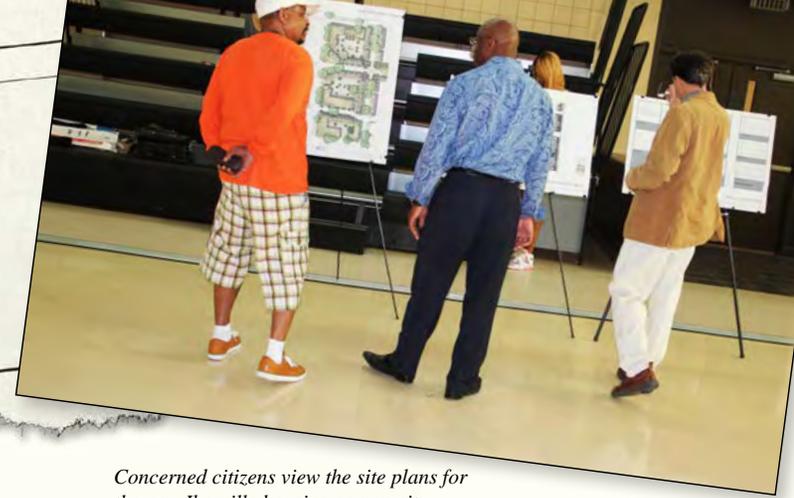
Alfred Marshall, a Stand organizer, was convicted 12 years ago for burglary, served five years and has stayed out of trouble for the past seven years and yet he said he still has trouble finding work. If the application includes a box to be checked if the person applying has a criminal history, Marshall said he knows he won’t get a call back much less an interview. He recently thought he was going to be hired as a cook but the company did a criminal background check dating 10 years and turned him down.

“I’m working on the right path but that took something out of me,” he said. “I’ve been doing all the things I need to do to fit back into society so why don’t I have a chance to have a decent job?”

The Times-Picayune

Residents question Iberville plans, city officials tout future improvements

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
February 2013



Concerned citizens view the site plans for the new Iberville housing community

The fifth public meeting on the redevelopment of the Iberville housing complex focused on efforts to mitigate negative impacts to the community while touting the long-term positive effects, but questions continued to linger among suspicious residents. Shirley Mitchell Morris told officials during the meeting Tuesday at Craig Elementary School in Treme that she doesn't trust the Housing Authority of New Orleans. She said she worries senior citizens such as herself won't be able to return to the main refurbished Iberville site and instead will be forced into outlying senior centers.

"They'll say one thing and when the time comes they'll do something else," Morris said. "That's why I don't trust them. I put my trust in the Lord and he has my back."

Maggie Merrill, senior adviser to David Gilmore, HANO's administrative receiver, assured Morris that every resident will have the opportunity to return and the people who have been there the longest will be moved to the front of the line. Elderly residents will have the option to move to the old Texaco building at 1501 Canal St. that is being redeveloped as part of the project into a 112-unit apartment building for senior citizens, but it is not mandatory, Merrill said.

This was the final public meeting to focus on the historic and environmental impact the project will have on the community and the surrounding areas. This process is expected to be completed by April after which construction will begin on the first two phases of the project, a three-block area bounded by Iberville and Bienville streets and North Villere and Crozat streets.

The transformation of Iberville into a sprawling mixed-income community is seen as the linchpin in the city's efforts to revitalize the downtown area.

Officials presenting at the meeting included Merrill, Brian Lawlor, the city's director of housing policy, Joseph St. Martin, head of the consulting team, Tracey Dodd with U.S. Risk Management, Andrew Baque, director of urban design with Manning Architects, and April Kennedy of HANO.

Preliminary findings of the environmental assessment study, as presented by Dodd, included the following highlights:

- Aesthetics will be improved through the installation of additional sidewalks, green space, access to the Lafitte Greenway and landscaping;
- Security will be enhanced through the addition of street and pedestrian lighting;
- Air quality will be negatively impacted in the short-term during construction;
- Drainage will be improved by holding more storm water onsite while buildings will be elevated to comply with base flood requirements;
- Construction will require the removal and disposal of hazardous waste including asbestos, lead and contaminated soils, none of which will be transported through existing neighborhoods;

--Traffic in the neighborhood will be improved by restoring the existing street grid, taking the burden off of surrounding neighborhoods while increasing access for emergency vehicles.

Baque' explained to the audience that the development team considered four strategies on how best to tackle Iberville: leave the site untouched, rehabilitate all of the existing buildings, tear everything down and start from scratch, or combine preservation with new construction.

The fourth strategy was the only one that achieved the main goals of the project --reintegrating the public housing community back into the city while preserving many of the historic structures, Baque' said.

Manning Architects created eight design plans based on this strategy before deciding on version 11; it incorporates 14 historic structures into the core of the development for a total of 880 units compared to the 821 that currently sit on the 23-acre site.

There will be 304 public housing units, mostly town homes and multi-family buildings, allowing the majority of the 360 families currently living in Iberville to return. HANO also plans to provide 112 public housing replacement units in the immediate area for a total of 416 units in addition to 405 new voucher units.

The entire Iberville redevelopment project will be mixed income including one-third public housing residents, one-third working class and a final third for market-rate families.

During the public comment period, Cheryl Austin, executive director of the Greater Treme Consortium, raised concerns about how developers planned to use two historic

buildings slated to remain non-residential. Baque' suggested one could be used as a museum, possibly connected to St. Louis Cemetery No. 1, an idea that didn't sit well with Austin.



Texaco building at 1501 Canal Street

“I believe that building will become part of some kind of tourist attraction and the people suffering now and being preplaced won't reap any of the economic benefits,” said Austin who grew up in Treme. “I know what happens with displacement. I watched it when I was young and we are still not benefitting from the destruction of the homes where Armstrong Park now sits. The only way you can pull people out of poverty is with real economic development, where the community has a sense of ownership in it.”

Construction on phases one and two of the Iberville redevelopment is expected to be completed by December 2014 and will consist of demolition, renovations of some of the existing 74 buildings and street, sewerage, drainage and utility work. HANO will not have a finalized master plan for the project until after the historic and environmental impact study is completed.

HANO, in a partnership with the city, is redeveloping the Iberville site as well as an expanded 300-block area called “Iberville-Treme” that is bordered by Tulane and St. Bernard avenues and Broad and Rampart streets. The nearly \$600 million project calls for the construction of 2,446 apartments including a one-for-one replacement of all of Iberville's 821 public housing apartments.

HANO received \$30.5 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2011 as part of its Choice Neighborhoods Initiative that focuses on revitalizing entire communities instead of narrowly targeting public housing complexes.

The Times-Picayune

HANO unveils mobile computer lab

By **Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com**
February 2013



HANO Mobile Computer Lab



A Guste resident accesses a computer at the mobile computer lab launch

David Gilmore, the administrative receiver for the Housing Authority of New Orleans, held up a cell phone before an audience of more than 50 senior residents of the Guste High Rise in Central City, and admitted that much of the new technology people use to communicate makes him uncomfortable. But it is vital that people learn their way around computers, he said, so they can stay informed, especially during hurricane season, and thrive in the 21st century job market.

To accomplish these goals, Gilmore unveiled HANO's latest initiative, a mobile computer lab.

"If you don't get with the times you'll find yourself behind the eight ball because everybody else will be miles ahead of you," Gilmore said. "People living in communities like Guste sometimes get left behind because they don't have the same access to the information age. We have to change that."

An anonymous party donated \$75,000 to HANO's nonprofit Crescent Affordable Housing Corporation to be used exclusively for the creation of a mobile computer lab. HANO used the money to buy a new van equipped with 16 laptop computers, a projector and screen, printer, moveable cart, tables, chairs and a rolling whiteboard for presentations. The lab provides wireless Internet access and can be setup inside or outdoors in tents.

Courses, which begin next week, will focus on basic computer skills, online banking, how to pay bills, build resumes, acquire job skills and access medical information, among other topics. Each course consists of four two-hour classes and is limited to

16 people so everyone has their own computer. The mobile lab will be available to every HANO community.

"This is about more than just having a building, but having programs inside of that building to help people move into mainstream society," said Cynthia Wiggins, president of the Guste Homes Resident Management Corporation. "The only way to do it is to educate people in the necessary skills."

Wiggins also announced the construction of a HANO-financed \$2.3 million community center at 2601 Thalia St., adjacent to the Guste Homes, that will include a computer lab, an exercise room and a culinary arts program. Construction is expected to begin in May and be completed by the end of 2014.

Chef John Besh approached HANO about participating in the culinary program, Wiggins said, and possibly taking a select group of young people to New York for a nine-month training program that will include food and housing costs. Wiggins hopes to target some of the most troubled teenagers in the neighborhood with the help of the city's CeaseFire program.

"We want to take them out of what they are accustomed to and put them in new environment where they can get a new perspective and see something different," she said. "One of the problems is that they are so accustomed to this life because they've never been outside of it. This program takes them out of it and lets them know there is a life outside all of this foolishness they're involved in."

The Times-Picayune

HANO recalls 700 Section 8 vouchers, blames sequester

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
March 2013



HANO A.P. Tureaud Building at 4100 Touro Street

After spending four years on the waiting list for a Section 8 housing voucher, Rashaad Foley's dream of moving into a place of her own with her 5-year old daughter were about to come true. Foley received her voucher last year and after several dead ends, she finally found the perfect home. It was in a good neighborhood, just two blocks from her mother's house, had a backyard and came equipped with a security system.

She put down a \$750 deposit, which was hard to come by, Foley said, and was waiting for the Housing Authority of New Orleans to inspect the building when she received a letter from David Gilmore, HANO's administrative receiver.

"A number of circumstances including over subscription of vouchers and budget cuts have combined to make it necessary that we temporarily suspend use of currently unused vouchers under the Housing Choice Voucher Program," the March 21 letter stated. "Consequently, the voucher issued to you must be withdrawn effective immediately."

Automatic federal funding cuts known as the "sequester" went into effect March 1 forcing HANO to decrease its housing services budget by 17 percent. As part of the cutbacks, about 700 Section 8 housing vouchers recently awarded but not yet in use for rental assistance were suspended.

The sequestration cuts were exacerbated by an excess number of housing vouchers in

the New Orleans market, Gilmore said at HANO's March 26 board meeting. When he arrived in 2009, Gilmore said the Section 8 program was underused with nearly 12,000 families in voucher subsidized rental housing and 22,000 people on the waiting list. So he opened up the program that year and for the first time since 2003 HANO began accepting new Section 8 applications. Today there are 17,900 subsidized families with 13,250 people on the waiting list.

"HANO, like other housing agencies, walks a thin line," Gilmore said. "The under-utilization of Section 8 vouchers gets you in big trouble, but if you use more vouchers than you have money for you have to pay back the federal government. In trying to achieve that balance we issued more vouchers than we can pay for." It would cost HANO \$5 million -- money it doesn't have -- to fund the 700 suspended vouchers, Gilmore said.

"So we called back vouchers not in use, asked people to go back on the waiting list and when the situation resolves itself we will give them back their vouchers," Gilmore said. "No one will lose housing as result of us taking your voucher away." Foley and others affected by the suspension don't see it that way.

Foley said she had an apartment lined up near the end of last year but HANO officials told her the \$650 rent was too high and refused to approve the unit, even though her voucher was worth \$762. The landlord of the next apartment Foley looked at turned her down because she didn't have a rental history. The third house appeared to be the

charm until HANO temporarily suspended the program.

“I feel like it’s their fault because I could have been living somewhere by now,” she said.

Foley lost half of the \$750 deposit because she was forced to back out of a signed lease after her voucher was taken away. She is now living at a friend’s house with her daughter. Foley said the most she can afford to pay in rent without any government assistance is \$400 and those rates haven’t been seen in New Orleans since before Hurricane Katrina.

It’s not fair for the government to take away vouchers from people who have already signed a lease, put down a deposit and are hung up on the final step, waiting for HANO approval so they can move in, said Colette Tippy, lead organizer for Stand with Dignity, an advocacy group for public housing residents.

“I talked to a woman who just found a place. Her son was shot twice when he was 8 so she keeps her kids in the house all the time. But she finally found somewhere safe and was so excited,” Tippy said. “She borrowed \$1,000 from family and friends for the deposit and talked to her kids about playing in the yard and being able to go

outside. She was devastated when she got the letter. These politicians are playing with people’s lives.”

At the board meeting, Gilmore said that his staff would review each case and some people, depending on how far along they are in the process, might be able to keep their vouchers.

After Section 8 tenants sign a lease, HANO inspects the property, determines if the rent is reasonable, reviews ownership, and then signs a contract with the landlord approving the voucher payments.

For people like Foley, who waited four years to receive a voucher and were just a few steps from moving into their first home, anything less than granting them full approval would be a travesty, Tippy said.

“A lot of people have spent a lot of time and money going from place to place, taking off work, putting down deposits and to have all of that come to nothing in the end is crazy,” she said.

The Times-Picayune

HANO, public housing residents clash at board meeting over workforce policy

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](http://www.nola.com)
April 2013



Construction at the new Iberville community

David Gilmore, the administrative receiver for the Housing Authority of New Orleans, clashed with protesters at the agency's board meeting Tuesday (April 16), angrily refuting accusations that he lied in order to curry favor with the construction industry.

At issue is a policy HANO approved in March 2012 that required contractors overseeing projects worth more than \$25 million to enter into community workforce agreements with trade unions to establish wages, benefits, training programs and other conditions of employment.

Without unions negotiating these agreements, local workers are often shut out of jobs and are denied training opportunities that can lead to careers, said Colette Tippy, lead organizer of Stand with Dignity, a public housing advocacy group that organized a protest before the board meeting. The redevelopment of the Guste and Iberville housing developments are the first two projects that would fall under the new policy. But HANO announced a month ago that it could no longer support its own policy because it conflicted with a state law. Critics accused Gilmore of backing down after being pressured by the construction industry.

"While black workers are struggling with poverty wages from temp jobs, and Section 8 cuts are forcing families into homelessness, Gilmore is siding with big business over low-income workers," Tippy said.

At the meeting, Gilmore said the state passed a law in 2011 prohibiting public agencies from requiring contractors to enter into agreements with labor organizations for projects that get state funds. He said when he instituted the 2012 policy he was

not aware that it violated the law.

"The issue of the legality of the comprehensive workforce agreement didn't come up until a month ago when we were putting together a bid specification for (the redevelopment of the Guste housing complex)," Gilmore said. "The lawyers told me that I'll get sued and in the state of Louisiana I'll lose. I'm duty bound to obey the law."

The housing agency remains committed to providing employment opportunities to its residents, he said. As part of the 2012 policy, HANO requires that public housing residents make up 30 percent of new hires for projects worth more than \$100,000. It also requires that contractors provide training to those workers, and direct 10 percent of the project's work to construction-related businesses owned by public housing residents and 3 percent to non-construction businesses.

Those requirements, however, allow contractors to avoid paying prevailing wages and providing comprehensive workforce training, Tippy said. Instead of training public housing residents, contractors can pay a percentage of the project's worth into HANO's training fund program which is not as comprehensive or respected in the industry as those provided by labor unions, Tippy said.

"When officials make promises to community members about what they're going to do to rectify the fact that black families only have the earning potential of 50 percent of white families in the New Orleans region, those promises have to be kept," Tippy said.

Before the meeting, several dozen public housing residents and advocates aligned with Stand marched to HANO’s office holding signs accusing Gilmore of being a liar and chanting, “Gilmore, Gilmore, you can’t hide. We can see your deceitful eyes.” Gilmore responded forcefully at the meeting.

“You can say anything you like. You can put whatever you want on a sign. You can make up things if you like, tell me how disappointed you are that I let everyone down as if we don’t have any history together and you can descend into name-calling and rhetoric and all the other garbage, but I’m not going there,” Gilmore said. “I’ll stand on my record and I don’t care what you think about it. I’ll always do what Gilmore thinks is the right thing to do.”

Despite the decision not to enforce the 2012 policy, Gilmore said he supports comprehensive workforce agreements and that union apprenticeships are “by and far away the best route to take to make sure employment is permanent.” He pointed out to his critics that labor unions are involved in the redevelopment of the Texaco building on Canal Street into 112 one-bedroom apartments for elderly residents of Iberville being forced to relocate.

Gilmore urged members of Stand to appeal to the state Legislature to change the law and that he would “write to the speaker of house and the New Orleans delegation and indicate to them I stand squarely behind project labor agreements and that the people that live and work in the state of Louisiana would be better off with them.”



Construction at Guste III community

The Times-Picayune

Officials witness demolition of Algiers public housing complex

By [Andrea Shaw, NOLA.com](#)
April 2013



Christopher Park Demolition

Calling it the “visual symbol of the failure of public housing” in New Orleans, a federal housing official witnessed the demolition of the old Christopher Park Homes in Algiers Tuesday, saying endless possibilities lie ahead once the blighted complex is cleared.

“I am real happy to see this happen today,” said David Gilmore, administrative receiver for the Housing Authority of New Orleans. “Now it can be forgotten as that symbol.”

When the development on Vespasian and Murl streets opened in 1971, it was celebrated as one of the nation’s first rent-to-own public housing complexes. There were 150 two-story townhouses, a mixture of rental units and condominiums, along tree-lined streets with a community park.

But the development fell victim to decades of neglect and never lived up to the hype. Many people blamed HANO, the community’s principal landowner, for mishandling its finances and federal grants, and failing to maintain the rental units and make major repairs. The buildings were plagued by termites, water leaks, electrical outages and collapsing roofs and ceilings.

HANO stopped leasing vacant apartments at the complex several years before Hurricane Katrina, and by 2005 only 80 units were occupied.

Gilmore offered to buy out the remaining property owners in 2011 at an average cost and appraisal rate of about \$40,000 per unit. The last family moved out that same year in December.

The start of demolition was more than two years in the making, Gilmore said settling with property owners, and in some cases estates, where the original owners had died. He visited the community after arriving in New Orleans two and half years ago and left feeling something had to be done immediately.

“I won’t ever forget this little old lady on a walker, came out of the building and invited me in. I went inside to see her house. The conditions were unspeakable,” he said.

Gilmore applauded New Orleans Councilwoman Kristin Gisleson Palmer, who represents Algiers, for her encouragement and persistence in getting the complex razed.

She pointed to houses surrounding the eyesore. “They shouldn’t have to look at this. We don’t need all this blight in Algiers.”

Across the street from Christopher Park is the abandoned Crescent City Gates, which also could soon fall to the wrecking ball, and open up 20 to 30 acres of land. “This is just the start,” she said.

Palmer also lamented the delays in removing debris from the demolition of the Higgins Gate Apartment on nearby West Bend Parkway. Hamps Enterprises and the city are awaiting a court date on the issue, she said.

“The city is ready to take it away. We need it for the betterment of Algiers,” she said. “It’s dark. It smells bad. Kids were walking to school past this. At what point does public safety come before a lawsuit?”

HANO contracted with Durr Heavy Construction to demolish the site at a cost of \$591,000. Gilmore noted that seven public housing residents from the Fischer community are working on the teardown, which is expected to be completed in July. FEMA is paying for the work.

The Orleans Parish School Board is expected to take control of the Christopher Park site as part of a property exchange with HANO.



Receiver Gilmore pictured with New Orleans Councilwoman Kristin Gisleson Palmer and FEMA Deputy Director of Programs Andre Cadogan

The Times-Picayune

HANO encourages public housing residents to invest in homeownership

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
April 2013



Rochelle Trotter and her two children recently closed on their Gentilly neighborhood home

Some public housing residents and those receiving Section 8 vouchers could be buying their own homes and building generational wealth for just a little bit more than what they are now paying in rent, Housing Authority of New Orleans officials say.

There is a perfect storm of events making it the ideal time for people to buy their first house, said Laura Tuggle, HANO's former general counsel. Interest rates are historically low while HANO and the city, through its soft-second mortgage program, are offering significant financial help.

But there remains a reluctance among many lower income people to make their first leap into homeownership.

"People are losing their jobs. It's a scary thing," said Tuggle who recently left the housing agency for a position with Southeast Louisiana Legal Services. "But it really helps build wealth in a family if you have homeownership. It gives their kids the chance to have a better start."

HANO gives housing voucher recipients 15 years of financial assistance in paying off their mortgage while the elderly and disabled receive assistance for the entire term of the mortgage.

When banks consider how large a loan to provide a family, they include the value of the Section 8 voucher and that has proven to be worth between \$25,000 and \$30,000,

Tuggle said.

"That gives you more house than you otherwise would qualify for. It makes a big difference when you're talking about what type of neighborhood you can be in. It opens up more choices and options," she said.

Since HANO instituted its homeownership program 13 years ago, 270 families have closed on houses. In an effort to significantly increase that number the housing agency recently kicked off an outreach campaign targeting the most viable families.

First HANO looked at the average monthly mortgage payment of families that purchased homes through the program and that figure came to \$550. There are currently 2,400 families receiving a Section 8 vouchers or in public housing paying that amount in rent. HANO wanted to whittle that number even more, so it looked for families paying at least \$750 in rent and found 300. Those are the people being targeted in the new outreach effort, and Rachelle Taylor encourages them to take advantage.

Taylor, with close to \$30,000 in financial assistance from HANO and the city, bought her first home for \$119,000 in 2008 and now pays \$853 a month on her mortgage. Before Hurricane Katrina, Taylor, with the assistance of housing vouchers, was paying \$700 in rent.

After being forced to move to Baton Rouge for nearly two years after the storm,

Taylor said she promised herself when she returned to New Orleans she wouldn't waste more of her money on an apartment.

“I have one friend paying \$1,300 for an apartment in the east. Are you kidding me? It's ridiculous what they're doing with the prices they have for these rents,” Taylor said. “I pray and ask the lord every day to keep me in my home and that nothing ever happens to it. I'm not only happy, I'm joyful.”

It typically takes people up to two years to complete HANO's homeownership program before they are ready to purchase a house; it includes an initial financial assessment, counseling on what it takes to be a homeowner, classes on how to budget for expenses, and assistance clearing any credit problems.

“If you're a smart consumer and have someone advising you, you can take \$1,000, open a secure credit card and then pay the bill on time to build credit,” Tuggle said. “For some of our families it's not that they have bad credit, they may not have any credit. Creating that credit repair action plan takes the most time.”

The program's minimum annual income requirement is \$14,500 though, realistically, it takes at least \$20,000, Tuggle said.

In addition to the financial help provided to those with housing vouchers, HANO has a reserve fund that can help people with gap financing. If they qualify for an \$80,000 loan from the bank and receive \$65,000 from the city's soft-second mortgage program for a house that costs \$165,000, HANO can provide \$20,000 to close the deal.

The city rolled out its \$52.3 million soft-second mortgage program in 2011 in an effort to help as many as 1,000 families buy new or restored homes. It offers second mortgages of as much as \$65,000 to low-income families as long as they participate in homebuyer training and have not owned a home for at least three years.

Since the program's implementation, the city has received 336 applications and of those 245 mortgages have closed, said mayoral spokesman Ryan Berni.

The city has made mortgage commitments totaling \$13.4 million to people at 80 percent or less of the area median income and \$2.1 million to families earning between 81 percent and 120 percent of the area median income.

HANO's push to get people interested in its homeownership program is already producing results. In the first two months of the year, 88 people made appointments with homeownership counselors compared to 52 during the same time last year, officials said. By the end of April, five people being relocated from the B.W. Cooper housing complex will have closed on their first home.

“There are a lot of families motivated to do it particularly those that are basically paying as much on rent as they would for mortgage,” Tuggle said.



Mr. James Anderson smiles proudly in front of his new home

The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) last week took its first step to eliminating barriers persons with criminal histories face in seeking affordable housing and employment.

Following its May board meeting, HANO announced a new policy called the Criminal Background Policy which will purportedly provide greater access to HANO services to all individuals regardless of criminal records.

“This policy will affect both the housing and the employment side of HANO,” said Maggie Merrill, HANO’s Senior Advisor to Administrative Receiver David Gilmore. “On the housing side, it affects admissions to both our Section 8 program and our public housing program.”

The new policy was adopted by the HANO board at its March 26 meeting with the intention of helping ex-offenders more easily transition into new lives by preventing those who apply for housing or employment opportunities with HANO from being barred on the basis of a criminal record.

On the housing side, HANO anticipates that this new policy will be most impactful on individuals and families already living in public housing.

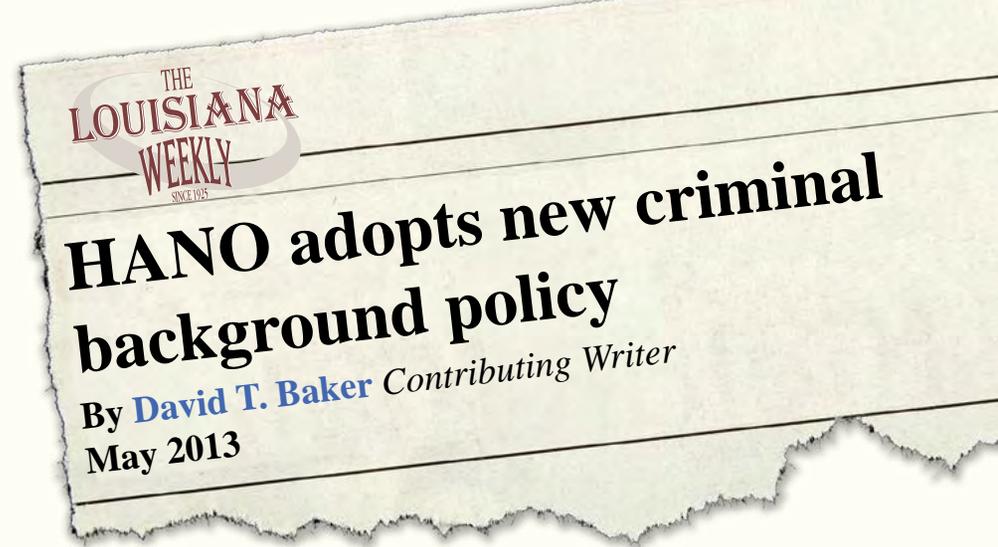
“We don’t expect this will result in a lot of new applications to HANO housing for new families,” said Merrill. This expectation is based on a recent suspension of HANO’s voucher program due to an oversupplying of housing vouchers.

“What we’re really expecting,” said Merrill, “is that this will affect family members that will be able to now rejoin their families that are living in public housing or in Section 8.”

Before the adoption of the new policy, families in public housing that had family members who were either coming out of incarceration or had past convictions were screened out of the housing pool, leaving them unable to live with their families.

On the employment side, the policy removes questioning about criminal records from the initial application process so that applicants will be reviewed based on skill and qualifications rather than be screened out due to a criminal record.”

We no longer ask about criminal background on our applications,” Merrill said.



“So we don’t ever ask about criminal record until we’ve made you a conditional offer of employment.”

“For instance, in my situation, I went to an interview, they offered me the job, then they said ‘OK. Now we will run a criminal background check.’ And if something comes up, we will review that because we also recognize all criminal convictions necessarily relate to that specific type of job. The example I always use is obviously if you’ve been convicted of some sort of fraudulent behavior or embezzlement in the past, you’re not going to get hired in a job in the finance department. But it doesn’t mean that you’re not necessarily qualified to work in some other department of HANO that has nothing to do with money or controlling contracts or that sort of thing.”

“That’s the purpose of this: to make sure that we’re not screening on criminal background until we find out whether or not you’re actually qualified for that position, and then if you are qualified and you do have a criminal record, we scrutinize that again to say if it’s something that’s risky to that particular position in and of itself or does this criminal conviction really have no affect on their ability to perform the job.”

While that policy has been changed, Merrill cautions that federal regulations are still in play and that HANO must adhere to them.

“There are some federally required categories that are basically what we call ‘automatic bars,’” said Merrill. These automatic bars pertain to convictions pertaining to drug manufacturing and sex crimes.

“For instance, if you’ve ever been convicted of producing methamphetamine at a housing authority property, you are banned for life from moving back to housing authority property no matter if it was five years ago or 20 years ago,” Merrill explained.

“The other federal ban, or ‘bar,’ is if you are on the lifetime sex offender registration, you are automatically banned. Those are federal guidelines the Housing Authority has to abide by.”

In order to build and implement its new policies, HANO contracted with the VERA Institute of Justice, a national research and policy nonprofit agency.

“What the VERA Institute is doing...they have created a pretrial screening instrument based on their extensive research that looks at risks of previous offenders to reoffend,” said Merrill. “So, they are helping us to come up with a tool that we can use to assess people’s risks to reoffend and their risks to the community.

By utilizing VERA’s research and tools, HANO will be able to do risk assessments on its applicants, anticipating the level of risk an applicant may represent to a community, even if that risk does not make an applicant ineligible for services.

“We anticipate that there will be some serious crimes that are risks to the community that will not be automatic bars, but will really raise a lot of flags and say ‘We need really look at this and make sure that this is not a serious risk to the health and well-being of the community itself,’” Merrill told The Louisiana Weekly.

HANO doesn’t currently have its own risk assessment tool.

“That’s what VERA is doing now. That’s part of this implementation process. They’ve been working on a risk assessment tool for us for a couple months now.

“They’re going to be finalizing it and then training us on how to implement that.”

Implementation & Accountability

Measurement mechanisms will also be put in place in order to track progress and ensure efficiency in implementation.

“That’s one thing that VERA is also helping us do, is come up with an internal evaluation system because we anticipate that there will be some give and take on these criteria...after we use it for six months, a year, may say ‘You know what, we need to adjust this because this is over-weighted or we’re missing this critical issue.

“So there’s always the anticipation that we are going to be having to make some adjustments to those criteria; so we will have an evaluation tool built in so that we make sure that we’re implementing this appropriately. And also, just tracking to makes sure HANO’s doing what we say we’re going to do.

“We don’t want to implement this policy then continue with the same procedures that we’ve been using with the same outcomes for the past ten years. We want to see different outcomes. We’re definitely going to be measuring that and following that up.”

HANO also made changes to other procedural documents to ensure that all policies were in compliance with the criminal background policy.

“This month, we adopted changes to several of our procedural documents that govern admissions to public housing, admissions to Section 8, our employment program as well as our procurement program,” Merrill told The Louisiana Weekly.

Administrative Receiver David Gilmore approved amendments to HANO’s Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP), The Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) Administrative Plan, the Procurement Policy, and the Employee Personnel Manual recommended by the Vera Institute reflecting the Criminal Background Policy.

“What VERA did, and what I did with them, as a way to implement our Criminal Background Policy statement, they went into these other procedural documents and made sure that anything related to criminal background screening or basically how

we admit people to programs or how we hire people based on criminal background policies made any adjustments that were needed so that they were in compliance with this new criminal background policy statement,” said Merrill.

“Other than the two federally required categories, no applicant will be automatically barred from receiving housing assistance because of his or her criminal background,” said Receiver Gilmore. “We are taking the necessary steps to amend the ACOP to make sure that those with criminal activity in their past who now seek productive lifestyles have a shot at a new beginning.”

ACOP consolidates screening procedures and requirements. HANO will continue to conduct criminal background checks for all applicants 18 years and above to determine acceptance or denial of admission. HANO’s amendment to the agency’s Procurement Policy establishes the guidelines for the procurement of supplies, equipment, services and construction. In accordance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment, the revised policy allows access to employment on all HANO-funded projects located at agency job sites. HANO recommends that all contractors subject to the policy adopt best practices by developing written procedures for screening applicants, and suggest they consider the nature of work to be performed, age at the time of conviction, time since conviction, and nature of the offense, and should also remove questions about criminal histories from job applications.

The changes Gilmore approved to the Employee Personnel Manual related to the new policy. “We will no longer inquire into an applicant’s criminal background at the time of the application. We will do so only when we have preliminarily determined to offer someone a job and will not deny otherwise suitable candidate employment except in the most serious circumstances,” said Gilmore. “If we’re serious about changing behavior we have to remove the barriers to opportunities for decent housing and employment.”

According to Merrill, many of HANO’s property managers were surprised for the need for the new policy stating that discriminatory practices based on criminal history weren’t really a major issue that they’d observed.

“When we first started looking at this a lot of our property managers said, a lot of people said, ‘This really isn’t an issue. We don’t exclude people for criminal background policies,’ which is not necessarily true to varying degrees, but what HANO said is ‘The issue is that because there’s the perception that we exclude you because of your criminal background policy, whether it’s for employment or for housing, people don’t even apply to our housing.’”

“So you’ve got families...that have members of their families that are either coming out of incarceration or have had past criminal convictions that are not able to live with their other family members because of this perception that they would not be admitted.”

It’s a perception that Merrill hopes the new policy will combat and create a new perception of welcome to all individuals interested in both employment and housing opportunities HANO has to offer.

“On the employment side, we really hope that it results in a lot more people, qualified people applying for these jobs,” Merrill said, assuring that individuals with criminal records are not only eager to have jobs but are also qualified in many cases.

“We recognize that there are a lot of people with criminal convictions that have a lot of skills and would do a great job and excluding them solely because they have a criminal record and past criminal convictions is really not fair and is counter to what HANO is trying to do.

“And on the housing side, we anticipate that it will result in a lot of families being able to be reunified.”

“It’s just a two-page, simple statement but it’s really setting out HANO’s intent,” Merrill said. “This is our intent going forward. This is our motivation for looking at our criminal background policies and changing the way that we implement that here at HANO.”

HANO prepares to break ground on new Florida Development housing

By **Danny Monteverde**
March 2013



*The new Florida Community
Groundbreaking Ceremony*



*Construction at the new
Florida community*

NEW ORLEANS — The Housing Authority of New Orleans next month will break ground on the first phase of a redevelopment at the Florida Housing Development in the 9th Ward, beginning again a redevelopment that Hurricane Katrina knocked off track for nearly a decade.

Twenty-six two-family residential structures will be built on three blocks bounded by Congress, Alvar, Law and North Dorgenois streets, according to City Planning Commission documents. The housing will be a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom units.

The total project will eventually see 51 housing units built, in addition to a management office. The subsequent phases have not yet been scheduled, according to the documents.

“This housing is needed,” District D Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge-Morrell said last week after she and her colleagues voted unanimously to approve the zoning docket that would allow HANO to begin work on the site. “Hopefully this will bring some of those residents back.”

HANO expects to begin work on the first phase in April, according to Lesley Thomas, a spokeswoman for the housing authority. The \$13.1 million project has been awarded to Parkcrest Builders, LLC. Work is expected to take 14 months, Thomas said.

The public-housing development, originally built in 1946, had a total of 734 units. It was built in a series of three-story barracks-style buildings spread across several “superblocks,” or blocks that were several times larger than a regular city block.

In the late 1990s, HANO began to redevelop the site.

The original barracks buildings were gradually torn down and replaced with new structures, including townhouse apartments and two-family homes.

The first phase of the original redevelopment was completed in 2004. The next year Hurricane Katrina badly damaged those housing units.

Many of the structures were demolished. The only remaining structures are on Bartholomew Street and have been vacant and little more than a magnet for graffiti artists and vagrants.

Unlike the original Florida barracks, the new units will be built to resemble more traditional New Orleans homes, something the planning commission documents note is more in line with the surrounding neighborhood.

The site will also include a small playground for children who live in the development.

The Times-Picayune

Demolition of Iberville housing development begins

By **Richard A. Webster**, NOLA.com
September 2013



Demolition of Iberville buildings

The demolition of the Iberville housing development began Tuesday morning, bringing to an end the era of the sprawling public housing complexes that for decades were home to thousands of low-income New Orleans families.

The Housing Authority of New Orleans and the city will tear down 59 of the 75 buildings that have made up Iberville.

In their place will rise a mixed-income community funded in part with \$30.5 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, a program intended to revitalize struggling neighborhoods by providing high-quality housing with improved services such as schools and commercial activity. New Orleans was one of five cities to receive the grant in its inaugural round.

The project is part of a bigger plan to revitalize Tremé and the downtown area.

“The construction of new low, moderate and market-rate housing complete with retail, school and public space improvements will strengthen these important neighborhoods that are at the heart of our city,” Mayor Mitch Landrieu said in a statement. “By connecting residents with wrap-around services like high-quality resources, programs and training in workforce development, education, health and transit, New Orleans will stand as a national model for redeveloping urban neighborhoods. This project will create better housing, safer streets and economic development.”

The city plans a one-for-one replacement, on-site and in the surrounding communities, of the 821 units that made up Iberville. A broader redevelopment plan, estimated to cost a total of \$600 million and paid for with funds from FEMA, HANO, HUD, the state and the city, will also revitalize more than 300 blocks within the boundaries of Rampart Street, Tulane Avenue, Broad Street and St. Bernard Avenue.

The onsite redevelopment will happen in two phases and will include 81 public housing units, 49 workforce units and 97 market rate units.

The full project, on-site and in the surrounding neighborhoods, calls for the construction of 304 public housing units, 261 workforce units and 315 market-rate homes.

The plan also includes 112 units for elderly Iberville residents at the former Texaco building on Canal Street.

Demolition is estimated to be finished by October, with the start of construction to immediately follow.

“Iberville is a very significant link in a much bigger picture of the revitalization of downtown New Orleans, which can be stimulated by the investment of transforming a public housing development into a mixed-income community,” HANO Administrative Receiver David Gilmore said in a statement. “And we are excited



– Continued –

Demolition of Iberville buildings underway

about expanding the scope of public housing redevelopment beyond the bricks of a building, while integrating revived infrastructure, linking educational and workforce opportunities, and making social services available to the entire community.”

HANO has relocated 250 families from Iberville, with the remaining 100 families to be moved by January. All original Iberville families will continue to receive day-to-day case management and supportive services such as job training and placement opportunities, enrichment activities for children and youth, adult education, physical and mental health services, and other critical programs.

The redevelopment plan was developed by the Iberville working team, which includes residents, HANO, city officials, developers HRI Properties and McCormack Baron Salazar, Urban Strategies and community engagement consultants GCR and the Black Men of Labor.

A programmatic agreement with federal, state and local preservationists was finalized earlier this year. It includes plans to preserve and renovate up to 16 historic buildings on the site, conduct extensive archaeological studies and create green spaces where an extension of the St. Louis cemeteries was discovered, according to HANO’s statement. During demolition and reconstruction, vibration from

construction activities will be monitored to ensure that no damage occurs to the historical structures nearby.

“The number of Iberville buildings slated for historic preservation on one site is unprecedented in the redevelopment of public housing in New Orleans,” Gilmore said. “In fact, it is equal to the number of original buildings preserved in the redevelopment of the ‘Big Four’ and St. Thomas developments combined.”

HANO also established an Iberville employment training program that has hired 30 youths and young adults to assist in pre-demolition activities and receive deconstruction training.

“I commend HANO for creating a plan that incorporates the area’s history and historic structures into the final design,” Councilwoman Kristin Gisleson Palmer said in a statement. “The demolition is also an opportunity for the city to create jobs, support local small businesses and DBE’s, and provide work experience and workforce skills for our citizens. The redevelopment will incorporate a construction training program for residents, which is essential, as cultivating our own citizens with job development skills is key to the viability of our city long-term.”

The Times-Picayune

HANO's unexplained termination of social services provider at old Desire complex raises questions, accusations

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
October 2013



The Estates, formerly Desire, community

The Housing Authority of New Orleans' decision to terminate the contract of a social services provider at The Estates, formerly the Desire public housing development, without explanation angered residents at Tuesday's board meeting, leading one member of the audience to accuse David Gilmore of possible illegal activities, a charge that did not sit well with HANO's administrative receiver.

"You are suggesting that there is some illegal and nefarious activity under the surface here that suggests I might have a financial interest in the outcome, and if you believe that to be the case, you better come out with the evidence and put it on the table for everybody to see," a visibly angry Gilmore told Jesse Triggs. "I'm absolutely offended that you would even suggest it."

The controversy centers around CDC 58:12, a former partner of Desire Street Ministries in Atlanta, Ga., that was hired by HANO on Oct. 1, 2012, to provide case management, counseling and other services to more than 400 families in the low-income housing complex.

The contract, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, was worth \$500,000 for the first year with the option to renew for a second year.

By all accounts, CDC 58:12 performed its job well and played a critical role in the well-being of the community, according to several residents and supporters who spoke on the organization's behalf at the board meeting.

"They're the salt of the earth, they're selfless individuals who have a servant's heart, and I just can't sing their praises enough," said Chris Jolissaint, the local coordinator

for the Child Evangelism Fellowship.

So it came as a surprise when Gilmore notified CDC 58:12 that HANO would not be renewing its contract, which expired Oct. 1, CEO Marcia Peterson said. When asked Tuesday for a reason, Gilmore said he received some "disturbing information" about the organization from an "impeccably reliable source" that was compelling enough to convince him to cut ties.

Beyond that, Gilmore said he couldn't provide further information, and he said that in the meantime, HANO would step in to provide supportive services to those with critical needs until a new provider is hired.

"I understand this is not an easy situation for anybody," Gilmore said. "I understand it leaves a significant gap (in services and programs) for many of you, and HANO is taking seriously its responsibility to try and make sure that gap gets filled. Nobody here took this judgment lightly, and were it not for some serious issues, we probably would not have made the decision. I'd like to be more forthcoming, but I can't."

The lack of information was a sticking point with many members of the audience, including Triggs, a case manager with CDC 58:12, who asked Gilmore if he had financial ties to another social services organization that might have swayed his decision.

"I never said the CDC has done anything illegal or untoward," Gilmore shot back. "I don't know whether you have or you haven't, and there was no suggestion in anything I said at any time to that effect. But to suggest that in return that may be the

case related to me I think is absolutely irresponsible and outrageous.”

Peterson said it was hypocritical of Gilmore to publicly cast doubt and suspicion on her organization without presenting any evidence and then become upset when someone did the same to him.

“At least give us an idea,” Peterson said after the meeting. “My board wants to know. Is it something we need to know that we need to address? For him to say this, its like he’s accusing me of something illegal.”

CDC 58:12 began providing services at the old Desire complex in 2009, working out of a trailer provided by HANO but using grants and private donations to fund their work, which included summer camps, after-school programs and activities for senior citizens.

The HANO contract awarded in 2012 allowed CDC 58:12 to expand its reach by moving into two trailers and hiring 10 full-time employees, including five case managers. They started support groups for young mothers and fathers, distributed food to residents, employed six residents of the housing complex, and partnered with the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission and NOLA Youth Works to provide a summer camp for 270 children and teenagers.

HANO has agreed to allow CDC 58:12 to continue to operate out of the trailers until a new provider is hired, but without the HUD money, the staff will be let go and all daytime services will be eliminated, Peterson said.

The issue is especially critical because the Desire complex has been without a community center since the old one was destroyed during Hurricane Katrina, leaving the two trailers as the only communal gathering spot, Peterson said.

At Tuesday’s meeting, Gilmore said HANO doesn’t have any money to rebuild the community center and had no plans to do so in the foreseeable future.

Albertha Burton, who has been a resident of the Desire complex since 1967 and suffers from gout, arthritis and a heart condition, said that without access to the trailers or a community center, there is nothing left for her to do but “sit on the porch and watch the grass grow.”

“The worst thing for a senior is a waste of time, nothing to do, just sit there all day,” Burton said. “At the trailer, I am somebody. They gave me the title of senior liaison worker. I interact with other seniors my age. I don’t have no family down here. That is my family.”



The Estates, formerly Desire, community

Tiniece Heim, a resident who worked for CDC 58:12 as the receptionist, wept as she told Gilmore how the leaders of the group used their own money to move a young boy out of town who was in danger of being murdered by a group of teenagers.

“I was there every day and saw how they care about people,” Heim said. “This is a blessing from God. Could you please look in your heart and reconsider not closing CDC? Please don’t take what God sent us.”

Gilmore listened patiently but remained steadfast in his decision.

“HANO’s best interests and the interest in the long-term of the residents is best-served by making a decision like this,” he said. “I don’t know if I can offer you a real good basis for this, but you’re just going to have to take it on faith, if nothing else, that I don’t do these things without a good basis. I don’t make these kinds of decisions without a good solid rationale, knowing full well that there are a number of people who have been upset by the decision.”

Gilmore said there might come a time when he reveals the information he received that caused him to terminate the contract of CDC 58:12, but offered no promises.

The story as originally ran stated that CDC 58:12 was a current partner of Desire Street Ministries. That partnership ended a year ago.

The Times-Picayune

Government shutdown delays Section 8 payments to New Orleans landlords

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
October 2013



HANO Tureaud building at 4100 Touro Street

More than 8,000 landlords in New Orleans with Section 8 tenants will have to wait at least a week to receive their rent checks because of the shutdown of the federal government, causing some to question their future involvement with the program.

Amy Smith, who owns two properties in New Orleans with a total of eight apartments, five of which are occupied by Section 8 tenants, said she receives \$4,000 monthly from the Housing Choice Voucher Program through the Housing Authority of New Orleans.

But when Oct. 1 came and went and HANO failed to send her the check, Smith, who said she depends on the Section 8 money to pay her mortgages and the utilities of her tenants, feared the worst.

When she called HANO, Smith said the person she talked to told her “that because the money comes from the federal government and because the federal government has shut down, we won’t be getting paid until it’s up and running again,” Smith said.

HANO, after receiving a number of calls from people similar to Smith, posted a message on its website Wednesday stating that the federal government didn’t cancel the rent payments, it was simply late in sending them and that landlords in the voucher program would receive their money starting Monday (Oct. 7).

“We thank everybody for their patience during this difficult and uncertain time,” Administrative Receiver David Gilmore said in the statement.

The delay was simply the result of a “glitch,” said Jerry Brown, deputy assistant secretary for public affairs with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which administers the Section 8 funding.

The government shutdown has decreased the number of active HUD employees from 8,709 to 337, according to the department’s contingency plan. As a result, the agency has a minimum number of people handling the current workload and that resulted in the “glitch,” said Brown who had no explanation as to why HANO was the only agency in the country that received its Section 8 funds late.

Should the government shutdown continue, HUD officials say there is enough money to fund the housing voucher program through December, but Smith said the experience will likely result in her reducing the number of Section 8 tenants she accepts in the future so a majority of her finances aren’t dependent on the government.

Donald Vallee, president of the Landlord Association of New Orleans, said many of his members who house Section 8 tenants are supportive of the shutdown. If it came to the point where they were forced to miss a few rent payments they would be willing to take the financial hit to reel in what they see as the overspending in Washington D.C., Vallee said.

“Landlords are fed up with the federal government and Congress and the Obama administration,” Vallee said.

Of the more than 8,000 landlords who accept housing voucher tenants, only 250 have more than 11 units.

“The majority of people are mom and pops with one, two or three units,” Vallee said.

“They live month-to-month and can’t afford their expenses without the revenue. At some point if you’re not getting paid for three months they are going to have to put (Section 8) tenants out and look for other tenants.”

Legally, however, landlords don’t have the right to evict tenants because the government failed to live up to its end of the agreement, said Amanda Golob, an attorney with Southeast Louisiana Legal Services. The tenants are responsible for their share of the rent and as long as that is paid the landlord has to honor the lease, she said.

Landlords can choose to end their involvement with the Section 8 program by giving the tenant and HANO 30 days notice.

The Times-Picayune

Mayor Landrieu hails Iberville redevelopment as part of larger downtown transformation

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
October 2013

New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, flanked by federal, state and local officials, celebrated the official groundbreaking Monday of the redevelopment of the Iberville public housing complex across North Rampart Street from the French Quarter.

Combined with the renovation of the nearby Saenger Theater; plans to rejuvenate the Circle Food store, the Carver Theater and the Treme Center; and the construction of a streetcar line along North Rampart Street and a \$2 billion medical facility on Tulane Avenue; the new Iberville will be part of a greater transformation of the downtown area that will bring jobs and opportunities to the long-suffering community, Landrieu said.

“We’re not just rebuilding houses, we’re rebuilding lives,” he said.

The Housing Authority of New Orleans and the city are in the process of tearing down 59 of the 75 buildings in the Iberville complex. In their place will rise a mixed-income community funded in part with \$30.5 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, a program intended to revitalize struggling neighborhoods by providing high-quality housing with improved services such as schools and retail outlets. New Orleans was one of five cities to receive the grant in the program’s inaugural round.

The city plans a one-for-one replacement, on-site and in the surrounding communities, of the 821 units that made up Iberville. The onsite redevelopment will happen in two phases and will include 81 public housing units, 49 units priced at rates affordable for

the working class and 97 market-rate units.

The entire project, on site and in the surrounding neighborhoods, calls for the construction of 304 public housing units, 261 workforce units and 315 market-rate homes.

The plan also includes 112 units for elderly Iberville residents in the former Texaco building on Canal Street.

A broader redevelopment plan, estimated to cost \$600 million and paid for with funds from FEMA, HANO, HUD, the state and the city, will also revitalize more than 300 blocks, within the boundaries of Rampart Street, Tulane Avenue, Broad Street and St. Bernard Avenue.

Rochelle Trotter, who lived in Iberville for 15 years and was one of seven residents who were part of the Iberville Working Team that helped design the new community, thanked HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan for giving them the opportunity “to tear this down. We were living in 1940 and now we’re coming up to 2014 and it’s going to be beautiful,” she said.

Glenda Graves, who has lived in Iberville for 31 years and was also a member of the residents’ design team, said that while watching the city tear down the buildings stirred up a lot of memories, she wasn’t sorry to see them go.



Mayor Landrieu speaks at the Iberville Groundbreaking Ceremony

“We have a lot of history, and when you see the buildings go down, you think about all the wonderful things that happened because the good outweighed the bad,” Graves said. “That’s the saddest part of it, but taking something down to put something better up -- that doesn’t make me sad.”

Donovan, who was at Monday’s groundbreaking ceremony, said when he first visited New Orleans after President Barack Obama was elected, he left the city angry because “not a single resident of public housing had moved back into the Big 4. President Obama brought his whole team together and he told us New Orleans had to be a priority for this administration and I made it one of my goals to make sure I could see residents move back into the Big 4,” Donovan said.

The “Big 4” developments include C.J. Peete, St. Bernard, Lafitte and B.W. Cooper, all of which have been or are in the process of being redeveloped.

The redevelopment of Iberville has been led by a coalition of federal, state and local officials but has been driven by the vision of the residents and community leaders, something that was vital to the project, Donovan said.

“Too often we’ve seen in the past the federal government comes in, demolishes a neighborhood and puts up public housing that doesn’t reflect the community, or puts freeways through neighborhoods just like on the Claiborne corridor that split apart neighborhoods,” Donovan said. “This really is one of the great chapters in one of the greatest comeback stories in the history of this country. What New Orleans has shown this country and the world is a remarkable thing.”

Cody Marshall, another Iberville resident and a member of the working team, said this project represents a giant leap forward compared with the years immediately after Hurricane Katrina, when a 2007 City Council discussion about tearing down the public housing developments erupted into a small riot during which the police used pepper spray and Tasers against protesters and several bystanders.

“I saw everything unraveling all over the city,” Marshall said. “This is great progress.”

Not everyone in the crowd, however, was supportive. Colette Tippy of Stand with Dignity, a public housing advocacy group, questioned whether all the Iberville residents will be able to return, and whether the redevelopment will lead to greater economic opportunities.

“There’s lots of great words about how this community is going to look when it’s done, but until there is real opportunity created through these major investments in this city, until there are real career ladders that are created, we will continue to see the same reality in the poor communities in New Orleans,” Tippy said.



Receiver Gilmore joins state and city leaders at groundbreaking ceremony

Childhood center a boom to Gentilly community

By **Dan Lawton**
November 2013

There were dinosaur toys on the shelves, building blocks on the tables and a finger painting extravaganza ambitious enough to warm Jackson Pollock's heart.

A troop of bubbly 3-year-olds played dress-up, switching between the garb of ship captains and doctors. One of them pressed a plastic stethoscope to Gerry Barrouse's heart.

"Do you hear a heartbeat in there?" he asked.

Barrouse grinned. He had popped into the new Educare early childhood center in Columbia Parc to lead a tour of the facility, which will be introduced to the public Thursday.

The 27,000-square-foot school, which opened Oct. 1 and cost \$9 million to build, is a major addition to the mixed-income complex, the site of the former St. Bernard housing project in Gentilly after Hurricane Katrina.

It's also part of a growing movement that recognizes early childhood as a crucial time in emotional and intellectual development, during which children in low-income families often fall far behind their peers.

The year-round center serves 150 children between the ages of 6 weeks to 5 years old.



Educare New Orleans

"If you get them to kindergarten on-grade, their chances for later success are dramatically improved," said Barousse, who as chairman of the board for the Bayou District Foundation helped spearhead both the Columbia Parc development and the new early childhood center.

Barousse said the philosophy behind the development of Columbia Parc, which spans 18 blocks and has 685 units and 2,000 residents, is to provide a constellation of housing, recreation and education opportunities.

When deciding what type of school to build, the group was introduced to Educare, a national organization started by Warren Buffett's daughter, Susan. The group has established 19 early childhood centers throughout the country.

Sensing it was a good fit, the Bayou District Foundation joined with the group to cobble together funds to build the school.

Approximately \$3 million came from the Housing Authority of New Orleans, \$2 million from Educare and the rest from a mixture of philanthropy and new market tax credits.

The school is operated by Kingsley House, an education- and community-building nonprofit that has been a longtime facilitator of early education programs.

Barrouse said he believes the center is the premier early childhood facility in the city. It has 11 classrooms, in addition to an industrial-size kitchen, a teachers lobby and workspace and offices for nurses, social workers and other members of the 50-person staff.

Students are divided into two sections, 6 weeks to 3 years old and 4 to 5 years old. Each class is staffed by three employees; master teachers supervise from offices with windows that allow them a direct view of each classroom.

According to Rafel Heart, the school’s principal, students are selected from an application process and must be below certain income levels to qualify.

There are 28 students at the school from the Columbia Parc area and many more from elsewhere in Gentilly, Heart said.

Heart said parents pay only a nominal fee to the state, somewhere between \$5 and \$15 per month, and the school already has close to 200 kids on its waiting list.

He added that the school’s low student-to-teacher ratio, which is approximately 6-1, means kids get plenty of individual attention that helps them not only to develop learning skills, such as number and letter recognition, but also to evolve emotionally.

“It really teaches cooperation and empathy,” Heart said.

He said the students learn together, play together and even eat together in a way that mimics relationships they would have with siblings.

Heart and Barousse said the true results of the school will be visible 15 years down the line, when the students they are teaching today will be heading off to college.

In the meantime, the Bayou District Foundation is in the midst of planning for an adjacent kindergarten-through-eighth grade charter school, which should break ground next year.

Barousse said the hope is that the new facilities will help create a flourishing Columbia Parc community.

As he guided a tour of the school, he pointed out the tawny brick facade of one of three buildings within the facility that were repurposed from the former housing project, vestiges of a past that seems distant amidst the sparkling, modern classrooms.

Giselle Scott, who teaches 4- and 5-year-olds at the school, said the new school sends an important message.

“The physical requirement reflects the children’s environment,” she said. “It shows the kids and the parents that they’re important.”



An Educare teacher reads a book to a four year old student

The Times-Picayune

Iberville demolition program aims to rebuild lives for 30 young men and women

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
December 2013

Participants remove household materials from an Iberville housing unit



A crew of 30 young men and women march through the Iberville Housing Development on a dreary day in December, armed with sledgehammers, crowbars, shovels and pipes. They shred the interiors of seven vacant units in less than 15 minutes.

Chunks of cabinets and kitchen sinks fly out of second-story windows in a cascade of debris, exploding on the muddy ground below.

Somewhere amid the destructive din of smashing wood and breaking glass the laughter of Kenisha Green-Ross is heard.

Green-Ross, the executive assistant to David Gilmore, the Administrative Receiver for the Housing Authority of New Orleans, stands in the courtyard watching with pride as her 30 “children” stomp from one unit to the next, tearing the interiors to pieces.

“I love it. I am so excited about this,” Green-Ross said before shouting, “Watch your head! Watch your head!” as a piece of deconstruction shrapnel launched over one of the balconies lands near the feet of one of the young workers.

Green-Ross admitted she dotes on her charges like a protective mother, making them lunch, and even organizing a Thanksgiving dinner for them, something many of these young men and women have never experienced.

Green-Ross said she does it because she knows what is at risk and what this opportunity can mean to these young adults. More than 15 years ago she and her husband, Thomas “Derrick” Ross, special projects coordinator for HANO, were saved by a similar program aimed at helping young people from a public housing complex turn their lives around through the dignity of honest work.

Kenisha Green-Ross and Derrick Ross were deep into the gang life in Washington D.C., facing two basic options: death or life in prison. That is when Gilmore, then administrative receiver for Washington’s housing authority, and several local community groups, offered them a different path.

“Mr. Gilmore saved my life,” Green-Ross said. “And if this program saves just one person or changes one person then that’s one more person alive, and we can be thankful because every single day someone is dying here.”

HANO started the Iberville Employment Training Program in June, hiring 30 young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who live in Section 8 or public housing.

For the past six months they have been assisting in the demolition of Iberville to make way for a new mixed-income community. As of December they have stripped more than 400 of the 821 units that made up the old Iberville, removing all of the contents while salvaging the appliances, drainage systems, kitchen sinks and other household items.

They work four days a week from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at \$10 an hour and receive life skills training on Fridays that includes motivational speakers who focus on preparing resumes, budgeting money, hygiene, anger management, problem solving, building trust, and working together as a team. They are also enrolled in courses at Dillard University to receive certification in lead and asbestos removal.

The goal of the program is to give young men and women on the fringes of society an opportunity to receive on-the-job training that can lead to careers and save them from a life on the streets, Gilmore said.

“You create a bond of mutual responsibility,” Gilmore said. “I will keep you busy. I will keep you employed. I will keep you trained. You keep yourself out of trouble and you be a responsible citizen. That’s the contract. These kids are developing a certain sense of pride about themselves and learning that in fact they have some value to society and they can contribute in a very important way. What other lessons do you need to teach these kids? Before they had no confirmation of their value as human beings. It’s sad but it’s so simple.”

Green-Ross knows intimately the dangers the young men and women of New Orleans face. Nearly two decades ago she was shot in the leg while walking through her Washington, D.C., neighborhood.

Green-Ross said she didn’t know what was happening, if it was a robbery or retaliation.

“Wrong place, wrong time,” said Green-Ross who was 17 years old at the time.

After falling on her back a few feet away from where her friend lay dying with a gunshot wound to the chest, the man who shot Green-Ross stood over her, aimed the barrel of his gun at her head and squeezed the trigger.

Green-Ross thought for sure she was going to die like so many of her young friends before her. It was just her time, she figured.

But the gun jammed.

That’s when Green-Ross said she heard a voice tell her to “Get up” and felt something pick her off the ground.

As Green-Ross fled she heard a gunshot. The bullet whizzed past her.

In the movies, this is the point where Green-Ross would have had a sudden epiphany and turned her life around. Instead, she said she became angrier and turned on the world. Green-Ross admitted she hurt people.

Change was slow to come.

This took place during the height of the 1990s drug wars in Washington that centered on a handful of extremely violent public housing projects, specifically Benning Terrace, a 274-unit development on the southeast side of D.C., commonly referred to as “Simple City” and ruled by two gangs, the Avenue crew and the Circle crew.

Gilmore once tried to inspect Benning Terrace but his driver was too afraid to go into the heart of the development, according to a 1998 U.S. News and World Report story. On the side of one building in Benning Terrace, graffiti announced, “You Are Now In A War Zone.”

Green-Ross said her parents were in jail for the majority of her life.

“My dad popped in and popped out,” she said. “He was always a gangbanger. He went out and did robberies and bad things and we all saw that.”

Derrick Ross, who the Washington Post described in a 1998 article as a “thoroughly menacing member of The Circle,” said he learned all his street smarts from his mother.

“Hustling, guns, everything. She was the wild one in our family,” he said.

Ross’ first encounter with death came when a friend died while trying to outrun the police in a stolen vehicle.

“The car flipped over and landed on him,” Ross said.

Shortly after that the Rollin 80s street gang entered the scene and “it was death behind death behind death,” Ross said.

When he saw the obituaries for his friends in the newspaper, what became a common occurrence, Ross noticed that none of the pictures that accompanied them were current; they were all taken when the young men were in elementary school.

“I wanted an up-to-date picture on my obituary so I took a new picture of myself each week,” Ross said. “I didn’t think I was going to make it to 18. Eighteen was the goal.”

The bloodshed at Benning Terrace reached a horrific nadir in 1997 when 12-year-old Darryl Hall was kidnapped and executed as part of the gang wars. When he was found four days later frozen solid in a nearby park, according to news reports, it took days to thaw his body before an autopsy could be performed.

At that point, Gilmore said he wanted to bulldoze the entire housing development. But when he attended a community meeting organized by a local nonprofit called the Alliance of Concerned Men to broker a peace between the warring crews, a young Ross emerged from the crowd and addressed Gilmore directly.

Ross said he told the administrative receiver that when he was a young child, Benning Terrace was safe because it was a nice place to live. The housing authority mowed the grass, removed debris, and picked up the trash; it looked like a suburb, Ross said. But after some time, the housing authority began to neglect the development and it fell into ruin.

“When y’all stopped caring about the grass we stopped caring,” Ross said he told Gilmore. “Gilmore said, ‘What do you suppose we do?’ I said, ‘Take the graffiti off the walls.’ He said, ‘I won’t but you all can.’”

Instead of tearing down Benning Terrace, Gilmore hired many of the young men who were part of the drug crews to remove the graffiti. The program was supposed

to last six months but it was so successful, the housing authority continued to hire local youths to clean up the neighborhood and by the fourth year there were no more killings in Benning Terrace, Ross said.

“We were at the point where we wanted to stop the killings,” Ross said. “And through us stopping the killings a lot of us stopped the drug dealing. We started having community cook outs. More and more people came on board.”

The program then spread to other developments plagued with violence like Park Morton where Green-Ross lived.

“We were in a beef with Garfield Terrace,” Green-Ross said. “Girls fighting and hurting girls any way we could,”

Gilmore and the Alliance organized a banquet for the young men and women and bought them nice outfits to wear.

“I finally put on a skirt,” Green-Ross said. “When I put that skirt on it said to me that I’m a lady and I really thought about what I wanted out of my life and I knew it wasn’t violence. ... I was somewhat the leader in the group so I said, ‘Let’s just do it.’ And we did it and it was very successful.”

Gilmore eventually hired Ross and Green-Ross to work full-time with the housing authority and they were married shortly thereafter.

When the couple arrived in New Orleans in 2010 with Gilmore, who was brought in to take over the long-troubled housing authority, one of the first things they did was reach out to the young people they saw standing on the street corners.

They heard the same tales of hopelessness that filled their own teenage years, how the young men expected to die young or go to jail, how no one would hire them because of how they looked or where they were from.

“Just imagine seeing everyday coming out of your door folks selling drugs and they’re wearing the nicest tennis shoes and the nicest jeans and the nicest shirts and

they got gold chains and gold all in their mouth and that’s all they see every single day so they say, ‘When I grow up that’s where I want to be,’” Green-Ross said. “They don’t come out their public housing door and see someone in a suit or their dad or mom going to work every single day.”

Determined to make a difference, Green-Ross and Ross reached out to the resident leaders of the local housing developments and told them about the jobs program in Washington, D.C., and how it had saved their lives. Several years later the resident leaders approached Gilmore and asked if HANO could implement the same initiative at the Iberville Housing Development.

“In our community we encounter a lot of violence and in some of our conversations with people who used to be involved in that activity, they would say to us the biggest issue was that they couldn’t find employment opportunities that really paid them a decent wage. We attributed that to their lack of skills,” said Cynthia Wiggins, president of the Guste Homes Resident Management Corporation. “We all want the American dream but some of us don’t know how to get it.”

There was skepticism among some members of the community who said the program would never work in a place like New Orleans, Ross said. First, trying to get young men from different wards to work together was a recipe for violence, they said. Second, there was no way that young men accustomed to making hundreds of dollars a day selling drugs would settle for making \$8 an hour doing hard labor.

Green-Ross said the same skepticism existed when Gilmore started the program in Washington. She estimates she was making more than \$2,000 a day selling drugs but when given the choice to make \$6.50 an hour at a regular job she jumped at the opportunity as did Ross.

“It was the peace of mind,” Ross said. “You didn’t have to worry about the police looking for you, you didn’t have to worry about dudes looking for you. So that \$6, once you add up all that other stuff, it’s like you’re getting your \$1,000 in peace of mind.”

The young men and women on the Iberville team express the same sentiment.

Troy Jones, 24, said he could triple or quadruple the \$10 he makes doing demolition by working 30 minutes on the street. But that sudden flash of cash comes with consequences and enemies.

“You making money and you go inside and try to lay down and you got a window and they either gonna knock it out or kick it in,” Jones said. “You got a family too. Maybe they don’t make it to you. Maybe they make it to your family.”

Ross did, however, heed the warnings of mixing troubled teenagers from various wards. He didn’t hire anyone with a significant criminal background or a history of violence. The few problems that have flared up have been quickly extinguished.

Several months ago two young men on the Iberville crew got into a fight, so Ross took them to Gilmore’s office where “they apologized to one another almost immediately without any adult oversight,” Gilmore said.

Ross then made them apologize to the entire crew and they agreed to take on extra work to make up for their mistake.

“When one kid offends another kid it ends up in street violence but it didn’t happen here,” Gilmore said. “For kids to exercise that kind of self control, it doesn’t seem much to the average Joe out there, but it is a phenomenal thing to watch. They are now behaving in a societal way. They’re part of our larger group and they are responsible to each other for how they behave and they’re beginning to believe this stuff.”

Jones agreed these are important lessons because the children of New Orleans are getting involved with drugs and violence as young as 8 years old and by the time “they turn 15 they’ve already developed as a grown person,” he said.

John Quize, 19, who has lost several close friends to street violence, said by then it’s too late. “You can’t do nothing. They got their own mind,” said Quize who has been on the Iberville crew for two months. “Some people don’t have a mother or father in their life and that messes their head up.”

If they weren't enrolled in the Iberville program they'd probably be "shooting somebody, robbing somebody, what youngsters do," Jones said. "But this program motivated everybody you see out here to change our whole lifestyle."

Ross said he started to get a sense of the isolation many of these young men and women live in when one of his workers said he had never been inside a restaurant in his entire life. Others said if you come from the 7th Ward you couldn't go to the 9th Ward. They were trapped in a box, Ross said.

"One of them said, 'We can't go to Mandeville. That's just for white people. They ain't gonna let us go to Mandeville.'"

So one day Ross took his workers on a field trip and drove them past Lake Pontchartrain.

"The entire van was packed and they all said, 'Where are we?' They were amazed at all these big houses," Ross said. "They said, 'I ain't never been back here. I would have never known this was here.' So now when we have downtime they say, 'Let's take a tour.'"

Since then Ross has taken them fishing, to Metairie and eventually plans to take them across the bridge to Mandeville.

Though the Iberville program is still in its infancy and its long-term success can't yet be determined, there are signs of hope. Durr Construction has taken on six of the original 30 demolition crew members as full-time employees while Abatement Construction and Service Contractors hired four.

When the demolition of Iberville is complete, HANO intends to bring on 30 more young workers to assist in the construction of the new mixed-income community and will transfer any of the original 30 who are still looking for permanent jobs to other HANO sites where their new skills can be put to use.

Wiggins said she is hiring 12 of the workers to strip 12 units at Guste after which they will be taught how to properly paint and lay tile flooring. Wiggins said she is also

in discussions with a local carpet company to see if it will take on one or two of the teenagers as apprentices.

Many of the Iberville workers have also applied for and received their Transportation Worker Identification Credentials with the assistance of HANO so they can work offshore.

Given these positive signs, Gilmore said he is trying to convince the heads of other agencies around the city to implement similar initiatives.

"The airport is being rebuilt, the bio-district is coming up, all this construction is going on in town," Gilmore said. "You put a bunch of these kids to work, give them some skills and training, they get jobs in the future and you're going to see the crime rate drop precipitously. I spend a lot of the time wondering why everybody thinks this is so miraculous. I've come to know these kids well enough to know that this is how they want to live their lives. They're tired of living in the dark."



HANO's Iberville Employment Training Program

The Times-Picayune

New Orleans housing authority generates \$1.5 million in sales of scattered sites

By [Richard A. Webster, NOLA.com](#)
December 2013



HANO Scattered Sites up for sale

The Housing Authority of New Orleans expects to generate \$1.5 million in revenue from the sale of 86 scattered-site properties put up for bid in November, the agency said.

HANO announced in October its intention to unload nearly 300 of these properties, typically defined as housing developments with fewer than 15 units.

The housing agency doesn't have the financial resources to rebuild these properties and effectively manage them so it's better to put them up for sale in hopes people in the private sector or nonprofits can put them back to use, said Administrative Receiver David Gilmore at a September meeting.

In its first sale, HANO put up 107 properties and received bids on 86, 38 of which will be redeveloped into affordable housing and 48 into market rate developments.

Affordable housing is defined as housing that is affordable to households making 80 percent or less than the area median income or \$44,000 in New Orleans.

The majority of the scattered-site properties are located in the Lower 9th Ward and were severely damaged by the failure of the federal levees in Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The bids ranged as high as \$326,500 from the Lower Magazine Association for three

properties in the 1000 block of Melpomene Street to as low as \$1,200 from the Moorish Science Temple of America for two properties on Caffin Street in the Lower 9th Ward.

Joshua Shipman bid \$8,551 for a cluster of 16 properties in the Lower 9th that are set to be redeveloped as market rate properties.

HANO, which currently operates 85 scattered sites, originally owned 1,381 such properties, most of which were developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The original goal of the program was to integrate low-income families that receive public housing assistance into neighborhoods throughout the city, according to HANO.

The agency has another 167 properties it will sell or demolish pending approval from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

HANO is reviewing five proposals for the Mazant Royal property in the Bywater. It consists of 1.79 acres and is bordered by Royal, France, Chartres and Mazant streets.

It was the year...

2014

■ **CHAPTER 6:**
■ **YEAR 2014**



Lafitte Senior Rendering

The Housing Authority of New Orleans will soon be ready to move forward with the third phase of the Faubourg Lafitte housing project redevelopment.

The agency recently accepted bids for construction of a 100,000-square-foot apartment complex for low-income senior citizens at 700 N. Galvez St. The building is part of a \$148 million redevelopment of Lafitte, one of the so-called “big four” housing developments that were demolished following Hurricane Katrina.

Gibbs Construction was the lone bidder on the project, with a submitted bid of \$17 million. The project has an estimated budget of \$24 million that is being financed through HANO and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Blitch Knevel Architects designed the project, which is being developed by a partnership that includes New Orleans-based Providence Community Housing, Enterprise Community Partners and L+M Development Partners of New York.

HANO spokeswoman Lesley Thomas said the agency is still reviewing the bid and could not specify when construction would begin, but added that it would likely start early this year. A building permit for the project was filed in November.

New Orleans
CITY BUSINESS

Faubourg Lafitte housing project eyes advancement

By **Robin Shannon**
February 2014

Thomas said HANO would own and manage the three-story building, which will include 100 elderly-only apartment units, multiple community rooms and assembly spaces, multiple laundry rooms on each floor and several common porches and terraces. The building will also feature a landscaped courtyard with sitting areas and extensive plantings, as well as a community garden area.

According to a 2011 presentation from the developers, the redevelopment of Lafitte was expected to include 276 public housing and low-income rental units consisting of single-family homes, duplexes and six-unit buildings in addition to the senior citizen building. The development also includes 141 for-sale units.

A separate \$62.1 million off-site component of the redevelopment, completed between 2009 and 2012, included 103 for-sale homes and 192 mixed-income rental units.

Construction began on the on-site rental and for-sale units in 2011, with most of them completed last year. HANO is still awaiting construction on about 50 of the homes for sale.

The senior citizen building, which was approved in 2009, suffered through a series of funding delays before finally getting off the ground last year.



U.S. Bank Closes on Financing for Historic Iberville Housing Redevelopment in New Orleans

Source **U.S. Bank**
March 2014



Iberville Public Housing Development

NEW ORLEANS, Mar 05, 2014 (BUSINESS WIRE) -- U.S. Bank will provide more than \$20.6 million in federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit equity financing, in addition to construction lending, for New Orleans-based HRI Properties' redevelopment of the historic 72-year-old Iberville housing project in New Orleans' iconic Tremé neighborhood.

The financing package marks the second major affordable housing development financed by U.S. Bank in New Orleans since mid-2011. The bank also provided more than \$60 million in tax credit financing and \$20 million in construction lending for Phase 1A and 1B of the B.W. Cooper redevelopment in downtown New Orleans, one of the city's "Big Four" public housing complexes redeveloped after Hurricane Katrina.

Prior to the start of its demolition in August 2013, the 821-unit Iberville Public Housing Project was the last remaining intact public housing development built in New Orleans during the New Deal era. The new housing complex is an integral piece of the city's broader mixed-use, mixed-income redevelopment plan for the 23-acre site.

U.S. Bank's financing supports the first and second phases of the project, consisting of 227 units of the 880-unit mixed-income community. Construction began in November 2013 and will be completed by early 2015. In addition to the tax credit financing provided through U.S. Bancorp Community Development Corporation,

the bank's community development subsidiary, U.S. Bank also provided a \$22.2 million loan to bridge financing during construction.

"We're pleased to play a role in another project that will have a positive impact on thousands of people in downtown New Orleans," said John Lisella, vice president of U.S. Bancorp Community Development Corporation. "This redevelopment will provide high-quality affordable housing and job opportunities to its residents while revitalizing downtown New Orleans."

The redevelopment plan includes funding from the Housing Authority of New Orleans and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through a Choice Neighborhood Initiative Grant, which will enable local nonprofit Urban Strategies, Inc. to implement a comprehensive community and supportive services program onsite. That program will include health education, increased health care availability, employment and literacy training, social work and case management for families and individuals, among other components.

"HRI is proud to have U.S. Bank as a long-term partner in the revitalization of Iberville and this historic area of New Orleans," said Josh Collen, Vice President of Development of HRI Properties. "These initial phases will be an impactful component of the Choice Neighborhood Initiative, an innovative collaboration between the City of New Orleans, the Housing Authority of New Orleans and many other stakeholders."



broadcast media



New Lafitte development ready for residents



*WWL TV - Paul Murphy / Eyewitness News
February 2011*

NEW ORLEANS -- The new mixed income “Faubourg Lafitte” is taking shape along Orleans Avenue in the 6th Ward of New Orleans.

Friday, U.S. Housing Secretary Shaun Donovan announced the first 50 units are ready for occupancy.

“It’s not just about recovery,” said Donovan. “It is about revitalization. It is about building that shining city on the hill that all of you, everyone one of you in this room is committed to building.”

Gone are the stoic looking brick buildings that housed families for decades in the old Lafitte public housing development.

There was a lot of controversy surrounding the decision to raze it, along with the B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete and the St. Bernard complexes. All of them were damaged during Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Former residents worried there would be no affordable housing left in the city. Lafitte Tenant Association President Emelda Paul said the new development should help allay those fears.

“They have been having a little doubt for the longest, so now seeing is believing and some of them are moving in and I’m so happy for them,” said Paul.

The new homes are primarily single-family cottages, shotgun-style singles and doubles, all with a feeling of old New Orleans.

Mayor Mitch Landrieu said Lafitte is an example of creating something new while preserving the city’s culture.

“At the end of the day it’s about giving people a safe place to live, so they can put their head on their pillow at night and make sure their children are safe and make sure they have an opportunity for a great job,” said Landrieu.

Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-La., hopes the new Lafitte will help bring families who left after Katrina back home.

“It’s a better environment for children, for families,” said Richmond. “I think the design is something that people thought about for a long time.”

“I feel great about it,” said Paul. “I’m excited about it. You don’t even have that old vision any more. You see this new vision that’s coming about.”

Eight families got the keys to their new homes in Faubourg Lafitte.

The Housing Authority of New Orleans hopes to have 1500 families living in the development by 2015.



Mixed feelings at meeting held over future of Iberville housing complex



WWL TV - Tania Dall / Eyewitness News
May 2012

NEW ORLEANS -- A packed and at times heated public meeting was held Thursday night to talk about proposed changes to Treme's Iberville Housing Development.

Community members say some Iberville residents didn't even know about the public meeting, but organizers say it was posted in the paper and flyers were handed out.

Another concern: that this project will make this Treme neighborhood less affordable to low-income families.

The historic Iberville Housing Development dates back to the early 1900s and needs major upgrades. Last year, the Housing Authority of New Orleans, better known as HANO, received a \$30 million to kick start that makeover.

Iberville resident Rochelle Trotter said it's a good thing.

"I think it's very exciting because we're getting an opportunity to come to the 21st century living," she said. "It's going to be very exciting and has been very exciting for the residents."

Community members heard five proposals for the public housing development. The city's plan is to turn the neighborhood into a mixed income community with more than 2400 units.

Plans would also include new retail stores, clinics and schools.

The project is one that Treme native Al Jackson welcomes, as long as families currently living in Iberville can return.

"Something needs to happen in and up as oppose to just moving them out," he said.

Critics of the project did speak up, upset that some Iberville residents didn't know about the public meeting.

"It's kind of disturbing to hear that people on this side of the neighborhood got fliers," said resident Daniel Burke. "You all need to do a better job."

Other community members voiced concerns about the possible threat of low-income families being priced out of Treme because of the project.

"That's all it is, is a scheme, a scheme from day 1 post-Katrina," said community activist Kawana Jackson.

"People think they're coming back as public housing residents because a lot of people are uneducated about market rate and tax credit," said Iberville resident Stephanie Mingo.

The public is being asked to weigh-in on the Iberville redevelopment project now through June 15.



Discovery of Human Remains Delays Iberville Redevelopment



*WWNO - Eve Abrams
December 2012*

The Housing Authority of New Orleans received a Federal grant last year to redevelop the Iberville Housing Development, the city's last traditional public housing complex, on the edge of the French Quarter. The plan was to keep about a third of the buildings, demolish the rest, and build new, mixed-income housing.

But, before demolition begins, HANO is required by law to conduct a survey to look for anything with historic significance, including gravesites and underground burials. Along with Lens reporter Katy Reckdahl, Eve Abrams learned what the archeologists uncovered is no big surprise.

To listen visit <http://wwno.org/post/discovery-human-remains-delays-iberville-redevelopment>



HANO Works To Keep Section-8 Voucher Families Off Wait List



*WGNO - Darian Trotter
March 2013*

7-hundred families found out they'd be placed back on the waiting list to receive section-8 housing.

Now leaders with the Housing Authority of New Orleans are trying to help families who were furthest along in the process of securing housing.

Darian Trotter continues our coverage.

The Housing Authority of New Orleans has had a steady stream of clients coming and going.

In some cases, after finding out their newly issued section-8 housing vouchers are being withdrawn, they've been devastated.

WGNO News Reporter Darian Trotter asked, "What did they say? They just told me that I gotta wait, I gotta move out the house, and wait for somebody to contact me with more funds but what am I supposed to do until then?" asked an unidentified woman who described herself as a voucher holder.

Friday, WGNO News reported exclusive details about letters mailed to 7-hundred voucher holders.

In them, HANO explained a number of circumstances, including an over subscription of vouchers and budget cuts are causing recently issued vouchers to be withdrawn effective immediately; because HANO does not have sufficient federal funds to subsidize new housing at the current time, or the near future.

"And I got three children, I done bought furniture for the house and everything," an unidentified single mother said.

This week, those families are in a bind, because a number of them were about to

<http://wgno.com/2013/03/26/hano-works-to-honor-vouchers-for-families-closest-to-moving-in/#axzz2x0Rdl0S8>

move into their own home.

The single mother said, "They got me stressed out." "This my first time getting a voucher now y'all want to take it back." "Like seriously!" "They did the inspection and everything." "The only thing I had to do was contract signing and move me in the house. I got the keys, I got everything."

Now families who received a letter of withdrawal will go back on the waiting list.

HANO Administrative Receiver, David Gilmore says there's an important footnote.

"No current voucher holders are going to lose their assistance," Gilmore said. "Nobody needs to worry about that and there are 17-thousand of them out there in New Orleans."

But calls into the WGNO newsroom suggest that is not entirely so.

It's why the unidentified voucher holder was shedding real tears.

She said, "Six months I have been in the house and now I gotta move out that's not fair, it's not fair."

After six years on the waiting list, the mother of three says going back on the list means going back to sleeping where ever she can.

"That's like I'm homeless, going from house to house." "I need my own house."

Gilmore says the situation has become dire for potential renters because a number of landlords violated HANO rules by allowing families to move-in before they were supposed to.

Under HANO rules all move-ins are subject to inspections and signed contracts.

Gilmore says the agency is in the process of working on a case-by-case basis with families who followed the rules and were steps away from moving into their home.

Others will be placed back on the waiting list in their original order.

HANO says they will however be first to come off the list when additional funding is available.



Construction on major housing project stalled due to funding hurdles



WWL TV - Monica Hernandez / Eyewitness News
October 2013

NEW ORLEANS - Officials broke ground Monday on the new Iberville housing development near the French Quarter.

But construction on a similar project just blocks away has stalled.

In 2009, developers broke ground on the new Faubourg Lafitte in Treme, with the vision of redeveloping one of the city's major public housing developments.

Four years later, just over half of the planned housing units have been completed. That's 276 affordable rental units, one of which is home to Emelda Paul.

"I love the place. It is beautiful," said Paul, who heads the Faubourg Lafitte Tenant Association.

But construction on the rest of the development has been on hold for almost a year now while the developers work out financing, leaving empty lots along Orleans Avenue.

"When agencies like HANO are late or developers are late producing the housing, the effect on people is pretty obvious. There's not the housing that folks were hoping for to be able to occupy," said David Gilmore, HANO administrative receiver.

"Of course I was concerned about it," said Paul. "I wanted to know what was the reason and what was holding up."

The hold up? Completing the project has been much more difficult than expected, said Terri North, head of Providence Community Housing, one of three co-developers on the project.

Developers were forced to turn in nearly \$1 million of GOZONE tax credits after missing a 2010 deadline due to the economic downturn, said North. Now, they're finalizing complicated financing deals with HANO and the state Office of Community Development.

"We're going to deliver everything we said we were going to deliver in terms of unit count and unit type. It's going to happen it's just going to take a little longer, it's taking longer than anybody had hoped it would," said Gilmore.

Construction is expected to start up again by the end of the year, this time on a 100-unit senior building for HANO and 89 market rate apartments.

Construction should begin on 52 homes for sale by next year.

And those like Paul can't wait.

"They're going to start it, so I'm looking forward to that and I take their word for it," she said.

All 517 mixed income housing units in Faubourg Lafitte are expected to be completed by 2016, with another 295 units off site.



Officials break ceremonial ground on Iberville re-development



WWL TV - Katie Moore / Eyewitness News
October 2013

NEW ORLEANS -- The US Secretary of Housing and Urban Development was in New Orleans Monday for a ceremonial groundbreaking of the Iberville housing re-development.

It's the last major public housing complex to be redesigned and rebuilt, in large part because it was so controversial.

Donovan joined state and local political officials to turn ceremonial dirt at the complex near the intersection of Bienville and Marais Streets Monday.

"Today we are breaking ground on the first of two phases. The first is 125 units of mixed-income housing -- low, moderate and market rates," said Mayor Mitch Landrieu.

Donovan said he's been to New Orleans at least a dozen times during his tenure at HUD, some of those visits for ceremonies at what used to be known as the "big four" housing projects.

While not as large as what used to be known as the St. Bernard, CJ Peete, BW Cooper and Lafitte housing projects, Iberville is the last historic complex in the city to come down.

Building by building, demolition crews are working their way through the Iberville complex. A handful of buildings will be saved, but turned into alternate-use buildings to preserve their historic significance. Piles of rubble sit where crews have begun

their work.

Lead and other hazardous materials make it a much more delicate procedure than just bringing in a wrecking ball.

"There over 1,000 apartments that we're gonna see throughout this neighborhood that we're gonna see for affordable housing as a result of this work. That doesn't mean those are all gonna be here on site. But we made a requirement that every unit of affordable housing be rebuilt within this neighborhood," Donovan said.

Some of the lower-income units will be recouped in the old Texaco building on Canal Street. It's also being re-developed, but will house some of the Iberville's senior residents.

The unit-for-unit rebuild was one of the concerns initially raised by long-time Iberville residents like Rochelle Trotter.

"In New Orleans, as you know, sometimes political people don't keep their word and this time, they really kept their word," she said.

All along, one of the main concerns has been that Iberville's prime location, next door to the French Quarter, and the CBD would lead the government to get rid of it all together.

"This is much, much better than it has ever been in every way. It's structurally better. It's spiritually better. It feels better and it looks better," Landrieu said.

Those residents who were on site Monday said they're looking forward to seeing what this new mixed-use site will become. Only a few families are still living at the complex while demolition is ongoing. Most of the former residents have been relocated to other HANO properties.

Some, including Trotter, who worked on the redevelopment project, are now working to become homeowners through the city's soft-second mortgage program. Trotter said she hopes to officially become the owner of a Gentilly home on Friday.

<http://www.wwltv.com/news/consumer/officialsbreakceremonialgroundoniberville-228684831.html>



City officials celebrate opening of Columbia Parc Senior Center



WWL TV - Jaclyn Kelley / Eyewitness News
December 2013

NEW ORLEANS -- It's a recovery milestone for some New Orleanians who thought they'd never see the day they could come home.

The Housing Authority of New Orleans celebrated the grand opening of the Columbia Parc Senior Center in Gentilly on Wednesday.

Mayor Mitch Landrieu, City Council President Jackie Clarkson and Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge-Morrell were on hand for the ribbon cutting.

Local leaders say the developer spared no expense. The luxury apartments are completely energy efficient and even outfitted with solar panels.

Not only that, residents can enjoy amenities like the fitness center, movie theater and private, gated parking.

The \$24 million project is now home to 120 New Orleans seniors. Many of those seniors relocated after Hurricane Katrina and say the opening of this new senior living facility gave them the opportunity to finally come back home.

"I just said, God, I want to live there. I want to go home so bad but I can't afford to live here," said resident Dianne Baquet. "Then this came up out of the blue."

Resident Sharon Gerdes said she's going to live there for the rest of her days.

"Because I love it!" she said. "I love my apartment, I love the design. I love the way they have the amenities for all of us."

The progress doesn't stop here in Gentilly. In fact there are plans to build a new elementary school and a new playground.

The new senior center also provides several amenities for its residents, including health and dental care programs, dining services and educational training.

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