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Public Housing

Temporary Aspect Lost As Residents Are Born, Live And Die In Projects

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Effective delivery of social services is a critical component in the equation for a successful public housing program, according to the chief of the Columbia Housing Authority (CHA).

Authority Administrator William R. Ballou told Richard Sertomans today the mission of housing officials has been and still is providing "temporary, safe, decent and sanitary housing for those fellow citizens of ours who are

incapable of providing it for themselves."

But he said the "temporary" aspect is the one that must be emphasized in current planning for housing projects.

"We don't put people in public housing and leave them there for the rest of their lives," Ballou said in explaining a philosophy that CHA officials have been emphasizing over the last few months.

He said that as public housing evolved from the 1930s on, the temporary aspect of the idea was "eclipsed by the urgent need to provide brick and mortar housing."

He said the result has been "high density, barracks-like structures in which hundreds of families were located."

Consequently the taxpayer has had to foot the bill while low income citizens have been born into, grown up and died in public housing and in the "poverty cycle," Ballou said.

Ballou said the old system of providing brick and mortar public housing has not worked and that a new equation for approaching the problem has been devised: brick and mortar plus effective delivery of social services equals upward mobility out of public housing.

From the brick and mortar standpoint, Ballou said authorities need to get away from massive, high density barracks-like structures. They should consider that perhaps their housing units should be dispersed throughout the community with "much, much smaller densities" and in buildings "aesthetically compatible" with the neighborhoods in which they are located.

"I'm not talking about putting low income homes in very high income neighborhoods — not at all," Ballou said, "but I'm also not talking about putting

low income homes in very low income neighborhoods.

"It seems to me there is a happy medium — there is a balance that can be attained."

He pointed out as examples the authority's assurances that it will not locate more than 30 units on one site; its recent purchase of 75 "235" program houses for use as public housing units; and its determination to buy more of the "235" houses.

He presented the social services aspect as the one that must be employed to motivate able-bodied residents of public

housing communities.

The needed social services include basic education, vocational training, nutrition, medical care, job opportunities, job assistance, child care and child nutrition — services already in existence.

He said he believes the obstacles to "effective delivery" of those services to public housing citizens include bureaucracy and bureaucrats.

Some "more effective rules" to govern delivery of services are needed to provide incentives for upward mobility out of public housing, he said.