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Housing Authority Expects 300 New Units to Come Online in 2023 as Part of Ten-Year Plan to Increase Stock

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V.I. Housing Authority Executive Director Robert Graham said during a board meeting Tuesday that beginning in 2023, some 300 additional housing units are expected to come online as part of a ten-year plan.

Speaking about the Housing Authority's portfolio redevelopment strategy, the executive director said 2022 was the first year of a 10-year strategy, and he revealed that units would begin coming online in fiscal year 2023.

"We have three development partners working on two projects apiece," he elaborated. "Over the intermediate term beginning next year we expect to see on average of 300 units brought online,

new or rehabbed, beginning in fiscal year 2023.”

Mr. Graham said the authority is in a better position today than it was five years ago due to federal resources received in recent years. Notwithstanding, there was still a lot of work to be done, he assured.

Regarding the authority's effort to make housing available to individuals in varying income brackets, and not just low-income applicants, Mr. Graham said this would not be achievable without more job opportunities and an increase in income.

Speaking of the authority's "de-concentration plan," which seeks to diversify affordable housing applicants, Mr. Graham said, “The goal is really admirable to want to have balanced housing annual income for residents that is across the spectrum and not just extremely low or low. We suggest in the annual plan that it's not practical to achieve that goal when in the public housing developments there are a significant number of low and extremely low income households.”

Mr. Graham said this was reflected in the waiting list, and added, “if the waiting list has the same proportions or composition that we have in public housing — that 80 percent of the individuals are low and extremely low income — it is very difficult to achieve de-concentration.”

The executive director opined that the only way to achieve any level of de-concentration would be to increase household income through training and jobs, and the Housing Authority is currently working with the Department of Labor to accomplish this. Mr. Graham said the hope is to get a few people through the process to be trained and have the opportunity to work, thereby increasing household income without triggering a rent increase — at least for the first 18 months.

The executive director said the Housing Authority was currently focused on two plans: the improvement of buildings, and to invest in residents and applicants through the Bright Path program.

Relative to the Bright Path program, a resident wellness and empowerment plan created by V.I.H.A., Mr. Graham said the authority was still in the process of increasing staff to be able to implement the plan. The goal is to find individuals who would advocate for improvements across the board for residents. He said there were potentially three to five resident councils that would be coming online next year to be "part of the solution." These councils will also have input into the design of replacement developments.

The the V.I.H.A. Board of Commissioners approved the authority's annual plan at the end of the meeting. Board Chair Noreen Michael adjourned the session without receiving an answer to one of her inquiries concerning modifications in the range of yearly income for residents in low income housing. This was because one commissioner had to leave the meeting, resulting in a lack of quorum. Board members agreed to address the matter in the next general meeting.