TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

BOARD PUBLIC HEARING
LOW INCOME HOUSING PLAN AND ANNUAL REPORT 2002

9:00 a.m.
Wednesday,
November 14, 2001

Room E1.028
Capitol Extension
1400 Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas

BOARD MEMBERS:

MICHAEL JONES, Chairman
C. KENT CONINE, Vice Chairman
BETH ANDERSON
SHADRICK BOGANY
BETH ANDERSON

STAFF PRESENT:

RUTH CEDILLO, Executive Director
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MR. JONES: I'd like to call to order the board public hearing for the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs for November 14, 2001, and this is the public hearing with regard to the State Low Income Housing Plan and Annual Report for 2002.

The first order of business is the call to order and roll call. Beth Anderson?

MS. ANDERSON: Here.

MR. JONES: Shadrick Bogany?

MR. BOGANY: Here.

MR. JONES: Kent Conine?

MR. CONINE: Here.

MR. JONES: Vidal Gonzalez is absent; Norberto Salinas is absent; Michael Jones is present. So we have four members present and two members absent, and I do certify that we do have a quorum.

At this point we will be taking public comment concerning the State Low Income Housing Plan and Annual Report for 2002, and if you plan to comment, we do need you to submit a witness affirmation form for this hearing. Now, I would say this is our public hearing, this is not the board meeting.

I have two witness affirmation forms that have been submitted, one by Mr. Sherman and one by Ms.
Anderson. Are there any others? Yes, sir, if you would bring them forward. Delores, could you get those for me? Thank you so much.

Our first speaker will be Ms. Anderson.

MS. P. ANDERSON: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members, Ms. Cedillo. For the record, my name is Patty Anderson; I'm the executive director of United Cerebral Palsy of Texas. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing services and advocacy to persons with disabilities across the state.

I'm very pleased to be here this morning to offer some comments on the 2002 State of Texas Low Income Housing Plan and Annual Report. I'd also like you to know that United Cerebral Palsy of Texas serves as the lead organization for the Texas Home of Your Own Coalition and we do have contracts with the department to do down payment and barrier removal assistance through the HOME Program.

Specifically, we wanted to offer our support for the department's commitment to a partnership with the Texas Home of Your Own Coalition. We call it HOYO, so I'll refer to it as HOYO just to keep it brief and simple. HOYO continues to expand opportunities for home ownership among a greatly underserved population -- that is, persons with disabilities who are low income.
Down payment and barrier removal assistance to prospective home buyers with disabilities is a major activity of the project to promote home ownership opportunities. Because people with disabilities are considered an underserved population, this assistance is an especially important activity to support and to have addressed in the plan.

The identification of HOYO as a cooperating organization really provides that tangible and demonstrated support to the partnership, and we appreciate it and we look forward to continuing to work with the department.

I specifically wanted to list our support for some commitments that are in the plan, those being an increase from 10 percent to 20 percent of the annual HOME allocation to applicants serving persons with special needs.

The second item is the addition of scoring criteria for applicants targeting programs that support the de-institutionalization of persons with disabilities. Establishing a higher amount of down payment assistance, funding available for eligible home buyers with disabilities is also a component, and compliance with Senate Bill 623 which provides four universal design features in new single family home construction by
organizations that receive HOME funding from TDHCA.

The establishment of an advisory committee to address the issues facing people with disabilities to obtain housing services in Texas is also a major step in the right direction.

In addition to those goals in the plan, we also see that there is an opportunity for the department to promote and educate the larger community on the housing needs that people with disabilities have in our state. We continue to feel that the department has a proper role and can be the catalyst for full compliance with Fair Housing laws, as well as promote policies that increase integrated accessible and affordable housing opportunities for people with disabilities.

In the past we have supported the Statewide Architectural Barrier Removal Program -- it's been called SABR within the department -- and the goal of that program is to systematically increase the stock of accessible housing in the state. There's really a tremendous need out there for barrier removal programs and we would very much like to offer that the plan needs to have a clear demonstrated commitment to that particular activity too. There's very little funding or technical assistance in replicating barrier removal programs across the state.

I have five very quick recommendations about
the plan, and I do have these in writing so I'm going to turn them in to you also. The first recommendation is that we modify the language of the State Low Income Housing Plan to read -- this is goal number 1 that I'm specifically addressing: The TDHCA will increase and preserve the availability of safe, decent -- and then add the words integrated and accessible -- and then continue with affordable housing for very low, low, and moderate income persons and families.

Our second recommendation is that the department would increase the monitoring efforts of recipients of funds for compliance with all state and federal requirements for accessibility by the use of a self-evaluation tool to be included in the uniform application prior to funding. The self-evaluation, we believe, should include all offices, any models that are used, any other facilities that are used by the recipient to provide services so that there's full physical accessibility to persons with disabilities.

Our third recommendation is to undertake a capacity-building effort to provide technical assistance to potential grantees and others throughout the state on the successful program model to develop a consumer-driven barrier removal services -- this is the home modification piece that I spoke to a moment ago.
And our fourth recommendation is that the department commit funds for those barrier removal programs within HOME, CDBG and the Housing Trust Fund Program.

And our last recommendation is that there be a creation of a minimum 15 percent set-aside specifically for projects serving people with disabilities in the Housing Trust Fund in support of initiatives to address the state's response to the Olmstead decision which we've addressed the board about before.

I'd be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

MR. JONES: Thank you. Ms. Susan Maxwell?

MS. MAXWELL: Good morning. I'm Susan Maxwell; I'm from the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities and I'm here representing the council.

As you probably know, the council is a governor-appointed board of 30 members and we have 60 percent that are people with disabilities and the rest are state agency folks who serve people with disabilities that are on the board or council, and we'd like to offer the following comments on the Low Income Housing Plan and Annual Report.

We would really like to express our appreciation for the progressive actions that have come about in the last year. We see that the department in the
state plan acknowledges the need for people with
disabilities to be integrated into community settings, and
this has been something that's just very important; people
don't like to be isolated in housing just for people with
disabilities.

And this has taken on a special sense of
importance, in that we're also initiating and getting off
the ground in our state the Olmstead Supreme Court
decision that says that people that have been forced to
live in institutions because there was no state services
and support for them in the community should be moved into
the community, and when they get to that community, I'm
sure they want to know that it is going to be integrated,
so we appreciate the department's understanding of
integration.

Our council applauds you on the formation of
the task force regarding people with disabilities so that
the staff can work with folks who just have a little
expertise in this area and all the policies that can be
brought forth and programs can have these things looked at
before they come to you.

Another thing that's been really great to see
is the participation of the department on the interagency
committee to get the Olmstead initiative or the Promoting
Independence initiative out in the state, and to agree to
take upon the extra 35 vouchers that HUD has given to get them out to people who are going to be leaving institutions. The department has shown an extra dedication to this effort; you should be applauded for that.

There's also additional money in the HOME Program for barrier removal and that's always a good thing for people with disabilities. To be able to access housing is one thing, but to be able to actually get in with ramps or wider hallways and get into the bathroom is real important, so the barrier removal section there is wonderful. And I see that there's a new pieces in tenant-based rental assistance and that's a really good thing too.

The next steps that we see the department can do to make things even better is to provide capacity building and educating people all around the state, as it is your role to reach many people, and providing for how to do barrier removal, and a lot of times the self-directed barrier removal that we talk about, the consumer-driven barrier removal means that we'll spend less money because people know that they only need this or that and not just the whole gamut of things that are in some of the documents, so bringing that expertise would be good.

And then the other thing is to help people
around the state understand the laws of the state that
provide for people with disabilities and the compliance
issues with that. A lot of people just don't get the
word, and we feel like when they make application to TDHCA
by doing self-assessment, they can check off, oh, I didn't
know that. It would be good for them as a way to get
information out so that we can see better compliance and
more housing for people with disabilities.

So capacity building and barrier removal
compliance, those are the things that we speak of, and I'd
like to thank you for this opportunity to talk to you this
morning.

MR. JONES: I'd like to thank you for being
here. Thank you so much.

Those are the only two witness affirmation
forms that I have for this. There's another one? Excuse
me, I didn't have it. Who is it?

SPEAKER: Carol Eisenberg.

MR. JONES: I'm sorry, I don't have it, but
we'd be happy to have her speak. Thank you for being
here.

MS. EISENBERG: Thank you. I work at the
Housing Council for the Texas Homeward Bound Coalition.
I'm also a Home of Your Own client. In 1997 I was
delighted to become the third person in the state of Texas
to actually purchase a home through Home of Your Own, and it's made a wonderful change in my life. I know from experience because now since over a year and a half ago I've been working as a housing counselor with Texas Home of Your Own. I've been dealing with individuals with disabilities and families with children with disabilities who are very interested in exploring home ownership as a possibility to improve their lifestyle, and without Home of Your Own, there is really very little that they can do to save enough money to participate in the program.

I also get a lot of calls from outside the regions that we serve. Right now Central Texas serves the counties of Bastrop, Blanco, Burnet, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Williamson. We also have programs, because the program has been so popular, that we've expanded to the Dallas area, to the Fort Worth area, to Houston and El Paso.

But I get a lot of calls at that 800 number that we have from people living out in Lufkin or Matagorda or lots of other places where we do not have any barrier removal programs and we do not have a Home of Your Own program so that people cannot purchase a home using the benefits that Home of Your Own offers which include down payment assistance, home modifications funds, and a Fannie
Mae Home Choice loan that we offer or that's offered through our lenders which is designed specifically for people with disabilities and is a lot easier to get into that kind of loan and offers a person the option of using non-traditional forms of credit to get a Fannie Mae Home Choice loan.

Also, since I bought my house, the Fannie Mae Home Choice loan is offered at lower than the going rate; I'm still paying the going rate but that may change.

But anyway, we really need to have an expansion of the barrier removal program. That would be critical to meeting the needs of the people who I get calls from who live in the outlying areas throughout the state where Texas Home of Your Own does not serve, and we can only refer them to the Texas area -- the area agencies for community action which may or may not have first-time home ownership programs or barrier removal. Very, very rarely do they have barrier removal programs so the contractors out there do not even know what barrier removal is supposed to look like. It's a big problem in Texas

I'm fortunate to live in an urban area where people do know about it, but we need to get this information out across the state, so anything that you guys can do to make this more progressive than it already is to reach citizens throughout the state would be most
I know that Texas Home of Your Own Coalition has put together a program to help educate consumers and construction personnel as to what barrier removal is and how to go about doing that, but right now we don't have the funds to actually go out and do it. But this is something that we want to be working on, and I think TDHCA could be a big part of that. And if anybody has any questions, I'd be glad to take them.

MR. JONES: Thank you. Any questions?

MS. EISENBERG: Thank you very much.

MR. JONES: Thank you. We appreciate you being here.

Is there anybody else I've missed?

(Pause.)

MR. JONES: Hearing none, I assume this closes our public comment. Seeing that that's all that's on our agenda for this particular public hearing, by common consent, I will adjourn the meeting if there are no objections from board members. The meeting is then adjourned.

(Whereupon, at 9:28 a.m., the meeting was concluded.)
CERTIFICATE

MEETING OF:    TDHCA Board Public Hearing
LOCATION:      Austin, Texas
DATE:      November 14, 2001

I do hereby certify that the foregoing pages, numbers 1 through 15, inclusive, are the true, accurate, and complete transcript prepared from the verbal recording made by electronic recording by Sunny Peer before the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

11/26/01
(Transcriber)         (Date)

On the Record Reporting, Inc.
3307 Northland, Suite 315
Austin, Texas 78731