



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Oakland City Attorney, Oakland Housing Authority Settle Lawsuit over Public Housing Conditions

Agreement signed Wednesday includes transparent reporting and tracking of complaints

OAKLAND, CA – A settlement signed Wednesday by the City of Oakland and the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) sets up improved systems for reporting, tracking and fixing maintenance problems for the thousands of tenants living in the city’s federally funded public housing units.

The settlement ends a public nuisance lawsuit filed by the City of Oakland in February 2007 over conditions at properties owned and managed by OHA, which is an independent public agency and Oakland’s largest landlord.

The press conference Wednesday took place at 2155 East 28th Street, a rehabilitated OHA property that has undergone improvements over the course of the lawsuit.

“All tenants in Oakland deserve humane housing, regardless of their income,” City Attorney John Russo said. “This settlement provides a framework to remedy problems as they happen, and it represents a more cooperative approach to managing public housing in Oakland. I applaud the Oakland Housing Authority for coming to the table hammering out an agreement that will benefit the thousands of families who live in their buildings.”

“We are grateful to the City of Oakland and the City Attorney’s Office for their great work in the process of amicably settling this suit, said Jon Gresley, Executive Director of OHA. “We were able to speed up our timeline on projects which were already underway, share information and have handled the most critical issues that were on the table.”

“I want to acknowledge the commitment and time expended by the Chair of our Board of Commissioners Moses Mayne Jr., along with Vice Chair Robert J. Pittman, Jr. and Commissioner Greg

Hartwig, all of whom invested their volunteer time to resolve this matter,” Gresley said. “Their insight and dedication were crucial elements in the successful resolution of this matter.”

Highlights of the settlement include:

- OHA assistant property administrators assigned to monitor all “scattered” sites – as OHA develops new housing, buildings with more than 16 units will have responsible persons on site.
- Abatement all garbage and graffiti problems within two business days of receiving a complaint.
- Information about the status of the complaints available to the City and to tenants.
- Coordination of efforts between OHA and the Oakland Police Department, including on surveillance of drug hot spots.
- Formation of a Working Group, which will include representatives of both agencies and will meet regularly to identify problems and coordinate services.

The city’s lawsuit addressed conditions at 52 OHA scattered site properties and other matters, including tenant behavior. The two principals in the action worked with a mediator in order to come to a mutual understanding and subsequent resolution of the suit. Both parties have developed new lines of communication and strategies that will fosterer closer cooperation between their respective organizations.

OHA provides services to a resident community of over 37,000 people and has been under-funded by the federal government for 16 years, creating a significant backlog of maintenance projects. Coincident with filing of the lawsuit, the Oakland Housing Authority received special recognition from US Department of Housing and Urban Development that allowed OHA to move more quickly to meet many of the concerns outlined in the lawsuit. In just two years OHA has been able to undertake a record \$25 million dollars worth of improvements to its properties. It has been able to reorganize how property is managed, resolve complaints, improve performance standards, provide life enrichment services and respond to issues of specific violations concerning the behavior of its clients.

In part to satisfy issues raised in the lawsuit, OHA developed two programs which have gone on to win national awards from the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials: The Customer Assistance Center and the Site Intervention Team.

The Customer Assistance Center has created an effective model to respond to complaints from community members, residents and government officials about illegal activity and blighted conditions both on and near OHA properties. Since its inception, 96 percent of complaints have been resolved by staff to the satisfaction of the complainants. The Site Intervention Team brings OHA staff, OHA police and residents together in community meetings to foster conflict resolution and crime abatement.

OHA currently provides a total of 3,221 public housing apartments and 11,142 Section 8 leased housing units in the City of Oakland. To see before-and-after photos of OHA facilities and to review documents related to programs and future planning for the agency, visit www.oakha.org or call (510) 847-1512.

For a copy of the settlement and other case documents, go to www.oaklandcityattorney.org.

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