

## 'Feds Approve Westpark Demolition Plans '

By Ed Friedrich



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Bremerton Housing Authority received permission Wednesday to begin moving residents from the old Westpark neighborhood so it can replace it with new housing.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development approved a demolition and disposition plan that the housing agency submitted a year ago. Now the housing agency can apply for vouchers that will help pay for the low-income residents to move, and to pursue financing to design and build new units.

It plans to demolish all 571 of the 1940s-era units on the 82-acre site and replace them with 790 units of mix-income homes, some single-family and some multifamily, said Kurt Wiest, BHA's executive director.

"It's an exciting time for this agency," Wiest said. "We are thrilled with the progress. We made a commitment in timetables and we've been able to make those timetables."

Wednesday's approval allows BHA to hit another key target. HUD's window of opportunity for accepting relocation voucher applications is Aug. 1-30. It might be a year before the next chance comes along. The housing agency has said since the beginning that it doesn't have the money to relocate residents without the vouchers.

At Westpark, residents pay 30 percent of their income for housing. That contribution will remain the same when they move, and the agency must come up with the balance.

There is no guarantee that the housing agency will be awarded vouchers, but the odds are good.

"We feel that this is a worthwhile project and if there's any in the country that should be allocated vouchers, it should be Bremerton Housing Authority's Westpark project," Wiest said.

Readiness is the key, he said, and Westpark has its zoning and financing in place and is ready to move forward.

The relocation vouchers will probably be awarded in October and, if successful, BHA could be handing them out by January, Wiest said.

Housing authority staff have been preparing residents for the move for the past six months. Each household will be assigned a relocation coach who will work with them one-on-one. Families can move anywhere within the United States. They will also get help with their relocation costs.

Now BHA can start selling parcels at Westpark to builders. Most of the new units will be privately owned. The agency will hold on to some land and build 190 low-income units, so some of those who relocate could return.

Westpark's renewal already has begun. The first phase — the 72-unit Bay Vista Commons — is nearly complete. The building contains 60 assisted-living units and 12 units for Alzheimer's patients.

Most of Bay Vista's residents will be like other public housing residents, paying 30 percent of their incomes to live there. Medicaid will pay for the daily assistance. A few of the units will be market rate.

The public is invited to a grand opening from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Aug. 18.

The Westpark redevelopment is part of a national move to decentralize public housing. It is scheduled to be completed in 2011.