

Several families will lose housing at Washington Village in Norwalk

By Justin Papp 8:14 pm EDT, Tuesday, August 28, 2018



Photo: Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

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Washington Village is mostly vacant, but 150 people do still live there while new buildings are constructed.

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NORWALK — All but a few former Washington Village tenants who have been relocated during the multiyear redevelopment will be able to move back to their old neighborhood when the project is finished in spring 2020.

The criteria for resettlement came up at a meeting of the Norwalk Housing Authority Board of Commissioners on Monday, at which details of the

Washington Village Phase Two project were discussed. Chairman Cesar Ramirez said he had learned of three families who were told they could not return to their former home once construction was complete.

“It appears to be that they were promised to go to the next buildings and they were supposed to be qualified,” Ramirez said to the board, Norwalk Housing Authority staff and Patrick Lee, principal of Trinity Financial, the developer overseeing the project. “But now because their financial income had changed, they’re not qualifying to move back into the building.”

Ramirez and other commissioners expressed concern that certain residents might lose out on housing.

“Our contract obligations with the Housing Authority says that we’re to provide housing for existing residents of Washington village that you, the Housing Authority, deem to be in good standing,” Lee said.

According to Thomas J. Ivers, director of the Housing Authorities Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, a resident in good standing is one who has been lease compliant and is not behind on payments.

Ivers added that there were a handful of families — three or four — who won’t qualify for housing at the new Washington Village because their income levels exceed maximums set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. As an example, Ivers said that a family of four could not have a combined income of more than roughly \$60,000 to qualify for the new development.

“It’s an issue we’ve made a real point of because of the nature of this development. The income criteria are more stringent than the existing Washington Village,” Ivers said. “So someone could be income eligible at Washington Village, but not be eligible at the new one, and obviously that presents challenges. So it’s been something we’ve talked about a lot.”

As part of their efforts to prepare the families who may not qualify for the new development, Ivers told the board that the Housing Authority flagged the tenants as early as three years ago and discussed other potential housing options.

Still, some commissioners worried about the displacement of former Washington Village residents who may have incomes higher than allowed in the development, but still may have limited housing options.

“You guys are going to take these people’s places from them, and they don’t qualify to move (back in). That’s terrible, terrible,” Brenda Penn-Williams said.

Still, Bovilsky said HUD’s restrictions were meant to ensure housing for low-income individuals, and that the Housing Authority had a responsibility to aid residents most in need.

“The issue is, what is the mission of this institution?” said Adam Bovilsky, executive director of the Housing Authority. “Are we here to provide housing to people regardless of income? Or are we here to provide housing to people who are low to moderate income? At some point if we start providing housing to people who are earning \$70-, \$80-, \$90,000, that’s housing with a subsidy that could go to somebody who can’t afford housing in Norwalk any other way.”

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