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News of the week

March 5, 2010

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Legislature Okays Bill To Give HA Stimulus Stream

Federalizes City, State Housing
By DAVID SIMS Housing Authority will receive



DANIEL SQUADRON: 'A massive investment.'

The Housing Authority will receive \$400 million in Federal stimulus funding immediately and \$75 million per year in perpetuity after that following the State Legislature's passage of legislation that will Federalize 13,000 units of housing built by the city and state. The bill requires Governor Paterson's final approval, which is expected.

The legislation closes the loophole barring those units from getting Federal support. Before, the HA had to use operating funds to provide them with capital improvements, part of the reason for its \$80-million deficit every year. The HA must now submit a Federal application for the money by March 17.

'Will Dramatically Improve Housing'

"This bill will allow [HA] to bring in more than \$75 million a year in Federal aid—a massive investment to address its operating deficit and dramatically improve housing for more than 400,000 tenants," said State Sen. Daniel Squadron, chief sponsor of the legislation. He said the money would "help us fix broken elevators, avoid heat outages, and address the basic maintenance problems that public housing tenants contend with every day."

Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd, who represents the bulk of HA workers, said in a phone interview, "This is a good day for the residents in public housing. . . this goes a long way to closing the HA's budget gap."

He said that the operating funds the deal would provide meant the Local 237 members working for HA would have less to fear during the budget season. "I can't guarantee that there will be no layoffs, but it goes a long way to minimizing layoffs. I haven't been briefed by the HA yet as to what this means for their current budget."

Mr. Floyd praised the efforts of Senate Democratic Conference Leader John Sampson to get Mr. Squadron's bill voted on when the March 17 deadline was fast approaching. After U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer, a long-time proponent of Federalization, included the funds in the Federal budget, Mr. Floyd and HA Chairman John Rhea lobbied in Albany to pass the legislation.



GREGORY FLOYD: 'A good day for public housing.'

HA: A Landmark Deal

HA spokeswoman Sheila Stainback praised "the largest mixed-finance deal for housing in the nation's history" in a statement. "In addition to providing funding for most of these City and State developments, the Federalization plan would enable all of HA's other developments to benefit from their full portion of Federal funds," she said.

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Mayor Bloomberg said that obtaining these funds was “one of the city’s top legislative priorities” and that the money would be used to “preserve, maintain and modernize our HA developments.”

The bill specifically requires the HA to transfer the developments through sale or lease to nonprofit entities, which would make them eligible for stimulus funds. The developments will not be privatized and will remain public housing units with all the current protections still in place.

Mr. Schumer said the legislation “will help ensure that orphaned HA developments are properly maintained and that thousands of tenants get the quality housing they need and deserve.”

“For years, public housing was dangerously under-funded, risking the lives of thousands of New York families,” said Mr. Sampson. “Today’s action means families struggling with the fiscal crisis will get the safe and affordable housing they need to survive.”

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