

# Residents don't want city to tear down Jacob Price

*By Greg Paeth  
Post staff reporter*

The Housing Authority of Covington expects an answer next month on whether the agency can move ahead with plans to demolish the Jacob Price public housing project at 11th and Greenup streets.

The authority has asked the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for approval of a plan that would begin with the demolition of three of the 23 buildings this year, with the entire complex razed by 2009.

"By the end of March we should have their reading on the application unless they ask for more information from us," said Tom Schmitz, interim director of the housing authority.

Although the city and the housing authority are convinced that the complex should be razed to revitalize the predominately African-American Eastside neighborhood, the Jacob Price Residents' Council sees things differently.

"We're not for the demolition. We don't want to see anyone displaced," said Vivian Cook, who has lived in Jacob Price five years and serves as president of the council.

Covington police said the project and the area around it are often beset by violence and drug dealing.

Cook said the complex has had its problems, but "there is crime in other neighborhoods."

The housing authority has yet to give residents any details about where they will go if HUD approves the demolition plan, she said.

"They're only saying you'll relocate. I don't want to move any-place else. I want to live in the neighborhood where I grew up and where my kids are raising their kids."

Cook also said she wondered why the predominantly African-American housing development was being targeted. She said she believes the city's long-range plan is to redevelop the neighborhood so that it's no longer affordable to low-income residents.

Schmitz said the population density of Jacob Price - 163 apartments on 6 acres - not the racial composition of the complex, prompted the authority to propose the demolition.

"It's also the neighborhood that can benefit most from economic development. There are a lot of abandoned and vacant buildings and lots in the neighborhood," he said.

Low-income tax credit money can be used to improve existing buildings in the neighborhood such as those that have been acquired by the city, he said. Those units could be made available to people moving out of Jacob Price.

One of the goals is to create a "mixed income" neighborhood rather than one in which mostly low-income residents live, he said.

The condition of the 66-year-old projects is deteriorating, and the cost to rehab the buildings is more than they are worth, Schmitz said.

The housing authority has no immediate plan for the property once Jacob Price has been razed, he said.

Covington City Solicitor Frank Warnock said a recent update from the housing authority attorney said the demolition was based on the high costs of maintaining the aging buildings and "the philosophy not to concentrate public housing and move some of that out into the neighborhoods."

That philosophy is one of the reasons why the Newport Housing Authority is about a week away from beginning demolition of the 202-unit West End public housing complex, located on valuable riverfront property along the Licking and Ohio rivers.

Newport Housing Director Joe Condit said demolition is scheduled to begin next week on 13 vacant buildings in the 31-building complex and that the entire project will be razed by June. He said only 42 of the units are occupied.

Residents of the complex are being relocated to new housing and apartments throughout the city in an effort to create an income mix in neighborhoods. One of the advantages is that scattered-site housing removes any of the stigma that might be associated with living in a complex that is clearly labeled "public housing," Condit said.

The City of Newport intends to buy the property from the housing authority and make it available to developers.

The housing authority received a \$28 million federal Hope VI grant to fund the relocations. Covington's Schmitz said Hope VI money for relocation is no longer available.

The first three buildings targeted for demolition in Jacob Price are on Robbins Street, the northern boundary of the complex, and contain 24 housing units, Schmitz said.

Ten of them are not occupied and the housing authority is not moving tenants into them because demolition could begin this summer, he said. In the entire complex, about 140-145 units are occupied he said.

The city's purchase of "scattered site" housing in Eastside to accommodate displaced Jacob Price residents could dovetail well with the demolition plan, Schmitz said. He said, however, that he did not know any details about the city's quietly executed acquisition of buildings in Eastside and Westside.

HUD officials in Chicago, where the Covington application is being reviewed, already have asked for more information from Covington about the cost to rehabilitate Jacob Price. Schmitz said the federal agency wants to determine the most cost-effective way to provide housing for low-income residents.

The application to HUD does not request any money for demolition. The housing authority would have to cover costs that probably would exceed \$1 million, Schmitz said.