

New Columbia Background Information

Relocation and Return

As the New Columbia project involves building a completely new neighborhood from under the ground up, the nearly 400 families who lived at Columbia Villa today were relocated during construction. Relocation began in March 2003 and continued through September 2003. Residents will begin to return in August 2005 when the first housing is complete.

Guiding Principles

There are three principles that will guide relocation and return:

- residents will be supported in their moves
- residents will have a choice of housing options
- residents will have the opportunity to return

Housing Choices

Residents were given the choice of moving to other public housing or receiving a Section 8 voucher, which provides rent assistance in the form of a subsidy that HAP pays directly to private landlords.

Relocation and Services Support

HAP built a strong team to support residents during their moves and through the relocation period. A staff of relocation specialists worked one-on-one with each family to make sure they found new housing and that their move went smoothly. In addition, the agency hired family specialists to provide counseling, assistance and support to ensure that families made the connections necessary for successful residency in their new homes. The family support staff will work with all residents desiring their services for the next four years. The staff will stay in touch with families that choose not to receive services and make sure they are aware of their opportunity to return to New Columbia.

Relocation Benefits

HAP developed a relocation plan for each family, based on an in-depth interview to determine individual needs, preferences and concerns. During individual meetings with residents, HAP explained relocation benefits, as well as the residents' rights under the different laws and regulations governing this process. All residents received the following benefits:

- assistance identifying comparable housing based on resident preferences
- transportation and child-care assistance during the housing search
- comprehensive professional moving services, including packing and unpacking, food and lodging vouchers as needed, and a \$50 moving allowance for incidental expenses
- payments of fees and deposits directly to landlords and utility companies and arrangements to address unpaid utility balances that could prevent utility hook up
- a replacement housing payment to cover increases in certain housing costs should they occur

In addition, every effort was made to find housing in North Portland for families that wished to remain in or very near the Portsmouth neighborhood.

Home Ownership

One of the major objectives of the federal HOPE VI grant program is to increase self-sufficiency of public housing residents, with the ultimate goal of helping families move off assistance, where that is possible. To that end, the New Columbia project provides support for Columbia Villa families that are able to take the step to home ownership as they leave the Villa.

- Down payment assistance of up to \$5250 (the equivalent of the replacement housing payment) will be provided to up to 10 qualified households that choose to purchase homes.
- HAP's pilot program that allows Section 8 voucher assistance to help with mortgage payments on a home will be extended to up to 20 qualified Columbia Villa residents.
- Families that have a longer-term objective of home ownership will be given direct access to HAP's GOALS family self-sufficiency program.

Returning to New Columbia

An informal survey of Columbia Villa residents in September 2002 indicated that nearly 70 percent of those responding, which was about 90 percent of all residents, wished to return to New Columbia. While the actual number returning is likely to be lower than that, as residents move to new homes, get comfortable and decide not to move again, all residents who wish to return will have the opportunity to do so. They must meet two requirements:

- they can return unless they have been convicted during the relocation period of a crime that is considered a violation of the public housing lease and grounds for eviction from public housing, and
- returning residents must agree to follow community rules that will apply to all housing types, including the homes for sale

Returning residents will receive an allowance to cover costs related to the move.