

Panel recommends new housing be put in Gas Plant area

By HELEN HUNTLEY
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Fifty-nine new units of public housing — the last the city of St. Petersburg may get for years — should be built in the Gas Plant area, a city committee agreed Monday.

The recommendation, which goes to the City Council for approval, contradicts the city's recent efforts to satisfy federal guidelines by putting public housing in white neighborhoods.

However, committee members were assured that officials at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) won't object to building these new units in the mostly black Gas Plant area.

"THEY INDICATED they won't stand in the way of using the 59 units on the south side," said Jack Highsmith, executive director of the St. Petersburg Housing Authority.

"We'd be satisfying a need in the community," he said. Highsmith said the Gas Plant site is close to transportation, schools and a hospital.

The area is scheduled for development as a combined residential development and industrial park. The city already owns much of the land and has torn down some of the dilapidated houses there. The Gas Plant area is bounded by Ninth and 16th streets and First Avenue S and the South Bay Drive interstate feeder.

Council member J. W. Cate said he has been hearing some complaints from the black community that the city promised to build new housing in the Gas Plant area but hasn't done it.

Highsmith said the city should not expect to get any additional federal money for public housing in the near future.

"THIS IS THE LAST money we're going to see for quite a while," he said.

The 59 units would include one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments, he said. They would be aimed at low-income families. Highsmith said that if everything proceeds on schedule, construction could begin in four to six months.

The units would be built on the east side of the Gas Plant site, nearest Ninth Street.

The committee's second-choice site was at the southeast corner of 11th Avenue S and 37th Street, near St. Petersburg Vocational-Technical Institute.

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