Holyoke meeting will focus on Lyman Terrace complex, its 400 residents and Housing Authority’s demolition plan

By Mike Plaisance, The Springfield Republican March 29 2012

HOLYOKE – The future of Lyman Terrace and the 400 people who live there will be discussed at a City Council committee meeting Thursday.

Because a large crowd is expected, the Redevelopment Committee will meet at the Holyoke Transportation Center at 206 Maple St. on the fourth floor, instead of at City Hall, Chairman Aaron M. Vega said March 22.

The meeting is at 6:30 p.m.

The Holyoke Housing Authority is seeking approval from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to demolish the 18-building, 74-year-old complex – set in rows bordered by Lyman, Front and John streets in the Downtown Neighborhood – because the structures have deteriorated, officials said.

The demolition cost of $1.6 million would come from $860,000 from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and $700,000 in housing authority operating money, officials said.

But residents have rallied against the demolition and submitted petitions to the city urging the buildings be saved because they have historic value and questions exist about the fate of tenants. Housing Authority officials have said tenants would be helped in relocating.

The basis of the meeting is the council on Feb. 21 referred to committee a resolution that opposed the demolition because “Holyoke’s revitalization depends on preserving, rehabilitating, and capitalizing on our historic architecture and infrastructure.”

The format of the meeting will be that councilors will question officials from the Housing Authority and the city Office of Community Development followed by public comments, Vega said.

An “Environmental Review Record” outlining the proposed demolition has been available for public viewing at the city’s Office of Community Development and at the administrative office for the Housing Authority. At each location, residents have been able to view the document and leave comments.

In a response to the public comments released Wednesday, the Housing Authority wrote that the Environmental Review Record spawned “unprecedented dialogue about the future of the housing complex and interaction between local government and the community.”

Responding to those comments, though, the Housing Authority reiterated its finding that the demolition of Lyman Terrace would have “no significant impact on the human environment.” The agency acknowledged the language may seem alarming or offensive to some, but explained that the terms are drawn from the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Housing Authority has issued a formal request for proposals for the site, with potential developers retaining the option to purchase the land "as is" with the buildings intact or after the demolition is complete, according to the document released Wednesday.

A total of 47 people submitted 50 comments on the Environmental Review Record. Lyman Terrace residents accounted for 16 comments, and another 3 comments came from city councilors. Residents from Amherst, Chicopee, Springfield and Worthington weighed in as well.

Three people wrote in favor of the demolition.
Lyman Terrace residents continue fighting demolition proposal  
By Cherise Leclerc  Posted: Mar 29, 2012

HOLYOKE, MA (WSHM) -

The 18 buildings at Holyoke’s Lyman Terrace housing project could soon face the wrecking ball.

Now, the families that call Lyman Terrace home are speaking out, chanting “renovation not demolition” as they lined the sidewalk outside Holyoke’s Transportation Center on Thursday night, hoping their fear of losing their homes could change the minds of housing officials.

"I feel beyond angry, I feel disappointed and I feel like if they are able to demolish Lyman Terrace it will set a really dangerous precedent," said resident, Marcella Jayne.

An hour later, those residents piled into a meeting with the city council's committee on redevelopment and Holyoke's Housing Authority searching for answers.

"I hope it changes their mind," said President of Lyman Terrace’s tenant association, Sonia Gonzalez.

Housing Authority officials responded to questions from the committee and residents wondering if demolition is the only way to deal with what they say are 18 buildings rapidly deteriorating. Demolition would cost around $1.5 million, but housing authority officials say renovation would be much more and they've tried alternatives.

"The Housing Authority has applied for a hope six grant through the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the last four years," said Executive Director of Holyoke Housing Authority, Rosalie Deane.

Approval for demolition could take four to six months once the application is in, bringing residents and officials to this point: will 167 families be uprooted and forced from their homes? According to Housing Authority officials the reality is the buildings are just too far gone.

"We've been planning to do something with Lyman Terrace for a number of years," said Deane.

But for the hundreds of people who live there, Lyman Terrace is not an eyesore, but home.

"The families that live there feel totally destroyed because they don't know where they're going to, will they go to shelters? They really don't know so it's been devastating," said Gonzalez.

Housing Authority’s application to HUD for demolition will be sent in about a month. There will be more public hearings. In the meantime, the committee on redevelopment is set to review a resolution by several city councilors who oppose the demolition.

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