

Seattle suspends issuing Section 8 tenant vouchers

BY CYDNEY GILLIS
 STREET NEWS SERVICE

Forget the “economic indicators.” For people on the ground, the recession just took a turn for the worse: The director of the Seattle Housing Authority says the agency has temporarily suspended issuing Section 8 rental vouchers to the city’s poorest residents.

The federal vouchers pay one-third of a private landlord’s rent (up to a certain cutoff) for very low-income households. But since the economy turned bad, Seattle Housing Authority Executive Director Tom Tierney told the agency’s board of commissioners this evening, people are using their vouchers longer. So few are leaving the program every month, he said, that the housing authority had to stop issuing the vouchers to individuals – and expects it won’t be able to again until the middle of next year.

Only individual tenant vouchers are affected. Tierney said SHA is still issuing what are called “project-based” vouchers – vouchers that the agency guarantees to developers of low-income buildings, including those funded by the Seattle Housing Levy. The housing authority provided 500 vouchers to projects funded by the current levy, Tierney said, and has committed another 500 vouchers to a seven-year levy renewal that goes before voters in November.

The project-based vouchers should remain intact, he said, but it’s possible that could change. “There may come a time we’d have to pull away project-based vouchers,” Tierney said, but “we would be very reluctant to ever do that.”

Come Sept. 30, Tierney said SHA is facing another issue when two new HUD rules go into effect. One will require all current public-housing residents and applicants to provide documents verifying their U.S. immigration status. The other will require a Social Security number for every member of a household currently living in or applying for public housing. The Seattle Housing Authority currently does not require a Social Security number for anyone under six years old, Tierney said.

Both represent big changes for residents and housing authority staff that may be called upon to help get or file paperwork. As a result, SHA and other housing authorities around the country are advocating for a delay in implementing the rules, Tierney said.

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