

HUD Official To Realtors: "Reinventing HUD Is Our Task"

The Clinton administration is working to make the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) "a catalyst, not an obstacle," in finding solutions to nation's housing and community development problems, according to department representative.

Terrence Duvernay, a HUD deputy secretary, discussed HUD's new focus at a forum during the National Association of Realtors' Mid-year Conference and Trade Exposition. Nearly 7,000 realtors and guests attended the April 23-28 conference.

According to Duvernay, HUD is committed to being an "agent of change" that will reorganize its programs so they effectively serve the needs for which they were created. "Reinventing HUD is our task," Duvernay said. Department officials plan to "transform uncoordinated programs" and "make (HUD) a problem-solving" deliverer of housing, he noted.

Duvernay addressed the department's efforts to expand the availability of single-family loans provided through the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) mortgage insurance program, improve the preservation of low-income multifamily housing and increase enforcement of the federal fair housing law. Specifically, he said HUD is concerned over FHA's loss of mortgage financing activity, noting that the program currently has about 4 percent of the market share, compared to a 50 percent

share years ago. "We must find a way to get FHA back" as a major mortgage insurance, Duvernay said.

Last year, NAR voiced concerns over FHA changes imposed by HUD that made the program less affordable and less usable for entry-level buyers. The changes, which essentially raised the closing costs, subsequently were repealed in NAR-supported housing legislation enacted late last year.

Currently, HUD is examining ways to simplify the loan-to-value ratios and mortgage insurance premium structure used in FHA underwriting, Duvernay said. In addition, the department is considering an increase in the mortgage insurance limit, which is now \$151,725 in high-cost areas, he noted, adding that higher down payments may be tied to such an increase. "The (mortgage insurance) caps are a concern," he said. "We are looking at how and when they should be raised."

NAR has long supported tying the FHA mortgage insurance limit to local housing prices. Making this adjustment would allow FHA to reach buyers in areas such as the California coast and the Northeast, where home prices generally exceed the current mortgage insurance limit.

HUD also is seeking to step up preservation of low-income multifamily housing, through an increase in funding for the flexible subsidy program, Duvernay said. This is part of the department's focus on major rehabilitation of older, deteriorated units

that could be used to help curtail the growing shortage of affordable housing of low-income residents.

He praised Realtors for their efforts to fighting housing discrimination. "You are part of the solution," Duvernay said. He noted that the department is planning to devote more resources to the enforcement of the federal fair housing law. "We must address what race continues to do...in the denial of access to rental housing home ownership and loans," Duvernay said. "We are committed to helping all people have the freedom to live wherever they choose."

In subsidized housing situations, HUD is seeking to find a balance between fair housing enforcement and the screening of potential tenants to keep out those who might have criminal intentions, he said. "HUD must not discriminate, but we must find a way to weed out criminals," Duvernay said. The department has earmarked more funds to combat drug sales and other crimes in public housing projects and other HUD-supported communities, he noted. "We must confront destructive behavior and strengthen the social contract or rights and responsibilities," Duvernay said. The Clinton administration is shifting away from the previous administration's focus on enabling public housing tenants to purchase the units in which they live. According to Duvernay, the dilapidated condition

Northwest Natural Cautions To Call Before Digging

As the weather warms and Oregonians' notions turn toward yard work and gardening, Northwest Natural Gas is asking anyone considering digging to call a service that will notify utilities to locate their underground facilities at no charge.

By calling the Utilities Notification Center two full working days before excavating, participating underground utilities are alerted to come out and locate and mark the lines. The Utilities Notification Center has more than 190 subscribers including most large owners of underground facilities in many parts of Oregon and southwest Washington.

"It doesn't matter if a person is planting a tree or building a fence on their property, it's the law to call before you dig," explained Bruce Paskett, field supervisor of Engineering for Northwest Natural Gas. "If a person does not call and damages underground services, they can be liable for all repair costs for damaged utilities-not to mention the hazard that exists by rupturing a gas pipe or breaking an electric cable."

"For instance, the polyethylene pipe that is widely used for natural gas distribution is very susceptible to damage from tools such as shovels and post hole diggers. These are damages

that can be avoided by calling before digging," he said. "Of course we don't want people damaging our services, but more than that, we want to make sure our customers are safe."

Paskett said that approximately 1,200 damages to natural gas facilities each year can be attributed to excavation. Nearly half of those are due to a failure of the excavator to notify the affected utilities of their intent to dig. The remaining damages are attributed to excavators who weren't careful when digging around natural gas pipes.

"Where there is yellow paint, it's the law that anyone digging must hand excavate the area with a shovel (instead of a backhoe) and to take due care not to damage the pipe once it is exposed," Paskett said.

Last year, the center received 170,000 calls requesting locates.

The Utilities Notification Center provides coverage for most of Oregon and parts of southern Washington. In the Portland area, call (503) 246-6699. In Clark County, Washington, call (206) 696-4848. Other areas should call 1-800-332-2344 (or 1-800-332-2DIG).

A different one-call system handles inquiries for utility locates in Oregon's Clatsop and Columbia counties. That number is 1-800-424-5555.

Labor Management Committee To Help Laid Off Workers

The Portland Public School District 1 and several unions announced the formation of a joint labor-management committee to assist the job-search and retraining efforts of employees who will be affected by the school budget shortfall.

The joint committee will coordinate community resources to help dislocated workers find jobs, appropriate training or retraining, and community services, such as financial counseling or stress management. "By pooling resources of the school administration, union, and the community before layoffs occur, we can help employees find new jobs and attempt to lessen the impact of job loss," said Pat Grose, Oregon Dislocated Worker Coordinator. The eleven members of the committee, nine representing Unions and two representing the school administration, will seek out training and retraining services and will actively seek employment for job-ready individuals. It will also coordinate the various local, state, and Federal resources available to dislocated workers.

"By working together we believe that the talent at Portland Public Schools can be transferred to other

employers in the area," said Grose. "We are here to be advocates for all employees."

The committee is supported jointly by Portland Public Schools, the Unions, and the Oregon Dislocated Worker Unit. Federal Job Training Partnership Act funds are available to provide classroom training, job search, and community and other services. The use of joint labor-management committees to serve dislocated workers has been successful nationwide in lessening the trauma associated with layoffs. Cooperation combined with yearly intervention minimizes these adverse effects.

The union representatives include: Steve Scheible and Tim Healy, School Employees International Union (SEIU #140); Susan Larsen, Toni Silva, and Linda Dick, representing Portland Federation of Teachers and Classified Employees (PFTCE); Virginia Ross, Sandi Rosenfeld, and Marc Stein, Portland Association of Teachers/Oregon Education Association (IAT/PEA); and Gerald Krahn and Linda Noel, District Council of Unions (DCU). The Portland Public Schools representatives include Dr. Ed Schmitt and Pat North.

REDBOOK Selects Alameda Elementary As One Of 'America's Best Schools'

Portland School District's Alameda Elementary is the only Oregon school, and one of 72 elementary schools in the nation, recognized for overall excellence in REDBOOK's America's Best Schools Project.

More than 550 schools were nominated for honors this year by state and national education leaders, members of the U.S. House of Representatives and education reporter. America's Best Schools recognized 177 outstanding public elementary schools in six areas: classroom innovation, parent/community involvement, extra-curricular activities, special-needs programs, significant improvement and overall excellence.

Creative curriculum, varied extra-curricular activities, nurturing teachers, and supportive parent and

community members were cited as elements leading to Alameda's selection for overall excellence. Award-winning schools are featured in the April issue of REDBOOK.

Alameda previously has earned recognition for its outstanding program. In 1987/88, the school was one of five Oregon schools winning the National Elementary School Recognition Award for Excellence in Education, presented by the U.S. Department of Education. Alameda also was one of five Oregon schools nominated for the 1991/92 Blue Ribbon Elementary School of Excellence Recognition Award from the Oregon Department of Education.

Charles Nakvasil serves as principal of the school, which is located at 2732 N.E. Fremont.

For best results!
ADVERTISE IN THE OBSERVER

DREAMS FOR SALE.



If you've always had the dream of owning your own home, your dream may have just come true. For as little as you're paying in monthly rent and a modest down

payment, you could buy a HUD Home. That's right. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

THE DREAM OF OWNING YOUR OWN HOME CAN COME TRUE FOR ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE PAYING IN RENT.

(HUD) has programs that make owning a home easier

than you think. Programs that will even help you cover most if not all of your closing costs.

If you'd like more information about the home you've always dreamed of, contact your real estate agent. Or, for a free brochure on how to buy a HUD home, call 1-800-767-4HUD.

There's never been a better time to follow your dream, because now you can afford it.



WE'LL HELP YOU OWN A PIECE OF AMERICA.



To qualified buyers, only on homes with FHA-insured financing. Closing costs and fees additional.

Dad's Oil Service

heating oils

Best Cash Prices

104 NE Russell
Portland, OR 97212
282-5111

Speedy Service
Friendly
Call for Quote!



A-ZEBRA Realty Inc.

"1" Class Guarantee

700 N.E. Multnomah, Suite #400 • Portland, Oregon 97232
(503) 230-1390 • FAX 233-2688 • (503) 287-6837

