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Galveston Group Approves Ike Housing Aid Plan

More than half of the federal Hurricane Ike recovery funds in an \$814 million plan backed by the [Houston-Galveston Area Council](#) would go for housing if the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development agrees, officials said.

Leaders of the Office of Rural Community Affairs and the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, the two state agencies administering the federal Community Development Block Grant funds, said they hoped to submit the state's plan to HUD by Feb. 19. HUD then has 45 days to review and approve the plan, they said, and in the meantime local communities can begin identifying qualified projects and creating systems to accept applications for home repairs.

Representatives of the nonprofit Gulf Coast Interfaith urged the Houston-Galveston Area Council to start housing repairs as soon as possible, to help uninsured families who haven't received sufficient Federal Emergency Management Agency funds to make repairs.

"This is a victory on two counts," Galveston leader Joe Compian said in the online edition of the *Houston Chronicle*.

Galveston and Galveston County, where homes were most severely damaged in the Sept. 13 hurricane, would receive 53 percent of the funds under the proposal and spend 60 percent of their combined allocations on housing, he said.

Throughout the 13-county area covered by the council, the plan calls for spending 56 percent of the money on housing and the rest on infrastructure or economic development projects. But it's likely to be several months before work can begin on housing or infrastructure projects, officials said.

Several H-GAC board members stressed the importance of spending the federal money as quickly and effectively as possible, noting that this could affect future allocations. State agencies and local government councils such as H-GAC have faced criticism for their slowness in rebuilding East Texas homes damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Rita in 2005.

The revised Hurricane Ike recovery plan was approved by the H-GAC board of directors, with two dissenting votes.

Harris County officials were initially to receive only about half as much money as Houston, prompting strong objections. County Judge Ed Emmett and Commissioner Sylvia Garcia said this was insufficient to assist families in Galveston Bay communities devastated by Ike's storm surge.

"It's never fun to fight about money," Garcia said.

But Matagorda County Judge Nate McDonald said even the revised state allocation of \$109 million to Houston, down from the originally proposed \$172.3 million, was overly generous.

"That's just too damn much money" for a major city that can draw on local resources unavailable to small rural communities such as those he represents, McDonald said.

Although the federal Community Development Block Grant funds generally are intended to benefit poor and working-class families, state officials said they expect to receive waivers that would allow the money to assist a family of four earning up to about \$60,000 a year.

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