

Galveston OKs housing plan at 11th hour

By Harvey Rice | September 28, 2012 | Updated: September 28, 2012 9:54pm

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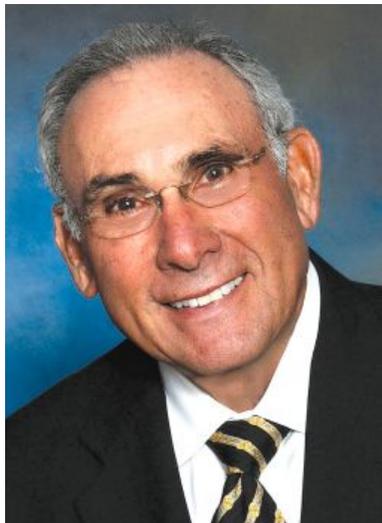
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Galveston Mayor Lewis Rosen resisted rebuilding public housing

GALVESTON - Barely an hour before a state-imposed deadline, the **Galveston City Council** on Friday approved a plan to rebuild public housing torn down after Hurricane Ike.

The council voted 5-2 to adopt the plan and avoid the loss of \$580 million in federal disaster recovery money and the forced repayment of money already spent.

"I'm going to vote for this because we have to put this behind us and start trusting each other," said Mayor **Lewis Rosen**, who strongly opposed rebuilding public housing.

Councilman **Rusty Legg**, also a public housing opponent, voted with the majority, saying the issue had been the most divisive he had ever seen on the island.

The plan was still being haggled over at 8 a.m. when the **Galveston Housing Authority** met to approve it before passing it on to the council.

Councilman **Norman Pappous** voted against the plan, saying the dispute should be resolved in court.

Only a single member of the seven-member council, **Cornelia Banks**, originally supported the rebuilding of 569 public housing units torn down after they were damaged when the storm struck in September 2008.

Rosen and six other council members were elected or re-elected as anti-public housing candidates. They say that putting public housing elsewhere in the county or issuing vouchers that can be used anywhere would be better for low-income residents.

After Rosen was elected in a June runoff election, defeating incumbent **Joe Jaworski**, U.S. **Housing and Urban Development** Secretary **Shaun Donovan** summoned him to Washington, D.C., and gave the city 30 days to approve a housing plan or lose its disaster aid.

Deadline extended

The **General Land Office** extended the deadline to Sept. 28, giving the city three options: accept a plan offered by the Land Office, lose all federal assistance and repay what has been spent, or reach a deal with two Austin-based low-income housing advocacy groups and local advocacy groups.

Councilwoman **Elizabeth Beeton**, who voted against the plan, complained that the advocacy groups refused to consider alternative plans.

"I have been mystified why they like this plan and are insisting this is the approach Galveston take," Beeton said. "Those who will suffer as a result of the plan are the ones the advocates are dedicated to serve."

The city and housing authority negotiated with the advocacy groups until the authority met Friday to approve the agreement.

"After so many number of years it's not a perfect document, but I certainly hope that ... we at long last have a blueprint before us that will permit the return of affordable housing opportunities to the island," said **Joe Compian**, a leader of Gulf Coast Interfaith, one of the local advocacy groups involved.

Disaster aid at stake

The two Austin groups, **Texas Appleseed** and the **Low-Income Housing Information Service**, participated in an agreement with HUD and the state that requires Galveston and other Texas cities to make sure low-income residents benefit from federal disaster recovery money as required by law. Galveston specifically was required to rebuild all 569 public housing units.

If Galveston had failed to live up to the agreement, it could have jeopardized disaster money statewide.

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