

Uvalde Leader-News

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Limon leads Uvalde's busy public housing program

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Virginia
Limon

Housing costs are the largest expenditure most Americans will have, and many low-income families often have difficulty finding housing they can afford.

Public housing options in the area, overseen by the Uvalde Housing

Authority (UHA), were established to provide decent and safe rental housing for low-income families, elderly residents, and persons with disabilities.

Executive director Vir-

ginia Limon is in charge of UHA, which is overseen by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD administers federal aid to local housing agencies that manage homes for low-income residents at rents they can afford, usually 30 percent of income under a certain level.

According to Limon,

there are two options available to low-income families in Uvalde: low-rent public housing (48 units) and the Section 8 voucher program housing (217 units). The low-rent housing can be found mostly at Cenizo Apartments, while the Section 8 lodgings are found at Granada Apartments, Laurel Apartments, La

Quinta Apartments and more than 50 individual private landowner properties.

"We are 100-percent occupied in the lower program," Limon said. "In the Section 8 program we are expending all our funds."

She said the waiting list is open for both programs, and remains open year-round. Each waiting list is

ordered by time and date of application.

"We currently have about 153 on the low-rent waiting list and 133 on the Section 8," Limon said. Anyone who would like more information about getting on one of the waiting lists should go by UHA, located at 1700

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FULL: Limon has waiting list of Uvalde residents hoping to obtain public housing

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Garner Field Road.

"Right now the waiting list is moving very slowly," Limon said. "We are expending all our funds in Section 8 and here in public housing we are 100-percent leased... unless someone moves out of the program."

According to their latest evaluation, UHA is considered a high-performing entity when it comes to HUD's public housing

assessment system for both low income and Section 8. They are graded on four main indicators: physical, financial, management, and capital fund.

The most recent audit found UHA to have an unmodified opinion. Limon said auditors said UHA is well-run and had no findings to disclose.

Limon and her staff continually update residents' information. Residents are required to report within 10 days any changes to

household size or income. If they no longer qualify for the one of the voucher programs, UHA gives them six months to find new living arrangements.

UPCOMING CHANGES

A big change is on the way that will give some stability to housing authorities around the nation.

"In December of 2013, the housing authority submitted a Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD)

application," Limon said.

She recently received confirmation that UHA had been accepted into the program.

The Rental Assistance Demonstration was created in order to give public housing authorities the ability to preserve and improve public housing properties and tackle their backlog of deferred maintenance. RAD also gives property owners the opportunity to enter into long-term contracts that facilitate the financing of improvements, according to HUD.

Limon said RAD allows public housing agencies to leverage public and private debt and equity in order to reinvest in the public housing stock.

"We are going to do the housing-based voucher," Limon said. "The 48 public housing units will be administered like a

Section 8 voucher. The tenants will continue to pay 30 percent of income towards rent. They maintain the same rights as before.

"UHA will convert the 48 public housing units to project-based vouchers with a long term contract of 20 years that by law must be renewed. This ensures the units remain permanently affordable to low-income households."

She said RAD provides clear rules on ongoing ownership and use that will not increase UHA's budget. This shift from Public Housing program to the Section 8 program will allow providers to make capital improvements.

These changes could go into effect as early as the end of June, said Limon.

DEBT SERVICES

Limon said UHA has

only \$17,846 left to pay from an initial \$563,702 debt owed to the Office of Inspector General from fiscal year 1999-2000 audit findings. They are also making payments on money owed to the Section 8 Voucher Program. They now owe \$21,564 from the original balance of \$71,881.

PARTNERSHIPS

Limon is proud of UHA's involvement with TEAM Uvalde, Southwest Area Regional Transit (SWART), Our Health (Community Health Development Inc.) and other organizations to share resources and help the low-income families of Uvalde.

"We work together to provide services to the deserving people of Uvalde," Limon said.

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