

Saturday, June 28, 1997

# TAKING CONTROL



The Dallas Morning News: Michael Ainsworth

**Ardella Wilson celebrates with other Crest A Apartment residents after the Department of Housing and**

**Urban Development bought the property on Friday.**

By Tracy Everbach

Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

A group of tenants cheered "Two, four, six, eight! Who do we appreciate? HUD!" after the federal agency Friday bought the Crest A Apartments with plans to give partial control to residents.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development bought the rundown apartment complex on Loop 12 at Interstate 45 in a tax foreclosure sale. Tenants and Dallas City Homes, a nonprofit group that assists indigent people with housing, should take it over soon

## HUD helps tenants to buy, renovate apartment complex

under a deal worked out by the residents, HUD and the Dallas Housing Authority.

"We have a happy, safe community!" shouted Angela Williams, a member of the Crest A Tenant Alliance, which residents

formed to fight poor conditions at the complex. Tenants said Friday that they endured snakes, insects, leaky ceilings, faulty plumbing and peeling paint in their apartments under the previous owners.

HUD took over management of the 200-unit complex in December after the owners were deemed financially in default and it was ruled that the apartments failed to meet "minimum basic living standards." The previous owner was Crest "A" Apartments Ltd. That firm's general partner was Westport Housing Corp.

"The property's deplorable condition  
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# Residents to get partial control of apartments

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resulted from a lack of strict management, security control, financial controls, deferred maintenance, lease enforcement, tenant selection practices, drug policy enforcement and funding necessary to correct the deficiencies," according to HUD documents.

Some of the tenants are suing the complex's previous owners for "tenant abuse," said resident Meyko Adams, who was hugging her neighbors on the courthouse steps Friday.

"Everything has to be fixed," Ms. Adams said.

"We have to decide whether we want to go with the project. We can only commit to one year."

— Ed Burton, multifamily housing director for HUD's regional office

Since HUD took over, some conditions have improved. A private security force has been hired and some repairs made, residents said.

The federal agency bought the property for \$3.475 million Friday,

which will pay off the mortgage owed on the complex. HUD also has begun repairs estimated to cost about \$1.8 million. Although more than 140 possible bidders had asked for information on the property, no one outbid HUD on Friday.

One prospective buyer who came to the George L. Allen Sr. Courts Building downtown Friday said HUD is wasting taxpayer money.

The man, who refused to give his name, said the property was worth only \$1,000 per unit, or \$200,000.

Katie Worsham, acting secretary's representative for HUD's regional office in Fort Worth, said the agency decided to spend taxpayer money on

the complex because "HUD views this as a part of saving our communities ... We want to save that neighborhood. We want to further invest in Crest A."

The Dallas Housing Authority has notified HUD that it will buy the property, then turn it over to the nonprofit Dallas City Homes and the Crest A tenants association. That arrangement would last a year, HUD officials said.

"We have to decide whether we want to go with the project," said Ed Burton, multifamily housing director for HUD's regional office. "We can only commit to one year."



# PRIDE IN OWNERSHIP



The Dallas Morning News: Karen Stallwood

Residents of the Crest A Apartments in southeast Oak Cliff hope that they'll soon become its owners. Dallas City Homes is helping tenants (from left) Ardella Wil-

son, Ebony Wilson, Angela Williams, Barbara Wilson, Mollie Coleman, Meyko Adams, Grigete Wilson and (front) Antwone Williams.

By Sherry Jacobson  
Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

**A**ngela Williams became an activist last year when she realized that the "good" tenants of her rundown southeast Oak Cliff apartment complex stood a better chance of being evicted for complaining about the poor conditions than did the "bad" tenants who were selling drugs and causing the problems.

"I just started asking questions about how things worked," said Ms. Williams, who has had to fend off five eviction attempts as she drew attention to the Crest A Apartments on Loop 12 near Interstate 45.

Now, as the 200-unit complex heads to the

## Tenants want to buy apartments scheduled for tax-foreclosure sale

auction block in a tax-foreclosure sale by the federal government next week, Ms. Williams and her neighbors are hoping to become its owners.

In partnership with Dallas City Homes, a nonprofit group that recently turned around the notorious Wynnewood Garden Apartments in Oak Cliff, tenants say they are attempting to buy the complex from the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Duane McClurg, executive director of Dallas City Homes, which specializes in creating affordable housing for the poor, said it was most important for the residents to have a role in operating the complex.

"We lend our experience, reputation and expertise to the joint venture," he said. "But we're moving more toward residential ownership, where the benefit to them is not so much monetary as giving them control over how the complex operates."

To compete with other potential buyers, the residents and Dallas City Homes have  
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Tuesday, June 24, 1997

# Tenants want to buy apartment complex

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enlisted the help of the Dallas Housing Authority. The agency is considering exercising its right of first refusal and purchasing the property from HUD, said Lori Moon, DHA's president and chief executive officer.

The housing authority would, almost immediately, sell the complex to the residents and Dallas City Homes under an arrangement that has yet to be worked out. The new owners would have to come up with enough money to make repairs estimated by HUD to cost \$1.8 million.

"Our main interest is that the property stay affordable," Ms. Moon said. The DHA board agreed Thursday that it will notify HUD next week of its interest in helping the residents and Dallas City Homes acquire the property.

Such notification would have the effect of canceling Crest A's planned sale to private bidders on the steps of the Dallas County Courthouse on Friday, said E. Ross Burton, HUD's director of multifamily housing in the Fort Worth regional office.

"If we have an interested party like the city, the state or the Dallas Housing Authority, then we will bid on it ourselves and hold it for a negotiated sale," he said. The agency took over the HUD-insured property in December after the owner, Crest A Apartments Ltd. of Washington, D.C., defaulted on the mortgage.

The owner could not be reached for comment.

However, any sale would be thwarted if the current owner files a temporary restraining order or seeks bankruptcy protection before Friday, Mr. Burton noted. "All we're hoping is that we're able to go through with our plan."

Despite the poor condition of the apartments, more than 140 individuals and companies have

requested information on its impending sale. Normally, a tax-foreclosure sale such as this attracts minimal attention, said Mr. Burton, who showed the property to about two dozen interested parties at a recent open house.

"There's been some positive activity in that area of Oak Cliff to generate this kind of interest," he said, pointing to the recent construction of a 220-unit apartment complex for low- and moderate-income families on nearby Stag Road.

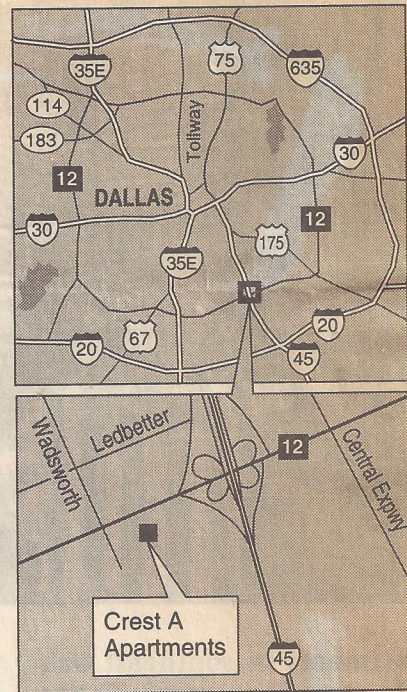
Crest A Apartments also may be benefiting from nearness to DART's light-rail line, which opened a station earlier this month about two miles to the west at Lancaster Road and Ledbetter Drive. Also, new retail services have begun popping up in the area, including a new 51,000-square-foot Minyard Food Store and a Wells Fargo Bank.

Still, the unexpected private interest in the apartment complex was reason enough for city of Dallas housing officials to reject a proposal to help the tenants and Dallas City Homes acquire the complex.

Mary K. Vaughn, the city's new director of housing, rejected the idea recently because of "the level of interest, the location of the property and current market forces." Her letter to Mr. McClurg, dated June 3, stated that she believed that "the property can be successfully purchased and rehabilitated without the city's intervention."

Mr. McClurg and the residents said they were disheartened by the city's decision but were unwilling to give up the project. They approached the independent Dallas Housing Authority for help in recent weeks.

"If they just let anybody buy these apartments, who's to say it will get better or be just the same as it always was?" said Ms. Williams, who has lived there for three years and is an



The Dallas Morning News

organizer for the Texas Tenants' Union, which has assisted the residents with their plan.

Rents are paid in large part by the site-based federal Section 8 program, which requires residents to pay 30 percent of their income in rent, starting at \$25 a month. It is uncertain if the government funds will remain with the complex after the sale or if residents will be given Section 8 vouchers and be free to find other housing.

The residents, mostly mothers and children, say they have long felt abused by the problems at Crest A. Excessive crime, broken plumbing and inadequate maintenance were such problems at the 25-year-old complex that last fall they filed a lawsuit seeking damages for the unsafe conditions.

In the months since HUD has taken over management of the complex, a security force and police have driven out drug activity, roofs are being replaced and routine repairs are under way.

"If they can get the housing quality standards up, we're fighting to stay here now," Ms. Williams said.



# The Dallas Morning News

Dallas, Texas, Wednesday, March 4, 1998

## A new lease on living

### HUD, tenants pair up to renovate Oak Cliff apartments

By Laura Griffin

Staff Writer of The Dallas Morning News

For years, conditions at the Crest A Apartments were so bad that mothers feared letting their children play outside.

There were continual drive-by shootings. Kids were killed. One 7-year-old girl was raped.

Inside the southeast Oak Cliff apartments, residents said they suffered the indignities of roach and flea infestations and were frustrated by leaky pipes, torn screens and rusty appliances.

Fed up, tenants finally sued the former owners for endangering their lives, citing "tenant abuse."

Those were some dark days at Crest A, said Angela Williams, tenant alliance president.

But now there is light, she said Tuesday.

With the help of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the

Texas Tenants' Union, the tenants have taken back their homes and their lives.

"We went down a rocky road with the problems we had," she said. "When you can have a decent, safe place to live, it makes a big difference. Everybody deserves decent housing."

On Tuesday, the residents and HUD unveiled several refurbished apartments, the first work completed in a partnership aimed at improving the property.

Elizabeth Julian, HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo's representative for the Southwest, said Crest A had epitomized what was wrong with subsidized housing. Now, she said, it is on its way to becoming a model for what can be done when HUD and tenants work together.

"Crest A represents the worst of our past and may represent the best of our future," Ms.

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# HUD officials, tenants pair up to renovate Oak Cliff apartments

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Julian said.

Using HUD's "Get Tough" initiative, designed to crack down on bad landlords, the department foreclosed on the property on Loop 12 and Interstate 45 and then purchased it for \$3.475 million.

Since then, the agency has started making repairs that are estimated to cost about \$1.8 million.

Gone are the indoor-outdoor carpet, rusty screens and broken pipes. Gone are the snakes and lizards and exposed concrete floors. Gone are the boarded-up windows.

New roofs were a must, as were new appliances and plumbing. The refurbished units have new carpeting, linoleum, lighting, vertical blinds and ceiling fans.

HUD has issued a request for proposals, stating that it wants the buyer to not only offer safe and decent housing but also social services to meet the needs of the residents and help them move toward self-sufficiency.

Tenants are working with Dallas City Homes, a nonprofit group that assists indigent people with housing, to come up with a winning proposal to buy the complex.

Residents say they fear that if their chosen nonprofit group doesn't win the bid, their rent will go up.

"That's a big concern and I do mean big," Ms. Williams said. "Once all this rehab is done, we don't want someone to say, 'Now you have to pay more for this.'"

HUD took over management of the 200-unit complex in December 1996 after the apartments failed to meet "minimum basic living standards."

HUD officials said the agency de-



The Dallas Morning News: Juan Garcia

**Angela Williams (left) and Ardella Wilson listen to Elizabeth Julian, HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo's representative for the Southwest. "Crest A represents the worst of our past and may represent the best of our future," Ms. Julian said Tuesday.**

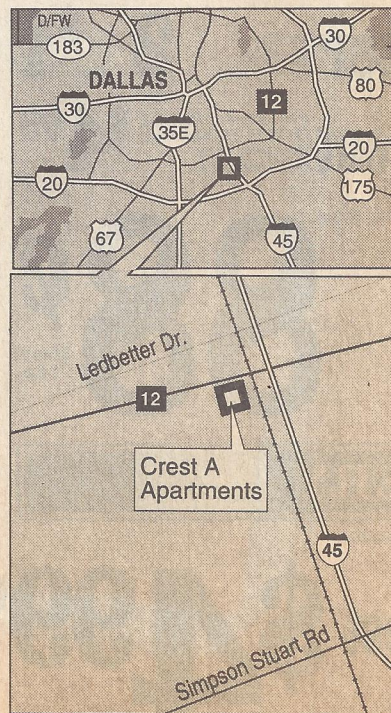
cided to spend taxpayer money on the complex because they saw it as saving the neighborhood and investing in the community.

Though the solution is best for the residents, it is a rare one because it takes so much work by everyone involved, Ms. Julian said.

"This is not the easiest path. It may be the best, but it's not the easiest," she said. "But success breeds success. And now we've got a blueprint that can make the case that it works."

As for what the residents have been through in the last few years, she said, it shows real dedication that they stuck with the complex.

"Some may correctly say that we were a partner in the problem," Ms. Julian told the residents on Tuesday. "Thank you for letting us be a partner in the solution."





Wednesday, March 4, 1998

The Dallas Morning News



The Dallas Morning News: Juan Garcia

From left: Ardella Wilson, Teresa Hall and Gidget Wilson rejoice at the ribbon-cutting for the refurbished Crest A Apartments on

Loop 12. Tenants and officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development celebrated their partnership Tuesday.