

Assisted Housing Presentation

Good evening,

Thanks for taking the time to join us to learn more about this process. My name is Paula Bingham, and I am the Director of Assisted Housing. My department administers the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program.

I will be issuing vouchers to the families that choose this option for relocation. The first step in this process will be updating household information, such as income and family composition, and performing a background check. Then, I will meet with all of the residents, in small groups of probably around 25, to go over the program requirements and to issue the actual vouchers. This meeting will take approximately 2 hours and we will discuss where to search for housing, the amount of rent subsidy they receive and the voucher size they have been provided. We will also discuss the Family Self-Sufficiency program and the HCV Homeownership program. The Homeownership program in the voucher program is very different from public housing's Homeownership program. The HCV program allows the participant to receive 15 years of mortgage assistance, and the family will make a monthly mortgage payment based on their income. Where else can you find a deal like that!!

After all families have been issued vouchers, we plan to have a Landlord Fair for any landlords that want to participate. We currently have approximately 500 different landlords who own and/or manage over 1600 rental units in all areas of Madison

County, and we certainly welcome any new landlords that would like to partner with us. All that is required to participate as a landlord is that the unit be affordable for the family, the rent must be reasonable based on similar unassisted units in the area, and the unit must pass the Housing Quality Standards inspection.

The advantages for a landlord are regular monthly payments from the Housing Authority, by direct deposit; tenants who maintain compliance with their lease and are rarely evicted; a consistent base of applicants for turnovers; and free advertising with GoSection8.com., the largest affordable housing listing service in the nation allowing participants to search for units and for landlords to post their vacancies. If any of you have rental property or know someone who does, please have them contact me to discuss becoming a Section 8 landlord. Our jurisdiction is basically all of Madison County, but our incorporation papers say specifically the City of Huntsville and 10 miles outside the city limits.

Housing vouchers were created in the 1970s to help poor families and their children escape public housing, but many of the 2.2 million households that are receiving vouchers **nationwide** remain clustered in low-income neighborhoods. The biggest reason is the support system they have in place, so they can have help with child care and transportation.

But I am sure we all agree that a child's course in life should not be determined by the ZIP code where he or she is born. So in January of this year, to help families make that decision

to move to better areas, Huntsville Housing Authority adopted the use of Small Area Fair Market Rents in determining our Payment Standards. This means that our Payment Standards are higher in certain areas based on the ZIP code where the unit is located. The Payment Standard is the maximum amount of rent or subsidy that can be paid for the family. In other words, with Small Area FMRs, families are offered "more money" if they move out of areas of high poverty concentrations to higher income areas which allows them to live in safe communities with great schools. Let me give you an example:

The amount of rent the family pays will basically be calculated the same as it is for public housing. Families pay 30% of their income for rent and utilities. So say for instance a family is currently paying \$100 for their portion of the rent for a 3BR apartment in Sparkman Homes. If they use the voucher and move to a 3BR unit in Huntsville, and for instance the rent is \$700, they will still pay \$100 (as long as their income does not change). If, however, they want to rent a 3BR apartment in Madison or Hampton Cove and the rent is \$1000, they will still pay \$100. So you can see by this example the advantage of moving to a higher income area. The family will pay the same rent, but we are providing more rental assistance if they choose to move to an opportunity area.

The increased Payment Standards are for ZIP codes in the Madison area, Harvest, Meridianville, the Owens Crossroads/Hampton Cove/Big Cove area, and the 35806 ZIP code which is in the northwest area of Madison County.

Families who receive vouchers to relocate also have the option of portability. This means they can take their voucher to any city in any state that has a Housing Choice Voucher program...New York, California, Florida, Puerto Rico. As you can see, the options are almost limitless.

Ultimately, the measure of these new changes will not be how many people left those clusters in low income neighborhoods, but whether the lives of those who moved to other areas were changed for the better. How many more young people in these families will graduate from high school and possibly college?

How many more parents will be earning more money so they can get on the fast track to self-sufficiency and possibly purchase a home? That's how we should measure success.

What we *do* know is that children who grow up in high poverty areas are less likely to succeed than children who grow up in better neighborhoods. During our voucher briefing, we will discuss the characteristics of a good neighborhood. So what are these characteristics?

- Access to good schools;
- Presence of adults who can serve as role models for acceptable behavior;
- Absence of negative influence from peers, especially for teenagers;
- Informal networks through which to gain access to services and employment;
- Low levels of crime and violence;
- Physical access to jobs.

Like Danielle said, we have an amazing relocation team, and it makes us feel really good to be helping these families find their new homes. Can you imagine how it must feel to be a resident here at Sparkman Homes and just maybe, for the first time in your life, you are going to have the opportunity to live where you want to live? How exciting this must be!

I just want to remind everyone that all of us at the Housing Authority will be helping these families and giving them all of their options for relocation, and if they choose a Housing **CHOICE** Voucher, remember the word **CHOICE**. Each family gets to choose where **they** want to live based on what is best for their family. THANK YOU