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## Rockford Concedes Housing Mandate

Rockford, IL, caught in a HUD-initiated squeeze over the siting of low-income housing, capitulates after losing a two-year fair housing battle with the department. The settlement requires the north central Illinois city to build a public housing complex in a semi-suburban neighborhood of single-family homes.

The skirmish developed in 2015 when an affordable-housing developer and the Rockford Housing Authority selected a building site in the neighborhood along a creek. The plan was developed under HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program and the developer would be the owner-manager under HUD supervision with the units paid for with Section 8 housing subsidies.

Their goal was to build a 65-unit townhouse project to accommodate families selected for the move from the city's crime-ridden Fairgrounds public housing project. But the developer pulled back after fierce opposition from homeowners whose neighborhood would abut the project.

The plan was scaled down to 49 units. But that failed to satisfy the homeowners. The city backed away from the commitment and initiated a search for a new site. Meanwhile, the city's abdication of the site caught HUD's attention. The department was seeking a potential major violator of its new interpretation of the 1968 Fair Housing Act to test its "Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing" rule as the Act's new enforcement mechanism.

A HUD investigation in November 2015 determined that the city violated the Fair Housing Act by its denial of the original building site.

The location of the new project moved quickly in HUD's direction. The department dispatched a regional executive to tell Rockford officials the city would accede to the department's demands or HUD would put future federal subsidies to the city in jeopardy and assume authority over the city's housing policy.

The new housing site was finally approved in January 2016, but the city's settlement with HUD stretched out over months until city officials agreed to ensure all housing plans would fall under the AFFH rule and that the city would take an active role in promoting the new rule, including a requirement to lead a regional discussion on how best to deconcentrate public housing reduce segregation and create opportunities for the relocated families.

The four-year agreement monitored by HUD also requires the city to "address significant disparities in housing needs and in access to opportunity, replacing segregated living patterns with truly integrated and balanced living patterns transforming racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty into areas of opportunity."