

SF's public housing is now all privately run

By [Emily Green](#)

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Photo: Michael Macor, The Chronicle

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Bianca Stojkova is a tenant at the Rosa Parks Apartments on Turk Street, among buildings sold by the city in October.

After 76 years of day-to-day management of apartment buildings for some of San Francisco's poorest residents, the city has turned over the last of its public housing to private hands.

The San Francisco Housing Authority sold 14 buildings designated for public housing to affordable housing developers in October. In total, the Housing Authority has relinquished control of 29 buildings — nearly 3,500 units — since 2014.

The buildings fell into disrepair under the Housing Authority — the fault of huge cuts in federal funding and negligent oversight by city officials. Tenants complained of cockroach infestations, elevator breakdowns — a big problem when seniors and disabled people occupy 60 percent of units — and security risks caused by front gates that did not close. The affordable housing developers are required to renovate the properties as part of the terms of sale.

In 2013, Mayor Ed Lee removed almost the entire Housing Authority Commission. His appointed replacements fired the agency's director, Henry Alvarez. Lee vowed to remake what he called "poverty housing" by transferring the units to private control.

Public housing to be renovated



Source: San Francisco Mayor's Office

Buildings sold by the San Francisco Housing Authority to affordable housing developers in October.

Location	Units	Type
1 655/795 Pacific Ave.	234	Family
2 2501 Sutter St.	135	Family
3 938 Ellsworth St.	150	Family
4 40 Harbor Rd.	223	Family
5 1750 McAllister St.	97	Senior/disabled
6 1251 Turk St.	203	Senior/disabled
7 350 Ellis St.	96	Senior/disabled
8 320/330 Clementina	276	Senior/disabled
9 3850 18th St.	91	Senior/disabled
10 1855 15th St.	91	Senior/disabled
11 1760 Bush St.	108	Senior/disabled
12 2451 Sacramento St.	98	Senior/disabled
13 2698 California St.	40	Senior/disabled
14 838 Pacific Ave.	200	Mixed

John Blanchard / The Chronicle

A mix of nonprofit and for-profit developers bought the buildings — but not the land — through a complicated financial process in which the Housing Authority essentially lent them the money, which the developers will repay, at least partially, over time. The developers draw on a mix of federal funds, private investment from Bank of America, and about \$100 million from the city to pay for the renovations.

“For decades, San Francisco’s public housing has been underfunded, but today we take a significant step towards revitalizing and rebuilding distressed public housing for our extremely low-income families and residents,” Lee said in a statement Thursday. “This milestone marks the end of many months of hard work by the city and our many partners.”

The benefits are already apparent. Viola Ryan, 65, has lived at the housing project at 345 Arguello Blvd. in the Inner Richmond for eight years.

“It was terrible,” said Ryan, a former merchant seaman. “We were living almost in the gutter. We had roaches. We had garbage everywhere. It was just filthy and nasty. We didn’t have heat and sometimes hot water. We couldn’t get nobody to fix anything for us.”

A month ago, her unit was gutted and remade by Mercy Housing, a nonprofit developer that took over management of the building in a previous property transfer. Ryan lived in a temporary unit during the 31/2-week renovation.

She ticks off the improvements.

“We got new cabinets, new countertops, new refrigerator, new stove, new sink, new medicine cabinet, new floors, new toilets, new windows, new screens, new balcony. We got everything new. It’s just a blessing.”

Mercy has renovated 18 of the 65 units and expects to finish by March. It also provides services to the residents, including bringing yoga and art therapy classes to the building.

Mercy Housing President Doug Shoemaker said the need for new management at the building was immediately apparent.

“When we walked in the door on the first day, there was just this group of residents there to greet us. They were so excited we were taking over the building they gave us a round of applause.”

The San Francisco Housing Authority still exists. It continues to own the land where the housing projects are situated. It ensures that the projects remain affordable, administers Section 8 subsidies and oversees the waiting list for

people to get into the units. The city also has an oversight role and ensures that the management and finances of the building are in good shape.

Most of the residents earn less than 25 percent of the area median income, or \$17,850 a year for one person. All of the units are subsidized by the Section 8 program, a federal subsidy to help low-income residents pay rent. The residents pay 30 percent of their income toward rent.

The first property expected to complete renovation is an 89-unit building at 430 Turk St. that houses seniors and disabled people, said Lydia Ely, a senior project manager at the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development. That building will be finished this month. The final building to finish renovation will probably be Ping Yuen North in Chinatown. The 200-unit building will take three years to complete.

"These are projects we could not rebuild today. We would not be able to afford to," Ely said.

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