



Affordable Energy Efficient Green Housing Roundtable

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By Andrew Pauline

Rising energy prices and environmental concerns have fueled interest in “green building”—resource-efficient and environmentally friendly construction and maintenance practices. The federal programs and activities summarized below represent some recent or planned efforts to address green building issues as they relate to

affordable housing. For example, many Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) supported housing units are older properties which were built when there was less attention to energy efficiency. In particular, their associated energy costs place a financial burden on HUD which subsidizes utility expenses in HUD supported housing.

Several topics from the GAO research, “*Green Affordable Housing: HUD Has Made Progress in Promoting Green Building but Expanding Efforts Could Help Reduce Energy Costs and Benefit Tenants*” (GAO-09-46) were highlighted at the roundtable. It was reported that HUD, which annually spends approximately \$5 billion on energy costs, provides some financial incentives to promote green practices, including energy efficiency. For example, public housing authorities can finance “green” improvements to properties through ensuing energy savings. However, HUD has not required energy-efficient products and appliances in its public housing properties, as required by statute. HUD also has not made major energy-efficiency updates to the building code for manufactured housing in more than a decade. Although HUD has partnered with others to develop a “utility benchmarking” tool that can assess energy consumption for its public housing portfolio, it has not created such a tool for the multifamily housing portfolio. Thus, HUD cannot fully understand the utility costs for more than 1.6 million units. GAO recommended that HUD complete a regulation to require energy-efficient

products and appliances in public housing, update the building code for manufactured housing, consider developing a utility benchmarking tool for multifamily properties, and consider providing incentive points for more green practices in some grant programs. The report can be found at www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-46.

Shortly after the conference, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released an additional report: *Affordable Housing in Transit-Oriented Development: Key Practices Could Enhance Recent Collaboration Efforts between DOT-FTA and HUD* (GAO-09-871). The report discusses federal efforts to promote the availability of affordable housing in and near walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods near transit (transit-oriented developments). Although the developments may provide green benefits (such as reducing automobile emissions) they can increase land and housing values which has the potential to limit the availability of affordable housing near transit.

The increased transportation costs that come from living far from work or transit can burden lower-income households. Since 2005, HUD and the Department of Transportation (DOT) have collaborated to promote affordable housing specifically in transit-oriented developments. A recent DOT-HUD partnership (which includes the Sustainable Communities Initiative) would fund grants to local governments to integrate housing, transportation, and land use planning and investments and reform zoning, building, and land use codes. However, the agencies lack a comprehensive integrated plan to implement these efforts. GAO recommended that DOT and HUD develop such a plan, and collect sufficient data to assess the results of these efforts. A copy of the report can be found at www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-871. HNN

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