



TEXAS LOW INCOME HOUSING INFORMATION SERVICE

HOUSING MATTERS

A newsletter dedicated to the goal that every Texan should have decent, safe, affordable housing

Rehabilitating the San Antonio Housing Authority



Texas' largest public housing authority, burdened by management problems and poor tenant-relations, is undergoing reorganization at the hand of a young new CEO, Henry Alvarez. Mr. Alvarez faces a tough challenge: the problems at the public housing authority (PHA) are numerous and media and political scrutiny is intense.

Public housing is one of the few government programs that addresses both poverty and urban decay. The programs operated by public housing authorities provide more than 90% of all housing assistance for the poor in Texas. Though moderate and low-income families can look towards affordable housing developments in the private sector, PHAs are the only major entities that provide housing for extremely poor families with incomes close to the poverty level.

The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) is a large bureaucracy — it manages and maintains over 6,000 public housing units and more than 11,000 Section 8 vouchers. It provides extremely low-income, elderly, and disabled people with housing subsidies so that they must only spend about one-third of their limited incomes on rent and utilities. Without this program, many of these families would be left making the painstaking choice between rent and food.

Thus, SAHA is a force that directly influences the lives of thousands of low-income families. Wise stewardship of public housing and Section 8 resources means more low-income people are housed. Mismanagement or bad decision-making means more are homeless in San Antonio, Texas' fastest growing major urban area.

The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (TxLIHIS) went to San Antonio to meet the man chosen by local officials to rescue SAHA and ask him some questions about his background, his vision, and his views on specific housing policy issues. The transcript of that

interview is included in this issue of *Housing Matters*.

It is important to note, however, that the future of SAHA does not rest on the shoulders of one man.

Lacking adequate funding, PHAs are swamped by a growing number of poor families. Many existing public housing apartments were built in the 1940's and 1950's and desperately require modernization.

SAHA's 2004 funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Development (HUD) for operating and capital grants breaks down to only \$306 per month per public housing unit for repairs and maintenance. \$72 million is earmarked for the Section 8 program and \$25 million in HOPE VI funds for public housing revitalization.

This newsletter examines how these funds have been used in the past and how they have impacted urban conditions and the lives of San Antonio's low-income families.

The practice, seen at SAHA's downtown Victoria Courts, of demolishing housing stock for extremely low-income families in order to make way for moderate-income housing is of paramount concern. (See page 4). Unfortunately this model may be used again. In 2004, SAHA disclosed that it is contemplating demolishing or selling off almost one-quarter of all its remaining public housing units.

Henry Alvarez won't be able to completely solve San Antonio's critical housing and community development problems alone. But it is certain that he will navigate the tides of change at SAHA and his success or failure will influence whether thousands of low-income families will have a decent, affordable place to call home. 🏠



Can Henry Alvarez fix the San Antonio Housing Authority?

On August 16, 2004 Henry Alvarez became the president and CEO of the San Antonio Housing Authority. Raised in a public housing development in New Orleans, Alvarez has 16 years of public housing career experience, having served as assistant director at the Department of Housing Services, Washington County, OR, and with the Housing Commission of the City of San Diego, CA., from 1988 to 1992. He holds a bachelor's degree from San Diego State University and a master's of public administration degree from Lewis and Clark College, Portland, OR.

On September 29 Kristin Carlisle and John Henneberger interviewed Henry Alvarez at his office. What follows is an edited transcript of that interview.

TxLIHIS: *Having grown up in public housing and having worked in a professional capacity with several housing authorities, what unique insights do you think that you bring to this job?*

Alvarez: When you say "grow up" that would mean most of my formative years. That is not the case. I spent several years of my young childhood growing up in public housing. Public housing, when I was a kid growing up in public housing, was not anything like it is today. My memories of public housing are much more pleasant, much more family oriented than they would be today. I would like to see us return to that sort of place. So as I go about doing my work, in my mind's eye I am trying to recreate that childhood memory. To the extent we can get there with the resources that we have available, we will. But that's the dream. The reality is that it's very difficult to move today's public housing to a more mixed income setting. When I was a kid in the 50's it was more of the way out than a way in. We hope that in the long run it will again be a way out.

TxLIHIS: *The San Antonio Housing Authority has been beset by number of problems. What do you think is the root cause of these problems?*

Alvarez: SAHA has a fundamental issue that it must resolve. The housing industry has moved at a faster rate than the skill set of our human capital. In doing so we have made mistakes, fundamental mistakes. It is not with malice or forethought, or fraud, or in any sense of wrong doing. We have just not had the skills to move quickly enough. So we are not only not on the same turf, we are not in the same place. What you find now is that in order to go about doing what we must do, we make missteps.

When we misstep we don't realize it, so we misstep again. So those missteps compound themselves to create the significant problems that I have faced since I have been here. So my sense is that our human capital is going to have to improve so we can get more in line with where the industry is today.

TxLIHIS: *So what specifically are you planning to do to solve these problems.*

Alvarez: That's actually a much simpler question. I think the first thing we have to do is get ourselves in order. We have to establish some order in this chaos. We have to look internally. We have to put the business systems in place to deal with the common things that a housing authority has to do. "Good morning," the pleasantries of the day. Then when our customers come in we have to do the same thing. We have to first build our own business by ordering relationships, including our relationships with our own employees, and with our customers and the participants in our programs. Until we get that done we should not be doing any external activities because we have way too much to do internally.

TxLIHIS: *What would you like to see HUD do to better support public housing and Section 8?*

Alvarez: I'd like them to take the national housing budget and give it all to us in San Antonio and I would fix all of our housing problems in a very short amount of time.

TxLIHIS: *So are you saying that the whole problem can be solved with just more money?*

Alvarez: If you want to get down the brass tacks of it, sure. Most of our problems can be solved if we just had enough resources. That is not the case. So what do I think HUD should really do? I really think that the Department of Housing and Urban Development has to advocate for the human being. They have to stop focusing on the sticks and bricks. There have been a lot of conversations about returning to sticks and bricks and leaving the rest of it alone. To me that is akin to throwing out the baby with the bath water. There are people inside these sticks and bricks. We have to refocus on how we get these human beings moving forward. So that, as I said before, low-income housing becomes a way out instead of a way in. Are our housing authorities the right institutions to deliver these services individuals need to succeed? I think we can do it if we have the resources. We barely



He thinks he can.

have enough resources to maintain the structures that the people live in. After that, the kinds of things that people need to improve themselves, to create some sort of self-esteem, for lack of a better term, to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, there just aren't enough resources to do that. The argument is that we need to rely on the other resources, on the faith based community – well we are. We have been and to suggest that we haven't is being disingenuous. But there are not enough resources to go around to fix this problem. We are going to have to focus on finding those resources.

TxLIHIS: *In light of that, do you think that HUD Secretary Alfonso Jackson is a friend of public housing authorities?*

Alvarez: Absolutely. He is the Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. He has to be a friend.

TxLIHIS: *In recent testimony before the House Financial Services Committee Secretary Jackson testified that poverty is a "state of mind," not the product of conditions. What do you think?*

Alvarez: The Secretary is entitled to his opinion. I may or may not disagree with it. If Secretary Jackson determines that it is a state of mind okay, I'm not learned enough to argue with the Secretary. But it's certainly is not a state of mind for me. I bring my state of mind the grocery store and they ask for money.

TxLIHIS: *President Bush is currently championing his view of an "ownership society". Do you think that the President's emphasis on home ownership is realistic?*

Alvarez: I'm not in a position to comment on what the Bush Administration or the White House or any of these learned people on the Hill feel that San Antonio's marketplace is. But home ownership is not for everybody. If it was we would not have multifamily housing. I certainly believe there's going to be a need for all forms of housing, ownership, rental, whenever it takes. I think it's going to take a variety of tools to meet the housing needs of the constituents of San Antonio. I haven't been here long enough to tell you what that really is.

TxLIHIS: *Conservative critics say public housing has been a failure because it is inefficient, it produces ghettos, and it breeds a culture of dependency. How do you respond that?*

Alvarez: I am an example that is not true. If it does, I don't know what happened to me.

TxLIHIS: *HUD is putting pressure on housing authorities to evict families that have a member with a criminal history - the "zero tolerance policy." Do you support this policy?*

Alvarez: I want to talk about that. I think we should support it as it pertains to the sale, manufacture, and distribution of drugs. We are just not going to get into that discussion. If you are doing those things then you should not be in our housing. Now, the teenager that goes someplace and makes a mistake by using something and we turn around and evict his five siblings and his mother – I am little uncomfortable with that process. So there has to be some balance between the two. On the other hand, there's the other part of it which is the violent crime part. Kids have altercations, disagreements every day. That is natural. Altercations, boxing matches, I do not have a problem with those kind of activities. When several kids decide they're going to make other kids do what they want with the strong arm of violent activity, we are opposed to that. Here at the San Antonio Housing Authority we will use the means necessary to avoid those situations in total.

TxLIHIS: *The relationship between the San Antonio Housing Authority and its tenants has been strained for a long time. Why is this and what do you plan to do about it?*

Alvarez: Wow! You know us well. We are going to have a conversation with our residents. We are in this thing together. It is not just SAHA. SAHA is not just the building and the employees, it is the community at large of which we are part. Part of the community is the residents and we are starting to have those conversations. We are finding out that people have issues with how we do maintenance. We are finding out that people have issues that we collect rent very well but that we do not communicate with them very well. We are finding out that there are many things that they would like us to do that are very simple in nature and that if we did them they would appreciate it.

TxLIHIS: *Can you think of a housing authority that has done an especially good job of maintaining good relationships with their residents?*

Alvarez: I worked at the Department of Housing and Community Affairs in Washington County [Oregon] and we had a great relationship with our residents. I thought in San Diego we had good relationship with the residents. I don't want to

continued on page 5...

SAHA tears down Victoria Courts without a way to replace it



Clockwise from bottom right: the former Victoria Courts public housing development in 1998, the mostly empty site of Victoria Courts 660 public housing units today, the new 210 unit Refugio Place Apartments on the Victoria Courts site that will provide housing for 50 public housing families, the 1940 dedication plaque.

Victoria Courts was a two-story public housing development located in downtown San Antonio across the street from Hemisfair Park and near the upscale King William Historic District.

Designed by legendary architect O'Neil Ford, for almost 60 years it housed San Antonio's poorest families in the heart of vibrant downtown—near jobs and high performing public schools. Built in 1940, it was a model of excellence in public housing architecture although by the 1990's it was badly in need of modernization.

Residents of Victoria Courts were surprised to learn in 1998 that the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) had applied for and received a \$4.2 million grant from HUD to demolish their apartments. Victoria Courts was not in as bad of shape as other public housing units in SAHA's aging inventory. Moreover, the desirable location, good schools and area jobs made tearing the development down a direct contradiction of the ideals behind current HUD policy.

In its application to HUD, SAHA cited noise from the adjacent freeway, airplane flight path noise, the apartments' high density, and the cost of rehabilitation as their rationale for demolition.

When the 660 dwelling units were demolished in 2001, many residents had been relocated into segregated neighborhoods with fewer nearby job opportunities and in school zones with lower performing schools. SAHA went ahead with demolition before it had the funds or firm plans to replace the 660 apartments.

Two years later, SAHA received a \$18.7 million HOPE VI Grant to rebuild housing on the former site of Victoria Courts, but redevelopment has been slow. The only construction has been the Refugio Place Apartments that required additional tax payer subsidies of more than \$7 million from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and \$1.75 million from San Antonio's Community Development Block Grant and Enterprise Community

programs. Today only 210 units have been rebuilt. Plans are still being developed and funding sought for the development of the remaining 392 housing units at the site.

Moreover, most of the new apartments have rents far in excess of what public housing residents can afford. One hundred five apartments house market rate residents with no income restrictions, 55 units house households with incomes at or below 60% of the area median income (\$30,900 for a family of four), and only 50 units are reserved for public housing residents who generally have incomes below \$15,500 for a family of four.

SAHA hopes to eventually replace a mere 151 of the 660 former public housing units. Provided willing tenants can be found, the remaining 451 new apartments will rent for as much as \$925 per month. Lost along with the public housing units are the subsidies that allowed SAHA to rent the apartments to extremely low-income families at rent levels of about 1/3 of their income. Once the project is completed, it will have reduced the total stock of public housing units for the poor in San Antonio by approximately 11%.

Ironically, SAHA now plans to develop these mostly higher income apartments on the same site that they told HUD was unacceptable for residential use because of traffic and flight path noise. SAHA is rebuilding apartments in buildings with more stories and with almost precisely the same density (602 units vs 660) as Victoria Courts. The density problem used to justify the initial demolition seems no longer to be a concern. SAHA points to the fact that the new development is "economically integrated" yet this goal was achieved at the high price of more than 500 affordable public housing apartments. 🏠



single out one housing authority over another. Let's face it, there are a number of housing authorities in the country and many of them are very, very, very successful. What we talk about are those of them that are not successful – that's a handful of them. The majority of the housing authorities in America are doing exactly what they were chartered to do in that they are providing their services to their residents and their constituents without any fanfare or recognition.

TxLIHIS: *When you arrived, was there anything in Washington County that you did not find going on here in San Antonio that would specifically have made a difference here?*

Alvarez: What I found when I arrived in San Antonio was a fairly parochial institution that had basically a veiled approach to dealing with its constituents. I think that the difference between SAHA and most other companies is that SAHA does not have a relationship with its customers. It does not even have a relationship with itself – with its own employees, from one end of the building to another. When we get things changed – and I think you'll find it will be sooner rather than later – folks will not be concerned with bringing problems to our attention. We will be concerned when they bring them to our attention and we will go out and fix them. And when once we start to do that... folks will point out more things to us and before long we will correct most of the deficiencies and who knows, before long this will be one of the best housing authorities in the country and I can dance on the table.

TxLIHIS: *Focus groups in Texas have shown that the public in general has a very low level of support for public housing and to lesser extent Section 8. What do think can be done about this?*

Alvarez: You know, I'm not sure. One of the limits that we have from statistical inferences from surveys is that it depends on who you ask. I'll bet that if you ask the folks who were receiving that assistance they would have a different opinion. If you assist their sisters or brothers or aunts they would have a different opinion. Sometimes our supposition becomes reality. I have yet to find these horrible relationships as they are presented in terms of public housing residents and Section 8 residents and I have been all over the country and I do not have that same perspective.

TxLIHIS: *Surely you realize that if the San Antonio Housing Authority were to announce today and it was going to build a public housing development in the far northern regions of this city in an affluent neighborhood that it would face a firestorm of opposition.*

Alvarez: I don't know that. But I suspect that if the San Antonio Housing Authority announced it was going to build a public housing development in the park adjacent to the back door of the White House that it would face a firestorm of opposition. So I'm not so sure that that is a phenomenon of the San Antonio Housing Authority or that it is a phenomenon of San Antonio. Again, if we were to talk about me building a house for one of your siblings, your relatives, I don't think there would be a firestorm. I think you would be running to help me do that.

TxLIHIS: *Do you not accept the notion that there is broad based middle class opposition to public housing?*

Alvarez: No, my sense of it is that it is too broad for my thinking. I think there is some opposition to assisted housing at every level. As to how entrenched it is here in San Antonio as compared to anywhere else, I am not sure it is any different. As I said before, if it does not affect you your opposition is going to be different than if I'm trying to help you do something for someone that you have relationship with, that you care about. I guarantee, if it were someone that you cared about you would let me put a public housing development right in your backyard. It isn't that you are not going ask questions like every other American – why me? Why in my neighborhood? It has to do with how it impacts people. And if you can explain to people how it affects them, they are less resistant. For example, Refugio Place, just up the street, in the opinion of many people in San Antonio who have seen it, it is a wonderful product. I cannot imagine that going in folks thought it was going to be wonderfully spectacular. But it is. It is the poster for what we can do with low-income housing. I would like to build a couple hundred of those around the city if I could. And I think people would be very accepting of them; along the Riverwalk, a couple in Alamo Heights...

TxLIHIS: *You may not want us to quote you on that Alamo Heights idea.*

Alvarez: I am a housing authority director. I think we should have balanced communities. I think we should have communities that provide the same opportunities to all of our citizens whether it is work, life, it doesn't really matter. I would be just thrilled if all of the high-end communities would say we want to embrace you because we are part of this community. That would be wonderful.

TxLIHIS: *State law now requires before building affordable housing projects a developer must demonstrate that they have "quantifiable community participation" prior to approval. What is the proper role for community input into affordable housing development?*



Problems plague Mirasol Homes

A major project to replace older public housing with single family homes has become one of SAHA's most recent controversies. The development resulted in a federal audit and independent analysis that allege substandard construction, noncompetitive bidding and unjustified profits by a private developer contracted to build the homes.

In 1995, HUD awarded SAHA a \$48 million HOPE VI grant to revitalize Mirasol Homes, a 500-unit public housing development built in 1953. The units were demolished to make way for the construction of 174 single family homes at the Mirasol site and 100 more at other locations. Additional townhouses, duplexes and senior housing were also constructed.

The San Antonio Express-News reported in April 2004 that of \$20 million in government funds spent to build the homes, private builders took as much as \$9 million in profit. In fact, Express-News analysis shows a profit of 40 to 86 percent on construction costs went to the Mirasol Joint Venture Team, comprised of a local developer and KB Homes, one of the largest home builders in the country.

The newspaper also reported that SAHA's own forensic expert found that the houses built for the Mirasol project failed to meet minimum federal quality standards.

A federal audit undertaken at the behest of U.S. Congressman Charles Gonzalez states that SAHA violated state environmental laws and directs that \$1.86 million spent mismanaging a contaminated landfill at Mirasol be returned to the U.S. government.

The audit also suggests there was an agreement negotiated between SAHA and builder KB Homes that dated back to 1997, two years before the Mirasol contract was signed. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development relies on the competitive bidding process to limit developer profit under the HOPE VI program, yet the audit report states that SAHA adopted procedures that "limited competition" for the Mirasol contract.

SAHA has disputed a number of the findings of the audit and the Express-News report. The agency's response is on its web site. at www.saha.org.

...continued
from page 5



Alvarez: In the classroom we know the best result occurs when we have a diversity of opinion, a diversity of lifestyles, a diversity of cultures. So this notion that we should let a neighborhood know that we are going to provide housing for individuals of lower income, I really don't have a sense of that. They are already there. They are already living in your communities. Now we are going to put them in a more stable environment where they are going to be able to get to school on time and get to work on time, be a part of your society. So why should we exclude them? And if we want to come and build housing that is decent, safe and affordable for them, doesn't that make your community better? It makes no sense to me. You know America said "send me your tired, your poor," and here we are. What if that had not happened?

TxLIHIS: *I am wondering if you are going to change the state of Texas or if the state of Texas is going to change you?*

Alvarez: You have to understand how this kid that sits in front you gets to be a housing director. I grew up in one of the poorest places in America and went to some of the worst schools in the country. My parents had a dream. My parents were divorced when I was two years old. I was raised by my maternal grandmother. All the isms in life that you can get, I had them. I worked hard and I persevered. When folks said I couldn't, I said I could. I want to be living proof that every kid in America living in "low-income housing," that the reality I have of sitting before you today answering your questions is available to every human being living in "low-income housing." I am lucky enough to live that dream but I don't think I'll be the only one. I think there will be tons of kids that will have that chance.

TxLIHIS: *SAHA's Victoria Courts public housing development was torn down before there was the plan in place to replace it. If you had been director of SAHA when that happened how would you have done things differently?*

Alvarez: I was not here. Let's be clear about that. We are talking about something that occurred ten years ago. It is very difficult to look back and say what I would have done. You have to do the arithmetic on whether or not it makes sense to demolish and replace existing housing or to continue to invest. Once that decision is made then you have to come to grips with...what it costs to replace the housing in today's market. That's a pretty expensive proposition. Can you realistically replace it all? I don't know. Could you afford to replace the 660 units of low-income housing at Victoria Courts today? I don't know. The subsidy costs would be tremendous. If you can get them to give us the money, I'll build twenty thousand units for low-income people.

continued on next page...



TxLIHIS: *My question is whether the San Antonio housing authority should tear down housing before it has a plan for what it is going to do.*

Alvarez: I don't think so. There does need to be the calculus as to whether it should be demolished or not and I think I agree with you that that requires a certain amount of planning and foresight. You're asking me my opinion of what they did ten years ago. I don't want to get into the politics. But if you're asking me a fundamental question —when do you demolish? I don't know. I think you know it when you see it. You look at it and you know this needs to be torn down.

TxLIHIS: *What do think about the requirement that a resident of public housing serve on the board of commissioners of the housing authority?*

Alvarez: It is great. I believe that the best form of democracy is participation. If we are going to govern public housing residents they ought to have a say in how that is done.

TxLIHIS: *Some people have said that there ought to be a time limit for residency in public housing and Section 8. How do you feel about that?*

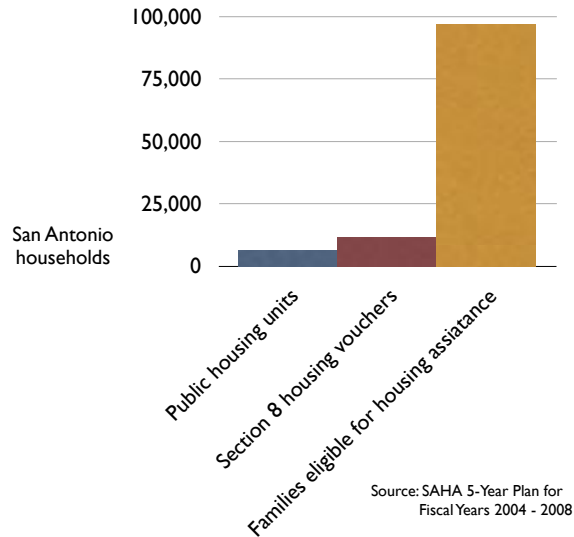
Alvarez: I have given that a lot of thought, I have to tell you that I am not clear in my own mind how that would work. We have a lot of elderly and disabled individuals on a fixed income. How can they do the work? Are they ever going to be able to support themselves? I don't know. As I have indicated before, some of those parenting issues and school issues leave some folks behind. What should we do? Should we be cognizant of codependency issues that are created in subsidized housing or any type of subsidized product? I think we should be. But on the other hand, I have yet to form an opinion. I don't think there's a clear consensus of opinion even in our industry whether there should be or shouldn't be, and if there should be what the time should be.

TxLIHIS: *What is the status of the San Antonio Housing Authority's waiting list?*

Alvarez: The public housing waiting list is open. There are 14,000 families on it now. The Section 8 waiting list is closed. Our Section 8 voucher program is currently over leased and there is a new protocol for managing the Housing Choice Voucher program and we have that reality to deal with. So there is no reason to give folks false hope that we're going to be issuing vouchers in the near future. 🏠

Large number of poor families overwhelm SAHA housing resources

SAHA's 17,871 subsidized housing units provide housing for about 18% of the low-income families in San Antonio who meet the eligibility requirements for assistance from SAHA.



SAHA subsidized housing inventory:

- 6,169 public housing units, 181 scattered site units
- 11,521 Section 8 housing vouchers

SAHA applicant waiting lists:

- Public housing = 14,000
 - 95% have incomes less than 30% of median
 - Almost 90% of these are families with children
- Section 8 waiting list = 5,000
 - List has been closed to new applicants since 2/03
 - More than 95% are families with children
 - 95% have incomes less than 30% of median
 - 1% have incomes greater than 50% of median.



Alazan Apache



San Juan Homes

• SAHA reports in its 2004 Annual Plan that the agency has is planning to evaluate whether to demolish or sell 1,480 units in older public housing developments. This represents almost one-quarter of all the PHA's public housing units. These properties include: Suton Homes, Springview, San Juan Homes, Wheatley Courts and Alazan Apache.

Our view: SAHA needs reform and the poor need some help

The San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA) is on a vital mission and it needs some help.

Without SAHA, extremely low-income families in San Antonio would have no housing option. Like other public housing authorities in the country, SAHA faces many challenges, some of its own making.

In recent years, a lot went wrong at Texas's largest public housing authority. SAHA acted like an unaccountable and at times arrogant bureaucracy. It urgently needs to improve its planning, management and relationship with its tenants and the community at large. The energetic new SAHA CEO, Henry Alvarez, has recognized this and says he has a plan to solve it. We wish him success.

It is time for SAHA to carefully review the physical and economic conditions in its aging public housing developments. Alarming, SAHA has told HUD that it is considering plans to demolish or sell off 1,480 public housing units, almost one quarter of all that is left. The decision to bulldoze 660 public housing units at Victoria Courts with no viable plan to rebuild was a mistake that SAHA should learn from.

Yet the fact remains that much of SAHA's public housing was constructed in the 1940's and 1950's and requires major maintenance or reconstruction. SAHA needs to plan for this and needs to involve its tenants and the San Antonio community in the process.


Henry Alvarez and the board of directors at SAHA must lay a plan before the City Council, the Legislature and the Congressional delegation. They should present the facts about what the agency needs in terms of funding and community support to continue to provide housing for the lowest income families and to help these families achieve their dreams of self-sufficiency.

SAHA and local officials point with pride to the Refugio Apartments as a model for the future of low-income housing development. We are decidedly less enthusiastic. Refugio is an attractive building but it does not house truly poor families at the scale that its predecessor Victoria Courts did. There are only 51 apartments set aside for public housing residents. This hardly offsets the loss of the 660 public housing units at Victoria Courts.

Assuming SAHA can make necessary management reforms and rediscover its core mission to house the poor, a looming problem remains. This is the failure of the federal government, the state and the San Antonio community to properly support the agency and to provide it with the funds necessary to do its job.

Our society asks a lot of public housing authorities. We expect them to house our poorest neighbors. There was a time when civic leaders like the late Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez understood the importance of the housing authority and worked to make housing the poor a paramount public policy priority. Nowadays elected officials are more often found running away from, or at best ignoring, the public housing authority.

There are 14,000 San Antonio families on the waiting list for public housing and another 5,000 waiting for a Section 8 housing voucher. SAHA stopped taking names for housing vouchers because, in Henry Alvarez words, there is no need to give them "false hope."

These families don't need hope—they need help. Henry Alvarez and SAHA, with a vision that includes the very poor and aided by a community that supports that vision, can and must provide help to the thousands who need it. 

www.texashousing.org



**Texas Low Income Housing
Information Service**

508 Powell Street
Austin, TX 78703-5122

**Serious problems face Texas'
largest public housing authority**