

Paper: HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Date: THU 02/23/1989

Section: A

Page: 1

Edition: 2 STAR

`Back to square one'/Council retracts approval of razing Allen Parkway Village

By LORI RODRIGUEZ

Staff

After five years of incessant controversy, the proposal to demolish Allen Parkway Village is back on the drawing board.

With only John Goodner and Larry McKaskle dissenting, Houston City Council Wednesday rescinded its approval of the plan to demolish the 1,000-unit project, sell the 37.5-acre tract and use the proceeds for better housing elsewhere in the city.

Without city approval, the Department of Housing and Urban Development cannot approve the demolition.

"What it does is pull the plug," Councilman Rodney Ellis said of the council vote. "Now it's time to go back to square one."

Among the majority voting to rescind was Mayor Kathy Whitmire, who has supported the demolition proposed by the Housing Authority of the city of Houston since council first approved it in 1984.

In that vote, only Councilmen Ben Reyes, Frank Mancuso, Ernest McGowen, Dale Gorczynski and Ellis voted against the demolition.

"But it's not at all unusual for the mayor to change her mind like this when she knows the other side has the votes," said Gorczynski.

Other council members who jumped on the winning bandwagon said they are not necessarily opposed to demolition but felt it was time to "revisit" the issue.

"I think the issue has got to be moved off dead-center, and it has got to be moved off before we go another 4 1/2 years doing nothing," said Councilman Anthony Hall.

By unanimous vote, resolutions opposing destruction of the project and supporting the construction of one-to-one replacement units on the same site were referred to the housing authority with instructions that the authority report back on the options now open.

That report should include an appraisal of the valuable tract west of downtown, cost estimates on options from rehabilitation to demolition and plans for replacement housing if the project ultimately is razed, council said.

The housing authority must complete its report within 60 days of the conclusion of a federal court hearing scheduled for March 10 on a lawsuit filed by the Allen Parkway Village Residents Council.

A move to ask for a report of the options from a City Council committee, rather than from the housing authority, was squelched by Hall.

"Whatever's going to be done, it's got to come from the housing authority" if HUD is to take it seriously, Hall said.

HUD had been considering the demolition plan for four years but repeatedly delayed a decision as the plan drew increasing fire from community groups and black leaders.

One of those leaders was U.S. Rep. Mickey Leland, D-Houston, who held a press conference in Washington Wednesday to urge council and the housing authority to stop bickering and work out a compromise.

Some council members predicted a compromise will be reached that calls neither for total rehabilitation of the project on its current site nor for razing and rebuilding of units elsewhere in the city.

"This doesn't mean that all the councilmen that voted to rescind are unequivocally opposed to demolition," said Ellis. "This just takes it back to the drawing board. All options are still open."

In an 11th-hour appearance, Earl Phillips, housing authority executive director, made a final effort to persuade council members not to rescind their approval of demolition. He said such a move would work against the progress the authority has made in building and renovating public housing here.

"It is my honest belief that Allen Parkway should be completely demolished, and most of the land should be sold except for maybe a small piece on the site or the outskirts for 100 to 200 replacement units," Phillips said.

Phillips and many national housing officials believe evidence has shown large projects such as Allen Parkway contribute to crime, drug abuse and other ills associated with lumping many poor people together.

Only 77 families still live in Allen Parkway, which has been systematically boarded up as other residents moved out.