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What is the primary mission of the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD)?

HUD's mission is simple – to increase homeownership, support community development and increase access to affordable housing that is free from discrimination.

The Department has a broad range of programs to help meet the needs of various communities:

- Mortgage insurance and loan guarantee programs which promote access to affordable financing for individual homebuyers, multifamily developers, and hospitals
- Grant programs for communities and non-profit organizations for housing, economic development, disaster recovery and community development initiatives
- Funding for local public housing agencies for project-based assistance and tenant-based housing vouchers
- Funding to serve special needs populations such as the homeless, persons with AIDS, the elderly and persons with disabilities

Through HUD's numerous grant opportunities and block grant assistance, the Department provides billions of dollars annually to various State and local government agencies and non-profit organizations. Information on HUD programs and grant announcements can be found at: www.HUD.gov/grants/index.cfm.

What are some challenges you face?

Each year, HUD helps millions of individuals and families become homeowners or to obtain safe, decent and affordable rental housing. In addition, the Department provides resources to improve economic conditions and infrastructure in distressed communities, making them more liveable. We recognize, however, while there are tremendous housing-related and community development needs, the available resources are limited. HUD continues to strengthen its partnerships with other Federal agencies, state and local governments, and private sector organizations. These partnerships are critical to advance our mission by leveraging resources and promoting innovation such as our Continuum of Care homeless programs and disaster recovery assistance in the Gulf Coast region.

For example, HUD is proposing legislative changes to modernize the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), to reform the Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG), to improve Public Housing and the Housing Choice Voucher programs, and to consolidate the Department's numerous homeless assistance programs.

HUD's Relocation and Real Estate Division and the Regional Relocation Specialists provide guidance and support whenever HUD-funded acquisition, demolition or rehabilitation programs trigger the application of the Uniform Relocation Act and/or Section 104(d) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. The latter applies to housing demolition or the conversion of low-income housing to other purposes under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME). In addition, the demolition or disposition of public housing units triggers relocation requirements under Section 18 of the United States Housing Act of 1937. It is commonplace for local projects to



involve funding from multiple HUD programs, potentially triggering multiple relocation requirements.

Can you share some of your immediate goals?

In the past few years, we have been concentrating on rebuilding HUD's relocation and acquisition resources by increasing policy staff in Washington and hiring Regional Relocation Specialists across the country. With this new staffing, HUD has been able to become an active partner with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on URA issues by collaborating on the 2005 revisions to the final rule and subsequent guidance, developing recommendations for potential legislative changes to the URA, and participating in the development of revised of FHWA courses on the URA.

We are taking advantage of opportunities to share resources and ideas with our other federal partners and the right of way industry. HUD is making great strides in revising the Department's acquisition and relocation guidance materials (including HUD Handbook 1378, claim forms, and public brochures) to conform to the recent URA changes and HUD program-specific statutory requirements. We have established an acquisition/relocation-specific website at www.HUD.gov/relocation and a listServ to send automated email notifications on new material of interest to anyone involved in HUD-funded projects.

Signing up for the listServ is easy: Visit www.HUD.gov, under Tools click on "Mailing Lists," and under Communities select "Acquisition and Relocation." Our Regional Relocation Specialists in the field are available to answer project-specific questions and help program participants, other federal agencies, and consultants work through cross-program requirements, including addressing appeals.

Which programs directly affect/benefit the right of way professional?

At the first IRWA Federal Update session I attended a few years ago, I asked your attendees how many had ever "run into" a HUD program or project during the course of their right of way activities. Almost every hand in the audience went up. Whether you are helping to build a road, expand an airport runway, set up power lines, extend a subway, or acquire land to build a new courthouse, chances are you will run into one or more HUD programs. Whether

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you need to acquire a property that was developed with HUD assistance, or must relocate a person who has HUD rental subsidy, having access to our guidance material and our staff can facilitate working through the various URA and program issues. Our programs can also be helpful when you may be faced with relocating a person or family who is very low income who might benefit from the assisted housing programs of HUD.

Where is the greatest demand for training?

Because our partners are usually local or state governments or non-profit organizations, we find that staff turnover creates a constant need for training on acquisition and relocation requirements. The HUD Office of Affordable Housing has a technical assistance contractor to provide training for our HOME and CDBG recipients. Our Regional Relocation Specialists also provide targeted training to any HUD grantee based on annual risk. In addition, HUD provides training to the relocation or acquisition consultant industry as well as other Federal agencies through our participation in events such as the Public Real Estate Education Symposium and IRWA training conferences. However, we see that there is a need for more education on HUD programs in the right of way industry.



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How can IRWA and right of way professionals help you achieve your goals?

It would be immensely helpful if the IRWA standard training courses could include basic information on HUD programs including how to access HUD information resources, and potential issues that a right of way professional might encounter. This could be of significant benefit to any consultant who might provide acquisition or relocation services to an agency involved in a federally funded project. Ultimately, URA and HUD goals are highly compatible, seeking to promote and retain decent, safe and sanitary housing that is affordable and cost effective.

For example, recently one of your members was assisting the General Services Administration (GSA) to estimate the relocation costs and obligations in the acquisition of a site for a new federal courthouse. It just so happened that all three identified sites were also HUD-assisted project sites. HUD relocation staff connected the relocation consultant and key GSA officials with HUD specialists who can help

navigate through these issues. Planning ahead and knowing the potential impact and costs is critical in any federally funded project that triggers the URA. Ultimately, the decision was made to reject the identified sites (all of which would have displaced a large number of very low income persons into a tight housing market) and seek other suitable locations. In this case, this consultant was familiar with HUD programs and issues and made the right connections early enough in the process to serve their client well.

Are you partnering with other Federal agencies?

Yes, HUD is currently working with the FHWA to anticipate and plan for issues in currently unexplored territory. For example, how do we handle acquiring a property that is encumbered by a reverse mortgage? As the U.S. population ages, more seniors are making use of these mortgage products to pay for necessary repairs to their property or to supplement their monthly income. While the URA compensates a homeowner for the acquisition of their property and cost implications of purchasing a replacement property, what financial assistance can or should be provided under the URA to a homeowner who has a reverse mortgage on the displacement property? This is still under debate because of the owner's diminished equity. Until HUD and the FHWA have a concrete case to examine, policy and procedure in this area is still undetermined. Your membership can help us develop the necessary guidance by identifying any of these cases that are encountered.

I appreciate the opportunity to share HUD's message and resources via the IRWA educational forums. I am hopeful that more of HUD's recipient agencies will take advantage of these opportunities to meet and discuss their concerns about relocation and acquisition issues with professionals in the right of way industry, HUD staff, and other federal partners. Together, we can improve the way relocation and acquisition programs meet the needs of both agencies and affected individuals. ●