



## Huntsville Housing Authority to focus on Brookside in Lowe Mill area

By Challen Stephens

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HUNTSVILLE, AL -- Forget about affordable lofts alongside public housing in downtown Huntsville. The **Huntsville Housing Authority** revealed Monday that it missed out on federal stimulus grants to tear down and reinvent Todd Towers and Searcy Homes.

But the board was undeterred, voting 3-1 to seek a federal grant to replace instead the public housing near the Lowe Mill.

"There is discussion of that being a sort of downtown west," said Carlen Williams, the authority's director of development. She told the board that the 72 units of Brookside public housing sit on 13.5 acres alongside Lowe Mill, and the neighborhood is seeing reinvestment from the city and individuals.

But one board member didn't like the sudden switch in focus.

"Personally, I don't think this a good idea for the board at this time," said board member Dick Fountain.

Williams said the board would have to apply by Nov. 17 for a federal HOPE VI grant to redevelop Brookside. Fountain said he didn't like the short turnaround.

But more importantly, he said, the authority has long talked of redeveloping Sparkman Homes, possibly working with the city school board to place a school nearby. He said that should remain the priority.

"If we don't get this, we're no worse off," said board member Tommy Beason.

"We're \$60,000 to \$80,000 worse off," said Fountain, citing the cost to apply for the grant.

A few minutes later, Beason added, "Somebody is going to get \$22 million to build a property. Why not us?"

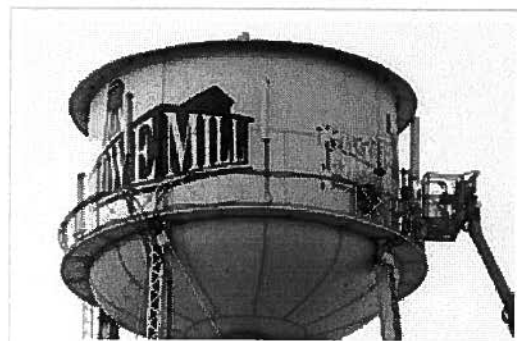
Fountain said he didn't think the authority should pursue federal money just because it was available. The rest of the board agreed with Beason, voting 3-1 to begin designing a new Brookside.

"So am I to understand that Brookside is to be torn down," asked a Brookside resident, one of only 10 people in the audience.

Board President Charley Burruss said it was too early to discuss details.

"But the answer to that is pretty obvious," added Fountain.

The city recently paved the way for the transformation of the Lowe Mill area by buying the Downtown Rescue Mission property. Also, the school board this year shut down West Huntsville Elementary and Stone Middle, the only schools near Brookside and the Lowe Mill.



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The Huntsville Housing Authority Board voted 3-1 to seek a federal grant to replace public housing in Lowe Mill. Here, a worker stencils "Lowe Mill" on the neighborhood water tower.

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The Housing Authority board had applied for \$43.5 million in five grants under the Capital Fund Recovery Competition portions of the federal stimulus package. The largest two proposals would have remade large parts of the downtown.

The board had proposed tearing down Todd Towers, which houses seniors. The proposal called for a new five-story senior center as well as a mixed-use building, including two-thirds private lofts and apartments and one-third public housing.

At Searcy Homes, which spreads over 15 acres near the Von Braun Center, the board had proposed tearing down the old brick housing and building a similar ratio of private apartments and public housing.

The authority also missed winning a \$10 million grant to demolish and rebuild parts of Sparkman Homes, although even the board expressed doubts about the likelihood of winning that grant.

The authority did receive nearly \$6 million in stimulus money to help build Gateway Place, said Lundy. That's the public housing for seniors planned next to Huntsville Hospital, where part of Council Courts used to sit.

Lundy said the authority has not heard one way or the other on the fifth application, a grant of about \$3.5 million to refurbish parts of Johnson Towers off Governors Drive.

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