

Brooksville Housing Authority gets a buyer for Hillside Estates

Pasco County company wants to buy long-vacant, low-income housing development for \$1.7 million.

By Barbara Behrendt, bbehrendt@tampabay.com, tel. (352) 848-1434 / Published June 4, 2019; Updated June 4, 2019

BROOKSVILLE — The Brooksville Housing Authority has accepted a \$1.7 million offer from a Pasco County company that wants to buy the 13.4-acre Hillside Estates community, which has sat vacant for more than seven years.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is reviewing the offer, but has not finalized it or set a closing date, according to public affairs specialist Gloria Shanahan.

A sale may help lead to more public housing for low-income residents in the Brooksville area and resolve other issues with the federal agency.

For years, the agency has negotiated with the Brooksville Housing Authority over problems with Hillside Estates and Summit Villas. Both developments were closed to residents in 2012 because of poor conditions.



Housing units that once housed low-income families in Brooksville at Hillside Estates have been abandoned for years. At the urging of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Brooksville Housing Authority recently accepted a bid for purchasing the development.

Recently, Brooksville Housing Authority members have discussed selling Hillside Estates, a 52-unit development on Continental Drive, and using the money to re-develop Summit Villas, a three-building, single-story apartment complex on 2 acres on Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard. The authority owns another acre alongside Summit Villas.

Earlier this year, the federal agency expressed concern that too much time was passing without progress. It notified the Brooksville Housing Authority that it must bring its management under the oversight of another agency and that federal funding for its executive director Tommy Brooks would end May 31.

Brooks left the job last week and was granted a six-month severance package, according to minutes of the April 16 Brooksville Housing Authority meeting. A specific dollar figure for the package was not immediately available, but budget records show that Brooks received an annual salary of \$54,642 in 2017.

The Brooksville Housing Authority held a special meeting on May 21 and approved the sale of Hillside Estates. There were seven bids on the property, which is valued at \$2,376,798 by the county's property appraiser. The bids ranged from \$300,000 to the \$1.7 million offered by bidder Premier Housing Investments, LLC. That bid was the one accepted by the authority.

Premier Housing Investments has a Zephyrhills mailing address and its manager is Chadwick Pettinato, according to state corporate records. Also during the special meeting, Brooksville Housing Authority member Eric Sangvic expressed concern about Brooks' management of the properties. The agency is left with an outstanding city water bill of \$46,253.69 for Hillside Estates, plus a \$596.65 penalty for failure to pay the bill on time.

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Members said they knew there were water leaks, and Brooks said he walked the site with the city manager, trying to identify where the leak was located.

The problem "has been going on for years," Sangvic said, and could have been solved by shutting off the water, rather than running up the bill. Homeless people may have been living in the units, he said, further running up the costs.

Brooksville Housing Authority members said they would be sure all the locks were working and ask for extra patrols by the Hernando County Sheriff's Office.

The Authority did not cut Brooks' severance package because of the way he handled the water leak.

"I agree that our property manager in the city of Brooksville should have been more responsive to the board," said Brooksville Housing Authority member Cliff Manuel. He said he would ask the city to consider reducing the bill or the fine.

Federal officials will review the sale of Hillside Estates. If they approve it, they will decide how much of the money they will return to the Brooksville Housing Authority.

Brooksville Housing Authority attorney Ricardo Gilmore said he will attend the June 10 meeting of the Hernando County Housing Authority to discuss the idea of having the county's authority management of Brooksville Housing Authority. The county agency has a paid director and staff.

Donald Singer, executive director of the county's authority, said there have been initial conversations about the idea.

"We're willing to talk more and see how it goes," he said.

Gilmore also suggested that Brooksville talk to the **Tampa Housing Authority** about managing the Brooksville agency, but Manuel said he was not in favor of that.

Francine Ward, another Brooksville Housing Authority member, said she hoped the county authority would take over.

Several years ago, the Hernando County Housing Authority built a public housing project called Magnolia Gardens in Brooksville, which has been well received.

Providing public housing "is a part of him," Ward said of Singer, "and it's an opportunity for them ... to get a feather in their cap for making another expansion."