

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
HOUSING AUTHORITY

TO: HOUSING AUTHORITY COMMISSIONERS
FROM: REBECCA LANE, HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
MANAGER
SUBJECT: HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
UPDATE TO HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM
ADMINISTRATIVE PLAN CHAPTER 4 - APPLICATION, WAITING
LIST AND TENANT SELECTION POLICIES

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Department of Housing and Community Services that the Housing Authority, by resolution, adopt revisions to the Housing Choice Voucher Program Administrative Plan Chapter 4 – Application, Waiting List and Tenant Selection policies to update the procedures to apply for the Housing Choice Voucher Waiting List, eliminate the limited preference for households affected by the 2017 wildfire disaster and update the referral mechanism for the limited preference for people experiencing homelessness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Administrative Plan is the major policy document guiding the ongoing administration of the federally regulated Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Where allowed under law, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) permits local jurisdictions to establish policies pertaining to the program. Chapter 4 of the City of Santa Rosa Housing Authority Administrative Plan outlines the policies regarding the Waiting List for the HCV program. Since the last update to Chapter 4 on May 20, 2019, the Waiting List application process for the City of Santa Rosa Housing Authority Housing Choice Voucher program was enhanced to offer an electronic application process. In addition, structural changes to Sonoma County's Continuum of Care necessitate an update to the language under the limited preference for people experiencing homelessness to clarify the process by which households can be referred for vouchers under this preference.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Housing and Community Services (HCS) administers the HCV program for the City of Santa Rosa Housing Authority (Housing Authority). The HCV program, formerly known as Section 8, is a federally funded rental assistance program for qualifying extremely low and very low-income households. The Housing Authority currently has 1,925 vouchers under its Annual Contributions Contract (ACC) with HUD. In addition, the HCV program administers assistance for approximately 250 Santa Rosa households utilizing vouchers from other jurisdictions, referred to as “port-ins.”

Waiting List Application Process

Prior to the year 2020, the City of Santa Rosa Housing Authority maintained a paper application process for the waiting list. Paper applications were distributed throughout the community and were accepted by U.S. Mail only. Applicant households were required to notify the Housing Authority in writing if their mailing address changed, and the amount of information that could be gathered on a paper application was limited.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated shelter-in-place orders necessitated and accelerated the development of an electronic application process to allow households to apply for the program online. The electronic process is more convenient for applicant households and more efficient and effective to administer. The transition to this system was completed in summer 2023 with the most recent opening of the Waiting List. Paper applications remain available for households who do not have access to or are unable to use electronic systems.

Waiting List Preferences

There are approximately 7,200 households on the City of Santa Rosa Housing Authority HCV Waiting List. The Waiting List is organized first by year of application and then by lottery to determine the specific rank number. There is one general preference on the Waiting List, and two limited preferences.

A general preference refers to an admissions preference that gives priority on the Waiting List to households that meet a particular circumstance or demographic. The general preference adopted by the City of Santa Rosa Housing Authority gives preference to families terminated from the Housing Choice Voucher program due to insufficient funding. This preference was established in 2013 in preparation for the impact of sequestration, the reduction of program funding provided by HUD, and HUD has encouraged Housing Authorities to maintain this preference in their Administrative Plans.

A limited preference refers to a specific number of turnover vouchers that are set aside for referrals through a partnering agency. Limited preferences do not re-order the

UPDATE TO HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM ADMINISTRATIVE PLAN
CHAPTER 4 - APPLICATION, WAITING LIST AND TENANT SELECTION POLICIES
PAGE 3 OF 4

existing waiting list and the Housing Authority may have its Waiting List open only to households that qualify for the limited preference. The City of Santa Rosa Housing Authority had previously established a limited preference with 48 vouchers set aside for families who lost their housing as a result of the 2017 wildfires; these households were referred through the partnering agency Rebuilding Our Community and this preference has been exhausted and is being removed from the Administrative Plan. The second and remaining limited preference sets aside 24 vouchers for families experiencing homelessness with referrals coming through the Sonoma County Continuum of Care.

PRIOR HOUSING AUTHORITY REVIEW

On May 20, 2019, the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners approved a modification to the limited preference for disaster-affected families to expand access to additional households displaced by the 2017 wildfires.

On March 25, 2019, the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners approved an expansion of the limited preference for disaster-affected families from 24 to 48 vouchers.

On August 27, 2018, the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners adopted the limited preference for families affected by the October 2017 wildfire disaster.

On April 24, 2017, the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners adopted the limited preference for persons experiencing homelessness.

On April 28, 2014, the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners heard a study session regarding the potential advantages and disadvantages of implementing preferences for the HCV Waiting List.

ANALYSIS

The current version of the HCV Administrative Plan is in need of updating to include reference to the electronic Waiting List application process in the Application, Waiting List and Tenant Selection policies chapter.

There has been no change to the policies that govern the Waiting List. The Waiting List is still organized by date of application and by random lottery. The electronic application process is an expansion of the methods by which households can submit an application, giving wider and more convenient access applicants. In addition, the electronic Waiting List application process allows applicants to provide more robust household information which can be used to determine if they qualify for certain Project-Based Voucher site-based waiting lists.

The current version of the HCV Administrative Plan is also in need of updating to clarify the referral source for households that qualify for the limited preference for persons

UPDATE TO HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM ADMINISTRATIVE PLAN
CHAPTER 4 - APPLICATION, WAITING LIST AND TENANT SELECTION POLICIES
PAGE 4 OF 4

experiencing homelessness. At the time this limited preference was adopted in 2014, the Sonoma County Continuum of Care's Coordinated Entry process operated differently than it does today, and the provider administering the Coordinated Entry system has changed. The updated language in the Administrative Plan will reflect the current practices of the Sonoma County Continuum of Care to ensure that eligible households may continue to be referred for this resource.

A summary of the changes to Chapter 4 - Applications, Waiting List and Tenant Selection is provided in Attachment 2.

FISCAL IMPACT

The proposed changes to the Administrative Plan do not have a fiscal impact on the HCV program; the funding is already available under the ACC with HUD.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) and 15378 in that there is no possibility that the implementation of this action may have significant effects on the environment, and no further environmental review is required.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Housing Choice Voucher Program Administrative Plan Chapter 4: Applications, Waiting List and Tenant Selection (Redline Version)
- Attachment 2 – Summary of proposed changes to the Administrative Plan
- Resolution

CONTACT

Rebecca Lane, rlane@srcity.org