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 **KING COUNTY**
HOUSING AUTHORITY

August 3, 2011

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Burien City Council
400 SW 152nd Street, Suite 300
Burien, WA 98166

CITY OF BURIEN

RE: King County Housing Authority Programs in Unincorporated North Highline

Dear Members of the Burien City Council:

I am writing in hopes of clearing up some misperceptions regarding the King County Housing Authority's programs expressed at the Council meeting on July 18th. These comments were made during a discussion about annexation. Your concern for the residents of both unincorporated North Highline and the City of Burien is admirable, and I wish you the best in the difficult decisions ahead. Hopefully this letter will leave you with more accurate information with which to make your decision.

At this meeting, a Council Member stated: "Right now the King County Housing Authority places 25% of its units within one small area – a county-wide agency. There is a very real potential that that area could flip and become a very depressed area..." Another Council Member stated: "One of the issues is KCHIA's policy of concentrating poverty in that area, and that's a process that's accelerated over the last dozen years or so..." I would certainly understand your concern if either of these statements were true. Fortunately, both of these comments are inaccurate.

KCHA has two former public housing sites in unincorporated North Highline: Greenbridge (formerly known as Park Lake I) and Seola Gardens (formerly known as Park Lake II). Both sites are in the process of being redeveloped and converted from public housing to mixed income communities under HUD's HOPE VI Program.

At Greenbridge, KCHA followed through on its commitment to deconcentrate White Center's low income housing by reducing the number of subsidized homes on site by 245 units. These units were replaced by newly sited subsidized housing in other parts of the county where fewer affordable housing opportunities are available.

In addition to siting subsidized units in areas of the County where affordable housing is scarce, KCHA also provides higher rent subsidies to any tenant-based Section 8 household wishing to rent in costlier housing markets such as eastside King County. This policy has worked well in enabling low income households to exercise housing choice throughout the region. Unincorporated North Highline currently has 3% of the County's Public Housing and Section 8 subsidies, not 25% to 30% as stated at the Council meeting.

CFTR: 08/15/11

Also contrary to assertions made at the Council meeting, the number of households receiving Section 8 or Public Housing assistance in White Center has actually decreased over the past decade. In 2000, White Center was home to 1,043 Section 8 and Public Housing households. In 2011 there are approximately 880 households – a 16% reduction. Of these households, 38% are elderly, 25% are disabled, and 37% are families with children. Many of these households work in low wage jobs and are severely rent burdened. A family in King County must earn \$22.62 per hour to rent an average two-bedroom apartment, almost three times the minimum wage.

The creation of mixed income communities at Greenbridge and Seola Gardens is a key element in White Center's revitalization strategy. These HOPE VI developments are broadly supported in the White Center community and have evolved through active input and participation by community residents and institutions. As part of these initiatives, approximately 455 new market-rate homeownership opportunities will be provided by the private market once the housing picture stabilizes, resulting in higher income families living and investing in this area as well as increasing local tax revenue. At an average of \$250,000 per house sales value, we estimate that these new homes, once built, will generate \$1.4 million annually in property taxes.

It is important to recognize that housing subsidies in most cases support families who are already living in a neighborhood and are significantly rent burdened, doubled up or homeless. In June, when KCHA opened its Section 8 waiting list for two weeks, some 450 White Center families applied for assistance. Twenty three of these households included a veteran of our armed forces.

KCHA works in close partnership with the Highline School District, other government agencies and non-profit providers to support children in the White Center community. The Highline School District reports that they served 600 homeless children in 2010. All of these children could benefit from KCHA housing assistance and there is little question that their academic performance would improve once they were securely housed. Without the affordable housing we provide many more of Highline's students would be homeless and unable to concentrate on academics. In addition to providing housing, KCHA has been instrumental in leveraging significant educational resources into the community by:

- providing land for the new White Center Elementary School as well as the Greenbridge Early Learning Center (Educare), a King County Library Branch (the first in north White Center), and a new YWCA adult learning facility;
- renovating and expanding the Wiley Community Center to support Southwest Boys & Girls Club, Neighborhood House and Highline Community College, programs that serve the entire White Center community, and by providing annual funding to support these programs;

- providing \$5 million in New Markets Tax Credit equity investments to help finance the Greenbridge Early Learning Center;
- developing an additional Head Start facility at Seola Gardens;
- actively participating in the White Center Partners Group and the “Promise” educational initiative.

In addition, KCHA has worked with the White Center community to address an array of other neighborhood priorities. The Housing Authority:

- secured financing for and developed a new expanded White Center Food Bank facility;
- helped finance the acquisition and rehabilitation of the Mallard Lake Apartments (now Coronado Springs) by a private developer to address physical deterioration and management issues at this problem property;
- is presently constructing a pedestrian trail from 4th Avenue SW to link with the King County trail system at 11th Avenue SW; four new community pea patch gardens; over a dozen parks and extensive public art;
- has invested in providing retail and small business opportunities in our new mixed income communities;
- provided street-front office space and on-going funding for the King County Sheriff to support community policing services around KCHA’s communities.
- has purchased nine smaller lots at the edges of Greenbridge - including dilapidated mobile homes and non-conforming auto repair uses that were contributing to neighborhood blight.

The only other property KCHA owns in the North Highline area is the Arbor Heights Apartments, which was recently annexed into Burien. KCHA purchased the Arbor Heights Apartments in 2002 at the request of the North Highline Unincorporated Area Council. Formerly known as the Cones, Arbor Heights was a dilapidated, crime ridden complex. After KCHA purchased and renovated the property, we partnered with New Futures to provide after-school services for the many children at the site – a program that continues to receive accolades.

KCHA would be happy to meet with you to discuss KCHA’s efforts in further detail. I appreciate your interest in our work, and wish you the best in the continuing deliberations on annexation.

Sincerely,



Rhonda Rosenberg
Director of Communications

