

# Residents of Tacoma's largest housing project are on the move



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For many Salishan residents faced with relocation, the thought of leaving neighbors and friends is the hardest issue. Anna Tang, 14, center, whose family lives in area one, the first area to be relocated, feigns fright as Kevin Newman attempts to paint her face at a recent event. Kariann Phaisan, 7, offers protection.

## The Salishan shuffle

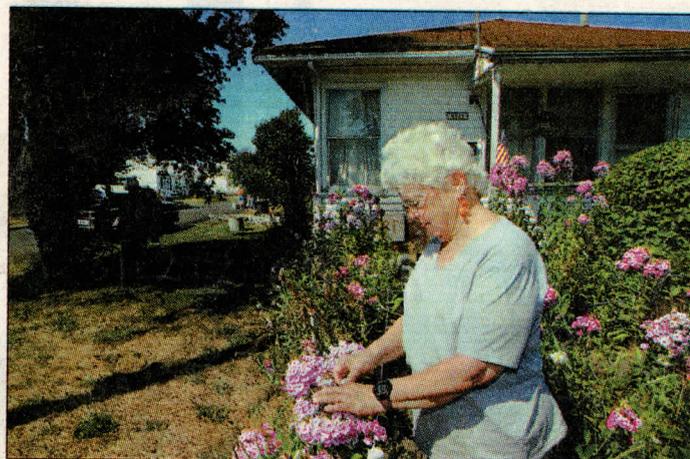
BY DEBBY ABE  
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Salishan is the community where Maureen Reardon raised her three children, the garden where she tends her sweet peas and phlox, the place she's called home for 41 of her 70 years.

But as much as she likes living in the public housing development, she knows her World War II-era duplex needs to be scrapped. The floors sag, wide cracks zigzag across the walls and curtains sway when the wind whistles through closed windows.

Sometime in the next couple years, the long-time resident will move once, perhaps twice within Salishan, and end up in a gleaming new home.



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Maureen Reardon, 70, is a 41-year resident of Salishan. She said she knows the development needs improving, but moving is difficult.

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### Salishan 'Hope VI' timeline

- May 2004:** Deadline for vacating homes in area one, on the northwestern quarter
- Summer 2004:** Demolition of area one
- Spring 2005:** Deadline for vacating homes in area two, which includes Salishan's southwestern wedge along Portland Avenue
- Spring 2006:** Deadline for vacating area three, on Salishan's eastern edge
- 2006:** Residents can begin moving into the new area one homes
- 2009:** Project completed

T. Neighborhoods - Salishan



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Willie LeMafa, left, and son Roman Pula, 14, help move LeMafa's daughter out of Salishan after she took advantage of relocation assistance from the Tacoma Housing Authority. Residents in the first phase of construction must be moved out by May 2004. Tenants leaving Salishan can receive \$750 to \$1,200 for moving costs.

## Salishan

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Reardon is among 2,600 residents slated to be relocated, at least temporarily, over the next five years as Salishan transforms itself from a poverty-stricken development of aging homes into a mixed-income community of modern homes and new amenities.

"I'm not looking forward to moving at all, but I know it has to be. My house is falling apart," Reardon said. "My choice is to stay in Salishan."

More than 780 units of low-income housing at Salishan will come tumbling down as part of the Tacoma Housing Authority's "Hope VI" revitalization project. In their place will rise a 1,200-unit mix of public housing, privately owned houses and assisted-living apartments for elderly and disabled residents.

The housing development's new town center will feature an expanded Family Investment Center and neighborhood recreation center plus a Washington State University center, a medical and dental clinic and room for several small stores.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided the \$35 million Hope VI seed grant that gives the renovation project its name. The remaining amount will be funded through additional federal, state and local grants, low-income housing tax credits, tax-exempt bonds, home ownership sales and other private and nonprofit sources.

"Most people are excited about the (new) houses," said Howard Conrad, Salishan resident and president of the Salishan Resident Council. "It's been a long time coming."

But to make way for improvements, residents must first move.

The Tacoma Housing Authority is launching a massive \$2.2 million project to gradually relocate the 780 households in Tacoma's largest housing project.

The goal is to cause as little inconvenience

as possible to residents while adhering to construction timetables, said Peter Ansara, the housing authority's executive director.

"There is a delicate balance between moving people and building housing," Ansara said. "We must understand that our residents are first and that sticks and bricks are second."

As required by HUD, the housing authority has developed a detailed plan to move residents in stages over the next three years.

The 271 households in a section of Salishan designated as area one – the development's northwestern quarter along Portland Avenue – must vacate their homes by May 2004. Demolition will take place that summer.

Area two residents, in the development's southwestern wedge along Portland Avenue, must leave by the spring of 2005. Area three residents, on Salishan's eastern side, must be gone the following spring.

Residents can begin moving into the new area one homes starting in 2006, with the entire project done by 2009.

The authority is trying to allow area one residents hoping to live in the newly built units to move to another area of Salishan during construction.

But how many can stay depends on how many other residents leave.

About 150 households typically move out of Salishan each year, and the development stopped accepting new residents June 1, Ansara said.

To encourage more tenants to go, the authority is offering them the chance to move to another of the authority's 12 public housing projects or enter the federally-funded "Section 8" program.

Section 8 recipients, who contribute 30 percent of their income toward rent, can live anywhere in the country if their landlord accepts the government's vouchers.

Ansara predicts about half of the area one households will move out of Salishan. Though residents are being given at least a year's notice to move, 14 families already have left.

To support residents through the transition, the HUD grant provides \$2.2 million for housing staff to help tenants review their options and find homes elsewhere. The amount also covers residents' moving costs and cable, telephone and other transfer fees.

Information fairs and meetings the past six months have alerted tenants to the relocation and Hope VI plans.

The authority provides translation at meetings and translates notices into Vietnamese, Cambodian, Spanish and Russian for Salishan's many foreign-born tenants. Mobility counselors provide extra help to non-English speakers who need assistance with transportation or translation with prospective landlords.

The news is reaching immigrants, said Saray Yuorn, a Cambodian on the resident council. Most want to remain in Salishan until the new homes are ready, he said.

"Their children were born here," Yuorn said. "Salishan has many different cultures and languages. They so love this place."

He and several other members of the resident-elected Council praised the housing authority's willingness to work with them.

Yet they also stressed the council has advocated for rights that tenants would not otherwise have during the relocation.

The council, for instance, successfully argued for the authority to cover moving costs into Salishan for returning tenants who had wanted to stay during construction but had to leave for lack of vacancies, Conrad said.

Tenants leaving Salishan receive \$750 to \$1,200 in moving costs based on how many bedrooms the family's unit had.

But some resident council members remain disappointed over the amount of moving costs the authority provides.

Ansara said the authority is meeting the federally-required minimum to cover moving fees of up to 50 miles from a renter's residence. But it's also calculating expenses to count an additional room so residents can get a little more. Meanwhile, Tacoma school officials

are carefully watching the relocation's impact on nearby McIlvaigh Middle and Lister Elementary schools.

At Lister, whose 450 students come mainly from Salishan, Principal Joe Bales said enrollment could decline in late 2004 and 2005 when the relocation program is in full swing, then rise when the renovation is complete.

If children could be bused to Lister while their families moved temporarily to another school attendance area, Bales said, "it would stabilize our enrollment and the continuity of the child's education."

However, it's unlikely the school district, with its budget crunch, could afford additional busing, he said. Nor does Hope VI include funds for school transportation, Ansara said.

School and housing authority representatives will keep meeting to discuss the situation.

Ron and Teresa Mazza and their 12- and 14-year-old sons took the authority's Section 8 offer to leave Salishan. They moved into a larger, newer home also on the East Side.

Ron Mazza said the family grew weary of Salishan crime – speeding drivers, residential burglaries and an occasional drive-by shooting attempt.

"The kids wanted a change and we wanted a change," said Mazza, whose family lived in Salishan for 14 years.

Shirley Vann, who will soon move into area three, believes crime will decrease in the new Salishan.

"You'll get a different class of people. It'll be a mixture," she said, referring to plans for private homeownership. "There'll be homeowners who will care about their property, and they're going to clean it up."

But Micheal Hegwood, another resident council member, cautioned, "We can't predict how the new Salishan is going to be."

"It's going to be a totally different community," the 50-year-old said. "The first act is, they need to build it."

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