

# Can Sacramento city and county do a better job with affordable housing?

As homelessness and rents are on the rise, the local agency that builds and maintains low-income housing is facing questions about its existence.

The Board of Supervisors will discuss Wednesday whether it makes more sense to have the city and county manage affordable housing on their own rather than rely on the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency. That question comes six years after state leaders agreed to eliminate redevelopment funds, which stripped SHRA of a key responsibility.

“The ‘R’ went away from SHRA, there is no more redevelopment,” said Supervisor Patrick Kennedy, who represents most of south Sacramento. “I would like to ask the question: Is it necessary to have such a big housing authority?”

How the county would assume the responsibilities of the decades-old agency is unclear, and a decision Wednesday to move forward would launch an exploratory effort. The county has not yet compiled data on potential cost savings or impacts from dissolving SHRA, which has a \$190 million budget.

Kennedy said he suspects it makes more sense for the city and county to assume SHRA’s responsibilities, but he is waiting to see more details before making up his mind.

The mere discussion, however, has alarmed some local housing advocates.

“In the midst of the worst housing and homeless crisis in Sacramento history ... we really need SHRA staff focused on solving the homeless crisis and allocating resources for affordable housing,” said Rachel Iskow, executive director of affordable housing developer Mutual Housing California. “It’s not the time to distract from the housing work we have to do.”

SHRA’s Executive Director LaShelle Dozier said she’s worked hard to cultivate a staff that has deep relationships with the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Funding for projects is also complex – SHRA’s staff cobbles together an average of five funding sources per project, according to a report to the supervisors.

“That is not expertise that can be replicated,” Dozier said. “It’s something that’s institutionalized in the culture of this organization.”

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The Marina Vista housing development in Sacramento on Thursday, November 15, 2012.  
 Photo courtesy Randall Benton - The Sacramento Bee

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops sustainable housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at [mutualhousing.com](http://mutualhousing.com).

Dozier also said it's premature to discuss changing SHRA without knowing how President Donald Trump's administration and Congress may cut federal housing programs.

SHRA manages 2,068 housing units for the city and 1,027 on the county side. Beyond physical units, SHRA runs the federal affordable housing voucher programs and channels money to federally funded community development programs. The agency also works with at least 15 jurisdictions beyond Sacramento County and the city of Sacramento.

Dozier found herself in the center of a high-profile debate over homelessness in January when Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg wanted to give chronically homeless people priority for federal Housing Choice Vouchers. Dozier, some council members and some supervisors pushed back, citing worries that other vulnerable populations would be displaced. Ultimately, the city and the county agreed to a compromise.

Joan Burke, director of advocacy for Loaves and Fishes, the nonprofit that serves homeless people, welcomed a review of SHRA. She said the political fight it took to get SHRA to use some of the vouchers for homeless people is an example how the agency wasn't using its resources in the best manner.

"It's always good to take a look at how long-standing agencies are functioning," she said.

SHRA has recently been involved in 17 affordable housing projects and 46 infrastructure projects, including \$39 million in new construction at the Twin Rivers housing project in the River District.

Sacramento Councilman Jeff Harris, who represents the area, said part of the Twin Rivers project is funded by a time-sensitive grant from HUD. Any indication that the future of SHRA is uncertain sends the wrong message to HUD, Harris said.

"If you pull SHRA out of this project, with the relationship they've built with the developer ... there's nobody who can pick up the pieces quickly or easily," he said. "They're the only people around who understand all the components for how to fund these subsidized projects."

Darryl Rutherford, executive director of the Sacramento Housing Alliance, said while his group has some concerns about transparency at SHRA, he doesn't think it makes sense to think of dissolving it – the most extreme of the options on the table.

"We're in the mindset of mend it, don't end it," he said.