

Low-Income Residents Sue Joliet Over Housing

CHICAGO (STNG) — A group of low-income residents are suing south suburban Joliet Wednesday in an attempt to stop the southern suburb from destroying their Section 8 housing.

According to a suit filed in federal court, five residents of the Evergreen Terrace housing complex, in the 300 North Bluff Street in Joliet, fear losing their homes due to the suburb's attempt to remove the complex, displacing more than 350 residents.

The Terrace sits "at the center of activity" in Joliet, which is why Joliet "aggressively lobbied" the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to eliminate the housing complex, the suit claims.

The suit said the lobbying failed, and Joliet officials decided to take eminent domain action to remove the Terrace for its own use. Joliet Mayor Arthur Schultz, Joliet City Manager John Mezera and Deputy City Manager Jim Shapard are all named as defendants in the suit, which states the city has painted the Terrace as an "eyesore, a blighted, high-crime property and a burden on Joliet resources."

The residents identified as Teresa Davis, Oscar Harris, Helen Dirkans, Elvis Foster, Richard Strejz and Brenda Strejz, claim they are being discriminated against for a variety of reasons--including the fact that a "significant portion" of Terrace residents are African American, and many of them single mothers.

The suit lists a number of reasons why the suing residents cannot afford to stay in the community without the Section 8 housing at the Terrace, and claims Joliet is violating the Fair Housing Act by "pushing the residents" out of the downtown area, stating the Terrace's demolition would have an "adverse disparate impact upon African Americans, women and families with children."

The residents want the City of Joliet to stop all efforts to get rid of the Evergreen Terrace and grant them "other relief" deemed proper.