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## St. Bernard Parish issues permits for mixed-income apartments

Published: Thursday, October 01, 2009, 8:38 PM Updated: Thursday, October 01, 2009, 11:10 PM

By **Chris Kirkham, The Times-Picayune**

After a months-long legal dispute between a fair housing group and St. Bernard Parish officials over attempts to block four mixed-income apartment complexes in Chalmette, the parish has issued the building permits necessary to begin construction.



Daniel Erath/The Times-Picayune archive 'This is an important step forward,' said Morgan Williams, an attorney for the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center.

U.S. District Judge Ginger Berrigan ruled last month that **St. Bernard Parish government officials were in contempt of court** and in violation of the federal Fair Housing Act by continuing to oppose a developer's bid to get a routine resubdivision of the four properties, a procedural step needed to begin construction.

In the Sept. 11 ruling, Berrigan laid out specific deadlines for parish officials and the developers, Provident Realty Advisors of Dallas, to resolve outstanding building permit details including a drainage plan, a fire department review and a parking plan.

The last detail, the drainage plan, was completed Thursday. The St. Bernard Parish Council held a special meeting Thursday with attorneys behind closed doors during which the council, lawyers and administration agreed to issue the permits.

St. Bernard's attorneys have appealed Berrigan's ruling to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Attorneys had asked the 5th Circuit for a quicker review of their case, but were denied that request last week.

Morgan Williams, an attorney with the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center, which brought the case against St. Bernard, said, "This is an important step forward for open housing in the metro area, and we hope that St. Bernard Parish officials will continue down this path in regards to other matters in the future."

Parish President Craig Taffaro said the parish will continue to "vigorously" seek the appeal, but that he believed a higher court should have heard the case before the parish had to comply with Berrigan's order in issuing the permits.

"Another sad day for St. Bernard Parish government in that the constitutional rights of a local governing authority have again been stripped away by the court's mandate," he said. "While I respect the judicial system's place to interpret and apply judgment in law, I believe that our due process to be heard at a higher court should be considered before potential irreparable harm is done."

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