



Everything New Orleans

Website asks New Orleans area residents to weigh in on St. Bernard Parish housing practices

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By **Benjamin Alexander-Bloch, The Times-Picayune**

Following St. Bernard Parish President Craig Taffaro's **meeting with civil rights leaders** last week, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center has launched a campaign to "counteract the racially discriminatory housing practices of St. Bernard."

Entitled "**Enough is Enough St. Bernard**," it seeks to encourage both St. Bernard residents and those who live outside St. Bernard, **to tell Taffaro** and the Parish Council to welcome racial minorities into the parish. The fair housing center's website on the new initiative is available at **<http://www.gnofairhousing.org/enoughisenough.html>**

Parish officials maintain that St. Bernard already has some affordable housing and that increasing it would reduce property values and undermine the single-family character of the community.

But a federal judge and the the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development have accused St. Bernard of engaging in **racial discriminatory** housing practices.

Judge Ginger Berrigan has often found the parish in violation of the Fair Housing Act and related civil rights laws and has ordered the parish to stop such practices. HUD has threatened to block hundred of millions in federal funding to St. Bernard -- and much more potentially to the state of Louisiana -- if the parish does not alter its ways.

St. Bernard has **attempted to block multifamily housing developments and rental units since Hurricane Katrina**, when about 80 percent of the parish's housing stock was severely damaged and the council began passing laws to direct regrowth.

"For five years now St. Bernard Parish officials have fought tooth and nail to keep the doors of St. Bernard Parish closed to renters," according to the fair housing center's "Enough is Enough" campaign. "These actions disproportionately prevent African Americans from moving to the Parish because African-American households in the greater New Orleans area are significantly more likely than white households in the area

to live in rental housing."

Most recently, St. Bernard has continued its long opposition to four mixed-income, multifamily apartments. That prompted Berrigan to issue a restraining order against the parish barring it from further interfering in the apartments' development.

"My issue is not racially based, " Taffaro said during his Friday meeting with civil rights leaders, explaining his opposition to the developments. "I do not support segregation. I do not support 'separate but equal,' " he said, adding that he fully supports integration.

Taffaro said he is disheartened that there are still, in 2011, portions of the population who feel "disenfranchised."

At its April 5 council meeting, the Parish Council **is expected to rescind** zoning ordinances that have raised HUD's ire by restricting multifamily and rental units.

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