

BETHEL HOUSING CAUSES RIFT

ASHA, Bethel People In Heated Rivalry on Conditions for Housing

A threatened boycott by Bethel citizens of the housing development for the poor being built by the Alaska State Housing Authority has forced that agency to withdraw some of the conditions it seeks to impose on the tenants once they move in.

Bethel Homeowners Association and the Bethel Housing Committee, the latter handpicked by the ASHA, have spear-

headed heated complaints against the conditions they thought were, or would be, intolerable on the tenants if imposed.

Back about two years ago, the State and the Association of Village Council Presidents, a native organization composed of over 50 villages in southwestern Alaska, negotiated for a plot of land on which to build a housing development for the poor.

In the negotiation, the AVCP asked guarantee of land ownership for the tenant once he paid for the house in which he lived.

The AVCP also asked that Bethel people have the right to suggest designs for the houses, and rights to operate the housing development under some local control.

ASHA, at that time, agreed to the guarantees but now the agency is being accused of having "shunted" those guarantees and has drawn up conditions on its own designed to govern the tenants.

The set of conditions that drew most of the heavy fire were those that would affect eviction of tenants. Some of these were:

- The eviction of the tenant would be affected when the family failed to meet its first-of-the-month house payment.

- When only one member of the household should reside in the house.

- If the family's income exceeds \$7,000 for one year.

Other conditions included were that leases on houses would

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be on a one-month basis and visitors or boarders would not be allowed.

Another ASHA plan Bethel citizens objected to was that the houses would be built 15 to 20 feet apart in clusters. The local people contended that they would be too close together.

One person reportedly said that the houses were so close together that if a fire occurred in one, all in the cluster would burn down. Another person contended the house would be hard to service because of high drifts of snow.

"During the winter, servicing those clusters would mean plowing out a lot of snow," he said.

Another person said that the tenants would not have room to tie up dogs or to build smoke-houses if they wished.

Bethel people also complained that although the housing development was planned in Anchorage some two years ago, they were not notified of those plans until last September.

It was about a month ago that Bethel residents learned about the conditions ASHA would impose on the tenants of the housing project. That was the time when the present furor began.

As a result, complaints and criticisms flew thick and fast between Bethel and Anchorage office of ASHA. Weekly meetings between Bethel people and the agency officials became commonplace. Still ASHA was reluctant to make changes.

Then at a meeting last month, a threat to boycott the housing development by Bethel residents resulted.

"If nobody stays in those houses out there, they're stuck," said Eddie Hoffman of Bethel regarding ASHA.

This threat of public rejection of the housing program brought quick response from Anchorage and two days of heated negotiations took place.

The following changes resulted from the negotiations:

-If a tenant earns in the excess of \$7,000 in one year between several poor years, it will not be a basis for eviction. His rent will be computed on the average earnings during several years.

-House payments will rise only if ASHA's operating costs rise.

-In case of damage to a house of more than \$25, and if ASHA corrects the damage, payment will be made in monthly installments.

-Homeowners Association of Bethel will decide if the tenants can have visitors or boarders, approve changes in the house, oversee maintenance of the house and grounds, approve fish caches and placement of dogs.

Negotiations are still reported to be going on over the one-month lease basis. Bethel residents would like to have that condition changed to a one-year lease so a tenant can have a leeway of a month's notice of eviction.