

**SOCIAL SERVICES**

### Housing authority feels the squeeze

By EVAN GOODENOW  
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Hard times are making the Fort Wayne Housing Authority's already difficult mission tougher.

Skyrocketing foreclosure rates and increasing poverty rates combined with a lack of federal taxpayer dollars have left the authority unable to meet housing demands, said Maynard Scales, authority executive director. Scales cites the period between Feb. 15 and March 15 as a good example: The authority opened up its waiting list and received about 2,000 housing applications. Scales said the most they can accommodate is about 300.

"We could've taken in 5,000 if we had left it open. There's just not enough units," Scales said. "Affordable housing is a priority that we can't afford to ignore much longer."

But critics say public housing needs have been ignored by the Bush administration-led Department of Housing and Urban Development. The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, a lobbying group with a membership of some 21,000 housing authorities and community development agencies, said HUD has consistently underfunded local housing authorities.

The association said  
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### By the numbers

- ◆ 1,000: Approximate number of Fort Wayne Housing Authority units.
- ◆ 2,879: Maximum number of Section 8 vouchers authority can use.
- ◆ 2,000: Approximate number of people on waiting list for public housing.
- ◆ \$2.8 million: Current authority daily operations budget
- ◆ \$12 million: Section 8 budget.

Source: Fort Wayne Housing Authority

**DIVERSIFICATION, EFFICIENCY ARE KEYS**

# WHAT DOWNTURN?

*Residential work has slowed, but contractors are optimistic*

By BLAKE SEBRING  
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Like everyone else struggling within the current economy, the members of the Association of Builders and Contractors have had to diversify, become more efficient and depend on each other more. Most of the members have been through something like this before.

"This isn't the first goat-roping time we've had like this," said Bill Arnold of L.A. Electricians at a recent ABC Northeast meeting. "My gosh, we started business in 1988 and people said we were nuts for starting, and we've grown every year since. Every 10 years or so you're going to have a correction. I don't know how deep this is going, but anybody with a brain could see with all the building and residential guys it had to hit the wall somewhere."

ABC is a professional construction trade association dedicated to the Merit Shop philosophy and to the free-trade enterprise system. There are about 100 companies locally involved with the organization, 500 in the state and 24,000 nationally. Anyone working in a construction-related field can join, including accountants and lawyers.

"We actually do a lot of research on this because so much of our market was residential, lot development and new-home sales," said Brian Brown of D.A. Brown Engineering Consultants. "Based on the numbers I have, I think that right now we are at a zero inventory point for new homes and lots. The last year and a half in Allen County, we've worked off the inventory we had in the years when we were building too many. The question at this point is how far below zero inventory we will go before primarily the financial institutions realize that it's OK to start doing more work again and selling houses and buying houses."

Brown doesn't believe it's going to change this year. Contractors are working 12 to 18 months ahead, and everyone is concerned about 2009.

"It seemed like everything overbuilt for a few years," said

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By Brian Tombaugh of The News-Sentinel  
An Amish framing crew from Lengacher Bros. works on the roof of a home this spring for Farmington Homes in Foxwood addition, off Wheelock Road.

### Association of Builders and Contractors

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*Lower housing prices keep cost of living lower in Fort Wayne*

By HANNAH REXROTH  
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Fort Wayne residents enjoy one of the lowest costs of living in the country.

According to Sperling's Bestplaces, a cost of living calculator, the price of living in Fort Wayne is about 25 percent lower than the national average. This difference has been why the city is listed in several national rankings.

In 1998, Money Magazine listed Fort Wayne as being the fourth-best place to live out of 300 U.S. cities. In March 1999, Business Week magazine ranked Fort Wayne second among 125 cities in the nation for financial security.

"The big driver here is housing cost," said John Stafford of the Fort Wayne Community Research Institute. "The prime variable in the different costs of living in various communities is the price of housing."

For example, the price difference between a car in Denver and the same car in Fort Wayne is negligible, Stafford said. But the price difference between a house in Denver and a comparable one here is significant. Stafford said one reason is that housing costs appreciated less rapidly here in the 1980s and 1990s than they did in other parts of the country. "The more robust the economy, the more escalation you will have in housing prices," he said.

Another reason for the low cost is the availability of land. "We're a community without many constraints on our housing market," Stafford said. "There's lots of land and lots of utilities available. We have lots of room to add new housing, and we've done that."

The opposite situation exists in cities such as San Francisco, where available space is limited. "With cities on the east and west coasts, it's very constrained, thus supply and demand come into play," Stafford said. "We don't have supply-and-demand limits like that."

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**HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION**

# Builders group offers education, support to members

Goal is to help them build high-quality homes at best price.

By CINDY LARSON  
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How does an association created to support home builders also benefit home buyers?

By promoting affordability and high standards in home building, the organization helps builders produce the highest-quality houses at the best possible price. And that makes home buyers very happy.

The organization is the nonprofit Home Builders Association of Fort Wayne, chartered in 1944 and associated with state and national home builders associations. Its mission is to "promote a positive atmosphere for the building in-

dustry" by providing education and promotional support to its members.

Matt Lancia is president of the local association and also project manager for Lancia Homes. His position is voluntary with the association, which has two staff members and about 550 members, about a third of which are builders. The other two-thirds are associate members, such as carpet and paint suppliers.

One of the association's biggest responsibilities is to provide ongoing education to members. The local association sponsors monthly code seminars at the Allen County Building Department that are open to all HBA members.

Other seminars focus on building-related issues. For example, in April the lo-

cal association arranged for the National Association of Home Builders to present a Certified Green Professional seminar in Fort Wayne. The NAHB offers five certifications for home builders. "Better credentials show that we're willing to do the latest and greatest in new-home construction," Lancia said.

In addition to education, the local association promotes builders through the Parade of Homes and the Town and Country New Home Tour.

Lancia said the association's promotional efforts are significant for smaller builders. "It's great for someone who doesn't build a lot of homes," he said.

Although the housing market has been hit hard by the sub-prime mortgage

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By Cindy Larson of The News-Sentinel  
Matt Lancia is president of the Home Builders Association of Fort Wayne. He's also project manager for Lancia Homes.