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HUD-on-Hudson

The feds tell Westchester County how to run local housing policy.

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Outside the Big Apple, Westchester County—the liberal-leaning suburb that stretches from Yonkers to Port Chester to Bedford—is the most racially diverse county in the state of New York. It also has an excellent record when it comes to subsidized housing, something for which it had been praised by Republican and Democratic Administrations. Which makes it an odd target in the Obama Administration's efforts to racially engineer American neighborhoods.

Yet that's the hand the county has been dealt following a court order this month that it comply with the demands of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. At issue is the interpretation of a 2009 settlement Westchester reached with HUD over the availability of "affordable housing." The deal required the county to spend more than \$50 million on 750 new subsidized housing units over seven years, mostly in areas with low black or Hispanic populations, and market those units to minorities.

Three years later, Westchester has 569 units in the pipeline and is

building them ahead of schedule. But that hasn't been enough to satisfy HUD. It also wants the county to apply a line in the settlement that calls on it to "promote" legislation that would forbid landlords from rejecting tenants who use federally subsidized Section 8 housing vouchers to pay rent.

The Board of Legislators considered such a bill in 2009 but it was never voted on. Similar legislation was vetoed the following year by new county executive Rob Astorino, which led HUD to withhold millions of dollars in community grants to the county. So the county sued, noting that "promote" doesn't mean "sign." In March a district court sided with the county, but HUD appealed and got the ruling reversed in May. The Second Court of Appeals recently granted Westchester an expedited appeal but lifted a stay on the May ruling.

Now the lawyer overseeing the settlement has insisted that Mr. Astorino comply with the May ruling, no doubt as a way of rendering the expedited appeal moot. HUD is also demanding that

Westchester provide a list of legal tools it can use should it ever discover evidence of racially exclusionary zoning within its borders. Never mind that a county-commissioned study of 853 zoning districts within Westchester's 43 municipalities produced zero evidence of any exclusionary practices, anywhere.

Nobody should stand for discriminatory housing practices, but the days in which blacks, Jews and other minorities were systematically kept out of suburban neighborhoods are long behind us. Nor is it evidence of racism if landlords fear that people who use Section 8 vouchers to help pay the rent might not meet their criteria as financially reliable tenants.

The record of government-mandated social engineering, abroad and in the U.S., isn't inspiring. Americans did not overcome a legacy of racial discrimination so that Uncle Sam could force local officials to go hunting for ghost trails, much less arrange the racial palette of their communities according to the tastes of Washington bureaucrats.