**TENANTS’ RIGHTS AND OPTIONS AFTER**

**PREPAYMENT AT PINETREE APARTMENTS**

This handout has information to help you make choices once the mortgage on Pinetree has been prepaid and it is no longer a USDA property. The expected date of prepayment is on or about August 5, 2012.

**Rental Assistance**:

Tenants can stay in their apartments at their same rent until their current lease expires. Tenants can also apply for a USDA voucher to keep their rent affordable after USDA notifies them of their eligibility for a voucher. This process and the timeline is described below under “USDA Voucher.” See also the section on “LOPE letters” below.

Tenants who have current rental assistance and would like to move can transfer their Rental Assistance to another USDA property. They are given priority to move into another USDA property, as described below under “Letter of Priority Entitlement.” However this must be done within 4 months of the date of prepayment, which USDA states is expected to be on or about August 5, 2012. The 4 months would then end on December 5, 2012. A list of USDA properties in Whatcom, Skagit and Island counties is attached.

**USDA Voucher**:

Tenants can apply for a USDA voucher after USDA notifies them they are eligible for a voucher. They do not have to apply for it immediately, but to avoid a gap in subsidy between their current lease and getting a voucher, tenants should apply at least 60 days before their current lease expires. The USDA voucher gives tenants 12 months of rental subsidy to help keep their rent affordable. USDA may provide the voucher for additional one year periods, if funding is renewed. **The voucher is a good benefit for most people and you likely should apply for it unless you have found other affordable housing.** Tenants can remain in their same apartment and use the voucher to get subsidized rent. They can also take the voucher to another apartment complex if it will accept the voucher.

**Tenants must begin using the voucher within 60 days of receiving it, or request an extension.** If a tenant is looking for another apartment to rent with the voucher and has not found one within the 60 days, the tenant can ask for one 60-day extension, giving a total of 120 days to locate another apartment to move into with the voucher.

Tenants cannot use a voucher along with Section 8 or Public Housing rental assistance, but can apply for housing with the Bellingham/Whatcom County Housing Authorities to get ongoing subsidized housing. The Housing Authority’s phone number is (360) 676-6887.

**Letter of Priority Entitlement (LOPE)**:

Tenants can apply for a LOPE letter any time within one year of August 5, 2021. A LOPE letter will give the tenant priority for 60 days at the top of a waiting list for an apartment in another USDA Rural Development property. Tenants can transfer their current Rental Assistance along with a LOPE letter. Finding another USDA property with vacant units can be challenging. To assist any tenant wanting to do so, a list of USDA properties in northwest Washington is attached.

***Information about your rights as a tenant, or regarding the USDA voucher or LOPE letter, is available from the Northwest Justice Project’s Bellingham office at (360) 734-8680.***



 1814 Cornwall Avenue

Bellingham, WA 98225

(360) 734-8680