

MIX-UP

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ment, because there were concerns that it might not be "consistent" with long-term city housing plans on the West Side.

With the city manager balking at the project, the landlord of Lexington Hills visited City Hall to seek the support of Maloof, a fellow real estate broker.

"We found out that maybe we were going to get some resistance from the city's bureaucratic structure," landlord Robert Monge said. "That's when I went to see the mayor."

Monge said he appealed to Maloof from the standpoint of a struggling realtor as well as one who saw a need for more public housing in Peoria.

"I presented my case, and he didn't see anything wrong with it, I guess," the landlord explained. "The

one who goes after it the hardest usually gets whatever it is, over the competition."

After Monge's lobbying efforts, Maloof approved the Lexington Hills development in a brief letter to HUD that directly contradicted the city manager.

Less than three weeks after Daken aired his concerns, Maloof wrote HUD that the city had "no objections" to the development and that it did not conflict with long-term plans for the West Side neighborhood.

The mayor was unavailable for comment this week. But the city staffer whose office drafted Maloof's letter said the mayor got caught up in a "confused mess" and actually might not have realized what he was approving.

City Special Projects Manager Mike McKnight said the federal government's request for city approval of the Lexington Hills conversion was

vague and could have been interpreted in different ways.

McKnight, who said he was unaware of Daken's concerns, too, said he personally would have called HUD to clarify the request before issuing an approval — something the mayor apparently did not do.

"Administratively, it was routine as heck," McKnight said. "It became a particular problem after the fact."

The fact that Lexington Hills had been converted to public housing did not become known to Maloof and other city leaders until the angry neighborhood homeowners took their complaints to a Peoria City Council meeting this spring.

At that point, the city agreed to amend its long-term housing plan to specifically exclude the West Side neighborhood from any further government-subsidized projects.

But the unsatisfied homeowners opted to take legal action against the Lexington Hills project, arguing that

the added influx of public housing is lowering property values, reducing the quality of life, increasing crime and overcrowding a nearby school.

If the homeowners win an injunction cutting off public subsidies from their new neighbors, the estimated 350 tenants now in Lexington Hills could be displaced, including several senior citizens and working mothers with children.

"It would be a crime," Monge said. "They're all nice people, and they're not causing problems for anybody."

But homeowner spokesman William E. O'Brien said he thinks the tenants easily could be relocated to an area of the city without as much public housing as his West Side neighborhood.

"The federal government is not going to throw those people out of their homes," he said. "And it's not our intention to make them homeless."