

# Government Sues Glastonbury on Bias in Housing

By ANDREW KREIG

Glastonbury, a mostly white Hartford suburb, was charged in a Justice Department suit Monday with racial bias in housing and land use.

The action adds Glastonbury to its neighbor, Manchester, and eight other communities accused of bias by the department since 1969.

Glastonbury has violated the Fair Housing Act of 1968 by preventing development of racially integrated low-income and moderate-income housing projects, claimed the civil suit filed in Hartford's federal court.

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The town's 1978 rejection of the 71-unit River Meadows project and 1979 rejection of the 90-unit Nye Road project were cited in the suit as examples of racial bias. The suit said rejection of the projects came while the town was approving higher income multi-family housing that is expected to be occupied primarily by whites.

Glastonbury officials Monday denied that there was a racial motivation in the town's housing decisions.

Their response was similar to that of Manchester leaders when the federal government brought a still-pending housing bias suit against it last year.

Glastonbury Town Manager Richard S. Borden said the town has no plan to keep itself white.

Donald C. Peach, former town manager for both Glastonbury and Hartford, said he thinks racial fear was a factor in Glastonbury's rejection of the two federally subsidized projects.

The federal suit seeks a court order requiring the town to take steps to develop "an appropriate number of racially integrated low and moderate income housing." The number of units of such housing would be left to the court's discretion if the suit is successful.

Both the River Meadows and Nye Road projects were proposed for northern Glastonbury. Residents of the area have protested that it already has too much high-density development.

Glastonbury, with a population of 27,000, has just one low-income public housing project for families, the 199-unit Welles Village complex built to house workers during World War II. There also is a low-income project for the elderly, the 50-unit Knox Lane project.

Glastonbury, whose rolling hills gave it the water power to become an industrial area in the 18th century, later became better known for its fruit orchards and poultry farms after water mills ceased to be a factor in industry.

Although the 53-square-mile town increasingly has become a bedroom community for well-paid people working outside it, it retains strong ties to its rural past.

Residents of the southwestern part of town, called Nayaug, have claimed



**RICHARD S. BORDEN**  
Denies Racial Motive

with pride — but apparently with some exaggeration — that they have "more horses than people." Partly in jest, they have fought to prevent such government modernization efforts as the paving of a road in that area.

The Glastonbury Town Council voted in 1978 to reject the River Meadows project for low-income and moderate-income housing on a 12-acre parcel at Pratt Street and Naubuc Avenue.

Opponents said the site was endangered by flooding. However, a town planning assistant said that only an area planned for recreation would be inundated in the type of flooding expected to occur once every 100 years.

Last year, the 17-acre Nye Road site was rejected by the town's Plan and Zoning Commission.

A civic group opposing the project said there were already 405 apartment units, 199 Welles Village apartments and 54 duplex homes within that one square mile near Glastonbury's center. Developers of the project later claimed they had been "treated unfairly and shabbily" by the town.

The 1970 U.S. census reported that more than 99 percent of Glastonbury's population was white, said U.S. Attorney Richard Blumenthal in announcing the suit after a federal probe that began in September 1979.

Glastonbury's objective, at least in part, was to maintain its virtually all-white character, he said. The 1970 census showed that the population of Hartford, situated five miles from Glastonbury's border, was 28 percent black and 7.5 percent Hispanic.

Peach, who last year took the job of running Hartford's city government after 19 years in Glastonbury, supported both disputed housing projects while he was town manager of the suburb.

In a telephone interview from his Hartford home, he recalled that the discussions about the projects were "very heated."

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# Glastonbury Named in Bias Suit

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"I'm convinced race was a factor," Peach said.

Almost all public comments by opponents avoided the topic of race, "but there were many private statements along that line," said Peach, who in June resigned his Hartford job amid stormy relations with the City Council majority.

Another former Glastonbury official, who asked not to be identified, said the town's officials rejected proposals for zoning reasons that had some validity — but that the officials were pressured at times by bigots.

Glastonbury officials, including Council Majority Leader Constantine Constantine, expressed confidence that they would prevail in the suit.

The federal government has prevailed on all seven suits resolved, said Justice Department spokesman John Wilson in Washington. The suits, each slightly different, all involve claims of racial restrictions in land use, he said. Most of them were against suburbs of major cities, although two suits were claims of race bias against Indians in rural regions. Those involve the Lummi Reservation in Washington state and the Sault Ste. Marie area of Michigan, he said.

The other adjudicated federal suits involve these suburbs and cities, he said: Chickasaw, Ala. (Mobile); Black Jack, Mo. (St. Louis); Parma, Ohio (Cleveland), and Lackawanna, Pa. (Buffalo, N.Y.).

The pending suits, he said, are: Dunkirk, N.Y.; Birmingham, Mich. (Detroit), and Manchester (Hartford).

Sworn pretrial statements from witnesses in the Manchester case were virtually completed last month, and the case is expected to go to trial in Hartford's federal courthouse early next year.

In that case, the Justice Department joined a suit brought by the Hartford Legal Aid Society claiming that Manchester's residents voted to withdraw from a federal housing program in part because of race bias.

The Justice Department, depending on its leadership, could decide at any time to drop a suit. The first suit was brought by the Republican Nixon administration over a zoning issue in Lackawanna.

Wilson, the Justice Department spokesman, said he did not know what the Reagan administration would say about the litigation, filed under part of the civil rights law passed by Congress in 1968.