The Housing Department seems to be a step ahead of both former Gov. Rafael Hernandez Colon and Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy in dealing with tenants of public housing projects who want to own their own homes.

Hernandez Colon, apparently unaware of what the Housing Department is up to, told tenants of Arecibo projects Sunday that he and Kennedy are "studying a plan to sell easements to their residents."

Ismauro Velazquez, a Popular Democratic Party press official, said later this week that Kennedy will spell out details of the plan today, while on a campaign stop here.

Housing Department officials, replying to Hernandez Colon's remarks, which were published in a Spanish-language newspaper, said the agency is currently selling more than 1,000 rental units to tenants of 14 public housing projects at bargain prices.

The agency plans to sell an additional 1,700 units at 10 other projects by November for $1 apiece, a Housing Department official said.

Meanwhile, the Housing Department has received authorization from a federal agency to sell 3,000 units at 34 other projects at their "book value," he added.

Acting Secretary Jose J. Andreu and other Housing Department officials said residents of six projects have already bought their homes at $1 a piece, 263 during the Hernandez Colon administration and 226 since 1977. These projects, like the other 10 $1-per-unit projects to go on sale before November, are Commonwealth-built projects whose mortgages have already been paid off.

Meanwhile, residents of nine federally funded projects have acquired their homes at book value, which is considerably less than their market value, by taking on responsibility for the unpaid balance of the mortgages.

Edilberto Lopatequi, head of the Public Housing Administration, said 65 families took that option during the Hernandez Colon administration at four "Turnkey III" projects. Since the beginning of 1977, Lopatequi said, 326 families have bought homes at those projects and at four other Turnkey III projects.

In the past year, Lopategui said, 46 families out of 74 have bought their single-family house which were built under a different program, at Glenview Gardens in Ponce. Glenview Gardens is the first of 38 projects, involving a total of 3,675 units, to go on sale under the federal 511 Program, he said.

The Glenview Gardens houses range in price from $11,000 to $15,000, according to Esther Rosado, a Public Housing Administration technician.

At present 326 units out of a total of 679 are for sale at $1 apiece at six Commonwealth-built projects. These include 43 units at three projects that first went on sale during the Hernandez Colon administration.

These are the Coll Y Toste project in Arecibo, San Jose No. 16 in Rio Piedras and San Juan, and Encanto de Coamo. Two other units in those projects are in use as offices.

Also available at $1 are 39 units in the Lopez Ricard project in Rio Piedras and one unit at Hato Grande in San Lorenzo. Four other units in those projects are set aside for use as offices.

Hector Gonzalez, an assistant to Lopatequi, said the Housing Department is "committed" to selling 1,700 other units for $1 apiece by November at the following Commonwealth-built projects: Jose de Diego, Agualaura; Zeno Ganda, Arecibo; Benigno Fernandez Garcia, Caguas; Manuel J. Rivera, Coamo; Francisco S. Moran, Roosevelt, Mayaguez; Francisco M. Citron, Salinas; Las Lomas, San German; and San Jose No. 13 and No. 17, San Juan.

Since the Housing Department has managed to sell only 561 units for $1 over the past seven years, Garcia acknowledged, it might have trouble meeting its goal of selling another 1,700 $1 units in eight months.

Lopategui's predecessor, Arturo Diaz Neval, said 14 months ago that the Housing Department expected to sell about 2,500 Commonwealth-built units for $1 by December 1980.

The eight Turnkey III projects with rental units available for purchase at book value include four that launched sales during the Hernandez Colon administration. These are Miraflores, Bayamon; Notre Dame, Caguas; Las Vegas, Caguas, and Ramirez de Arellano, Mayaguez.

The other Turnkey III projects with available units are Brisas de Añasco, Añasco; Vista Azul, Arecibo; Jardines de Quintana, Hato Rey, and Dolmas del Marques, Vega Baja.

The unsold rental units in the 14 projects currently up for sale range from detached houses to high-rise apartments.