

Homewood has crisis in housing, group says

By Barbara White Stack
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Contending that there is a housing crisis in Homewood, a 2-year-old non-profit group has devised a plan that it hopes will make that neighborhood the next Northside.

The group, Pittsburgh Housing Development Association, wants the city to obtain title to vacant lots and abandoned, tax-delinquent houses there, its president, E.L. Whitted said.

The association would then oversee restoration of the vacant buildings and construction of new houses on vacant lots and would manage the properties afterwards.

The association has scheduled a meeting for 6 p.m. Sunday at the Homewood Carnegie Library to discuss the plan. Mayor Calliguri, City Council members, and representatives of the Urban Redevelopment Authority and city Planning Department were invited, as well as community organizations.

"We [Homewood] have been neglected in terms of housing," Whitted said.

Mary Reilly, director of housing for the city Urban Redevelopment Authority, said Homewood has not received the same treatment as the Northside, but it has not been ignored. "There has been a lot of housing activity that has gone on in Homewood in the past decade," she said, noting that it was one of six city neighborhoods selected about three years ago for a concentration of redevelopment activities.

Ray Reaves, city assistant planning director, said Homewood probably has received more redevelopment money than nearly any other city neighborhood.

Over the past six years, Homewood received \$11.5 million in low-interest housing renovation loans and for street repairs and playground improvements through the Homewood North Project.

It also received 499 home improvement loans for nearly \$2 million in another program.

It got \$650,000 in rental housing improvement loans, more than any other area of the city, according to Reaves.

This year the city also put together a \$4 million package, including \$2.8 million in state Department of Community Affairs grants, to revitalize Homewood's business district on Frankstown Road and Homewood Avenue.

"Every neighborhood in the city could use more funds (for revitalization)," Reaves said, but added that he felt the most important project for Homewood right now is the commercial district rehabilitation.

He said the commercial district is the most blighted area in Homewood and its improvement may encourage repairs in the surrounding residential districts.

Whitted said, "We understand the commercial project is very vital. But housing development programs must be encouraged for the total revitalization of Homewood."

Under the association's plans, the renovated homes would be rented to low and moderate income people.

Part of the money for the project would be raised by the association through raffles and solicitation of corporate contributions, Whitted said. The remainder would come from city coffers.

The association would submit a budget for the program proposal to City Council within a week after the meeting with city and neighborhood officials, Whitted said, and the association's plan may be modified to include recommendations made at the meeting.

Whitted said the association is now attempting to raise money to repair and rent one house on Hamilton Avenue in Homewood, but that it has no other experience in rehabilitation and management.