

HUD investigates city's use of federal funds

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is investigating allegations that the City of Rochester violated HUD regulations and misused federal community development monies.

The allegations are tied to the use of community block grant funds to provide low-interest loans for the construction of the Hyatt Regency Hotel and the renovation of the Sibley Building in downtown Rochester.

On Jan. 13, staff members of the HUD Office of the Inspector General met with city officials to discuss the allegations raised by Metro-Act, a Rochester-based community action group.

According to Gordon Dutter, vice president of Metro-Act, the City of Rochester has agreed to provide a \$1.5 million loan at a 3-percent interest rate to Wilmorite Inc. for the renovation of the Sibley Building.

Dutter said that in 1990 the city had made a \$6 million loan for the construction of the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

"This is money that was supposed to be used to help low- to moderate-income people, not corporations," Dutter charged.

Those monies, Dutter argued, are intended for housing and community development projects that would directly help low- to moderate-income people.

The HUD investigation is standard procedure in response to complaints, noted Paul Kane, regional inspector general for HUD.

However, in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Kane said the current investigation is only preliminary. A formal audit would be required only if the investigation shows improprieties in the handling of HUD monies.

"We've been asked to look into allegations as they pertain to the program (in Rochester)," Kane explained from his New York City office. "We will take whatever action that we deem appropriate based on what we learn."

Kane estimated that his department would determine whether an audit is warranted within the next few weeks.

Jeffrey Swain, the City of Rochester's commissioner of community development, said he believes that HUD will find no evidence of wrongdoing.

"I'm confident that the inspector general will determine the city has acted according to regulations," Swain said.

Swain contended that HUD regulations allow such loans if they help fulfill HUD criteria by aiding low- to moderate-income people. He observed that both projects would meet that standard through the creation of jobs and by improving downtown Rochester.

"Many people who live near downtown work in downtown," Swain observed. "We feel that making a healthy downtown area is necessary to these nearby neighborhoods."

According to Dutter, the Metro-Act complaint arose out of discussions last summer by a group known as the Rochester Community Block Grant Coalition. The coalition — which includes the Catholic Family Center, the Office



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Eduardo Barrow, community organizer for the Spanish Action Coalition in Rochester, stands in front of the former St. Michael's Convent on North Clinton Avenue. Barrow believes that the building is one of many in the surrounding neighborhood that could be reconditioned into housing and commercial units.

of the Spanish Apostolate, and Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Rochester — met to provide input into the city's five-year Community Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS).

The group argued for more money to be targeted for developing housing through construction and renovation, according to Sally McCoy, the coalition's director.

The coalition pointed out that more than 18,000 low-income families in Ro-

chester have to pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing; that more than 600 families will lose their housing due to foreclosures and defaults in 1992; and that the city has 6,000 substandard housing units and more than 1,000 vacant houses.

McCoy said the group submitted a number of recommendations after a draft version of the document was proposed Aug. 21, 1991. She claimed that few of those recommendations were included in the final document, which was approved by HUD Dec. 30, 1991.

In addition, McCoy said, the final document was vaguely worded, lacking specific plans to address the community's housing needs.

But Swain noted that the draft version of the plan was based in part on the coalition's initial input. The final document included additional proposals made by the group, he added.

Furthermore, Swain explained, the five-year plan is intended as a general guide for the city, not as a specific blueprint. The city will be using the plan for developing specific proposals in the next 90 days as it begins actually designating how the HUD monies will be spent, he said.

Swain pointed out that the five-year plan is to be reviewed on an annual basis and that revisions can be made as needed to address some of the issues raised by the coalition.

Dutter said that he and the coalition members will try to provide input into the annual review of the city's housing plan, and will be monitoring the specific spending plans as they come before the city council.

Urban parishes in Rochester to consider clustering

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Representatives from two groups of parishes — one in the city's northeast region, the other in the southwest — have begun meeting to discuss clustering, a cooperative relationship in which parishes formally share staff and other resources.

Observers in both regions noted that the clergy shortage and a desire to pool funding and staffing for parish ministries are among the reasons behind the clustering discussions.

Yet diocesan and parish officials both stressed that none of the parishes involved in the clustering talks are now slated to be closed.

The three southwest parishes — St. Augustine, 410 Chili Ave.; St. Monica, 831 Genesee St.; and Our Lady of Good Counsel, 640 Brooks Ave. — are all located in the city's 19th Ward.

A planning team comprising representatives from each of the three parishes is scheduled to submit a number of clustering proposals to Bishop Matthew H. Clark by mid-February. The bishop will choose one of the proposals in March, and the cluster would be in place by July 1, according to information from the diocesan Department of Communications.

In the northeast, representatives from the following parishes met in November and December, and will meet again on Monday, Feb. 3: Our Lady of Perpetual Help, 1095 Joseph Ave.; St. Michael, 869 N. Clinton Ave.; St. Bridget, 175 St. Bridget's Drive; Corpus Christi, 864 E. Main St.; Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, 53 Ontario St.; Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier, 34 Teresa St.; and St. Andrew, 923 Portland Ave.

Support staff from such diocesan of-

fices as Parish Support Ministries and the Urban Services office are assisting the representatives in the planning process.

In part, both groups of parishes have embarked upon the clustering process to head off the effects of a clergy shortage.

The pastors of the 19th Ward parishes initiated their clustering process in the fall of 1991, when they realized that two of the parishes' pastors would leave their positions by June of 1992, according to Sister St. Luke Hardy, SSJ, parish administrator at St. Augustine's Church.

Sister Hardy took over the parish's administrative duties Jan. 1 after Father Robert P. Ring resigned the pastorate to become diocesan director of priest personnel.

Meanwhile, Father Louis A. Sirriani, pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel, has scheduled a sabbatical to begin in June, 1992.

In addition, Sister Hardy noted, the 19th Ward parishes previously have participated in cooperative ventures. For example, St. Augustine's and St. Monica's shared a business manager at one time, she said.

Coupled with the proximity of each of the parishes to the other, the history of cooperation between the three churches bodes well for their future cooperation, noted Father Peter Clifford, director of diocesan Parish Support Ministries.

In the northeast, meanwhile, the diocese has asked each parish to consider with which other parishes they would like to cluster. Like the southwest parishes, these churches also face a potential clerical shortage, but with a twist — the region needs Spanish-speaking priests.

Father Clifford noted that the impe-

tus for clustering in the northeast grew, in part, out of discussions last year among Rochester pastors serving the Hispanic population. A number of the region's parishes contain large Hispanic populations.

The diocese, at the same time, expressed its concern to the pastors that it was unable to find a suitable priest for St. Michael's, Father Clifford observed. St. Michael's last had a pastor in June, 1991. After that pastor, Father Vincent Panepinto, left his position, a diocesan search for a Spanish-speaking replacement turned up no suitable candidates, Father Clifford said.

Since Father Panepinto's departure, St. Michael's liturgical services have been celebrated by Father Laurence C. Tracy, pastoral assistant to the diocesan Office of the Spanish Apostolate, and Father Robert T. Werth, pastor of St. Bridget's. Both priests were asked to fulfill those duties through June, 1992, Father Tracy said.

Another Spanish-speaking priest, Father Nicolas Menjivar, may leave his position as administrator of Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier in June. A native of El Salvador, Father Menjivar should learn whether he is to be reassigned there by February, accord-

ing to Father John W. Medico, a pastoral associate.

Father Tracy also noted that some of the northeast parishes are considering the possibility of sharing staff personnel in various parish ministries. Like the 19th Ward parishes, he observed, those in the northeast have cooperated on various projects in the past, especially during the 1970s when several inner-city churches were organized in the Council of Inner City Parishes.

But unlike the southwest parishes, the northeast parishes will probably not have a formal clustering plan in place by July 1, according to Father Clifford.

"People in parishes move through the clustering process at their own pace, and cannot necessarily be governed and limited by a calendar," he said.

He added that, unlike the 19th Ward parishes, the northeast parishes are greater in number and spread over a wider geographical area, creating obstacles to clustering not present in the southwest.

Father Tracy pointed out that each parish is working on establishing what services its members want to retain for the parish in the event of clustering.



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