

Ogden's plan to revitalize inner-city neighborhoods finally takes shape

A major goal is to invite middle-class families back

By CATHY MCKITRICK | Standard-Examiner staff

OGDEN -- Armed with recommendations from a recent study and \$1 million in federal funds, Ogden's neighborhood development team has begun to tackle the task of revitalizing the city's east-central neighborhoods.

"Our goal is to move the line," said Ogden neighborhood development manager Bill Wright. "Part of our strategy is to invite the middle class back that left the area 20 years ago."

Wright referred to Harrison Boulevard, the "line" that separates Ogden's more choice neighborhoods on the high East Bench from the less desirable blocks to the West.

The corner lot at 26th Street and Jackson Avenue once held an old, abandoned gas station.

Vacant for 60 years, it became the eyesore of the neighborhood and was one of two adjacent properties designated by neighbors as the weakest part of the block.

Recently, the city purchased the lot, and the cracked concrete has been removed. Soon a new home will go up in its place. The rental house next door went up for sale, the city purchased it and will soon sell it to be owner-occupied.

"It's a great example of what we're trying to do with the money. We're working off the strength that already exists," Wright said.

Working off existing strengths was one of several recommendations contained in the \$65,000 study, "Revitalizing East Central into a Community of Choice," which was conducted by czb, a small neighborhood planning firm based in Alexandria, Va.

The study scrutinized 80 square blocks between Washington and Harrison boulevards and 20th to 30th streets.

It said the area's strengths are concentrated along Van Buren Avenue between 25th Street and 29th Street.

The area's more distressed blocks stretch from 20th Street to 29th Street, between Washington and Monroe boulevards, with the exception of the recently renovated Jefferson Historic District.

In January, the city learned it had been awarded a \$1 million Economic Development Initiative grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, to help revitalize the east-central area.

"We did the czb study preparatory to the grant coming in to get a fresh-eyes approach on how to allocate those funds," Wright said. The city commissioned the study last fall and received the completed document in February.

The study indicates that revitalizing the entire area could take a decade or more and is somewhat dependent on the private market and the economy.

Since January, the City Council met with neighborhood development staff in several work sessions to discuss where to focus energies this first year.

Earlier this week, the council voted unanimously to adopt the 2004-2005 strategic plan, which targets the 18 blocks between Harrison Boulevard and Quincy Avenue, from 24th Street to 30th Street.



Properties abutting the Jefferson Avenue Historic District are also considered high priority.

"By establishing strongholds in neighborhoods and targeting weaknesses on the block, you can bring a whole block back," Wright said.

In 2004-2005, the city plans to use half of the funding as follows: \$250,000 for 20 new homes; \$100,000 for home-ownership incentives; \$70,000 for homeowner rehabilitation; \$25,000 for matching neighborhood grants; and \$55,000 to administer the program.

The other half of the grant will be held over for use the following year.

The city plans to complement first-year funding by using other available grants, in-kind donations, private mortgages and private funding to maximize the EDI dollars.

"We're partnering with Fannie Mae and HUD on foreclosures and also nonprofits who rehabilitate homes. When we do that we're just rolling the money. We're going to get multiple use out of the same dollars," Wright said.

All told, the leveraged funds will amount to \$9,171,250.

City Council Chairman Rick Safsten voiced excitement for the plan, and in particular, the neighborhood matching grants.

"Neighbors can get together and apply for a low-dollar grant for specific things to better their neighborhood," Safsten said. "Just getting the people together is a benefit, creating a catalyst that generates interaction. It has benefits way beyond just painting a fence."

Residents can match grants either with money or time. "We have one project going right now where we provide the paint and they supply the labor," Wright said.