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Philadelphia Housing Authority executive director Carl Greene, far right, joins state Rep. Michael McGeehan, left and state Rep. Michael Stack, center, explaining how the new Liddonfield homes will look after receiving \$3.5 million in state funds as part of the Liddonfield Renewal Project in Northeast Philadelphia on Friday.

—MARISSA J. WEEKES/TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

PHA gets Liddonfield funds

State awards \$3.5 million; federal grant being sought

The Philadelphia Housing Authority has received \$3.5 million from the state of Pennsylvania, the first step toward rebuilding PHA's Liddonfield Homes in Northeast Philadelphia. The grant marks the first step toward compiling the \$94 million PHA needs to demolish the outdated housing now on the site and to develop 5 affordable homes in part of the property.



Carl Greene

PHA is awaiting word from Washington on its application for a federal HOPE IV grant, the same kind of funding that has helped the authority rebuild four other neighborhoods in North, West and South Philadelphia.

"The good news is, because of PHA's record of rebuilding communities on schedule and on budget, government and private investors do put their money in our projects," said PHA Executive Director Carl Greene. "That's why we're confident they will invest in us again. The bad news is we are operating at a time of major cutbacks in domestic programs at the federal level, so the competition for every dollar is great."

The housing PHA plans to build is only part of the story. The agency will use just 12 acres of

the 32-acre site for its construction and will sell the remaining 20 acres to a private developer who will build as many as 335 market-rate homes. The outcome will be a mixed-income community with low-income residents living side-by-side with middle-income families. PHA has already established a similar situation at its rebuilt Martin Luther King Homes and at Falls Ridge, where Westrum Construction is building the market rate homes.

The new Liddonfield Homes will feature a 65-unit senior building and 32 affordable homes for sale. As at all other rebuilt PHA sites, new street patterns will be created to reintegrate the site into the surrounding street pattern. New underground utilities and infrastructure are also part of the plan.

Documented studies show that when PHA rebuilds a site, crime in the area plummets and property values in the surrounding community sharply rise.

State Sen. Michael Stack and State Rep. Michael McGeehan, pointing to the positive impact of rebuilding Liddonfield, helped secure the money and presented the check to Greene in a ceremony near the development's entrance.

Congressman Chaka Fattah also attended the event, extolling PHA's record of success and promising to again fight for the federal funding needed to complete the project.

Some wonder when promised changes will take place

Residents of Liddonfield Homes had mixed reactions to the Philadelphia Housing Authority's announcement Friday of a state grant to redevelop the housing project.

PHA received \$3.5 million from the state for its estimated \$94 million remodeling project of the barracks style flats in the Holmesburg section of the city.

There will be 225 affordable housing units on 12 acres; a private developer will build 335 units of market-rate homes on the remaining 20 acres. Sixty-five units will be senior housing.

State Sen. Michael Stack and state Rep. Michael McGeehan secured the funding for Liddonfield. They expressed hope of a positive impact in rebuilding the community.

For one longtime resident who asked to be identified only as "Jackie," the plan is good.

"It's a beautiful thing," she said. "It's time for a change in development in the community." Jackie has lived in Liddonfield for over 20 years.

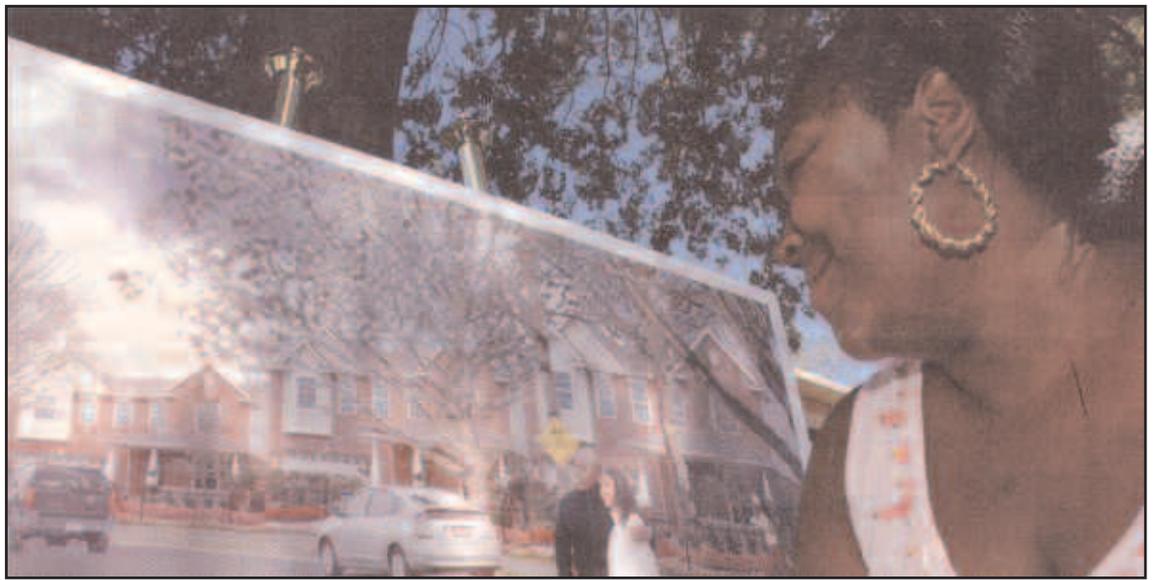
But other residents said they are frustrated, and want to be in the first group of tenants relocated when demolition begins. Several had more questions than they received answers after Friday's press conference.

Five-year resident Setry Lawrence, who is disabled, said she came out to hear the announcement, but was disappointed.

She said she and others couldn't hear from the parking lot where they stood, as PHA and elected officials announced the grant from the Jackson Drive entrance.

"The people of this project have been told that we were going to move for years," Lawrence said. She said that there have been eight meetings discussing the future of Liddonfield.

Another longtime resident, Tammy Wilson, was angry because her calls for maintenance have not been answered for months. She said there's mold in



Liddonfield resident Crystal Johnson looks at a rendition of how her Northeast neighborhood will look after the community was awarded \$3.5 million in state funding on Friday. Carl Greene, executive director of the Philadelphia Housing Authority, Congressman Chaka Fattah, state Reps. Michael McGeehan and Michael Stack and Joe Certaine, director of Gov. Edward G. Rendell's Southeast regional office, were on hand.

—MARISSA J. WEEKES/TRIBUNE STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

her apartment and her sink is broken, but no one has come out to make repairs.

"I've been calling, calling, calling," Wilson said. "We're just rotting out here."

In response to concerns about maintenance, PHA spokesman Kirk Dorn said PHA could match its maintenance record to that of any property management company in the city.

"The difference is, when residents in privately owned rental communities complain the media doesn't hear about it," Dorn said in an e-mail. "As a public entity we are open to more scrutiny, so when a resident of public housing complains, the media takes an interest. I might also say we conduct customer satisfaction surveys every year and our residents give us very high grades for maintenance."

But residents are troubled and frustrated by the crime in their neighborhood. Several said shootings occur every day, day and night.

One woman said her neighbor's window was shot through on two different occasions. She said police do not enforce curfew, and teens run the streets at night.

"There are shootings every night," said a woman who didn't want to be named. "A couple weeks ago someone was shot, but thankfully there have been no



Liddonfield resident leader Rose Bryant celebrates her Northeast community's receiving a \$3.5 million check from the state funding after the Philadelphia Housing Authority announced that the money will be used to revitalize the neighborhood as part of the Liddonfield Renewal Project.

murders since 2002."

The only reason people haven't been killed is by the grace of God.

Dorn said PHA is eager to rebuild Liddonfield because it "has become a problem for us."

He said similar complaints came from residents at Richard Allen Homes, Falls Ridge, Mill Creek and other developments before their redesign.

"Those PHA sites are now all beautiful, low-crime communities that are simultaneously raising the quality of life for our low-income clients and raising property values in the surrounding communities.

"Crime at all of those sites has plummeted because of our design and management, just as it will at

Liddonfield when we rebuild," he said.

PHA has applied for \$20 million in federal HOPE VI grants, and anticipates raising the difference through both private and federal funds. Dorn said word about the HOPE VI grant would come mid-September.

Relocation begins once funding is secured, and residents select the PHA sites they wish to relocate to. Dorn said any Liddonfield resident interested in moving to the new units would have first priority.

"It's a long time coming," said the woman. "It's exciting to get a brand new chance to come in and purchase a house, God-willing."