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## A boost for a blighted neighborhood

By Meghan E. Irons

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The Quincy Street neighborhood, set amid poverty and blight in a neglected patch of Dorchester, will get a glimmer of hope today, when the federal government is expected to announce it will award the city \$20.5 million to redevelop the community.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development named Boston as one of the first five cities to share \$122 million aimed at revitalizing high-poverty neighborhoods and helping low-income families.

The award comes from HUD's new Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, an Obama administration strategy that links government agencies with local leaders working to transform blighted neighborhoods into communities with affordable housing, safe streets, and quality schools.

Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, and New Orleans also received grants.

Some \$12.3 million of Boston's grant will be used to renovate the Woodledge/Morrant Bay housing development, a scattered set of 11 distressed buildings clustered around Quincy Street.

A portion of the grant will also be used for job training, after-school activities, English-as-a-second-language classes, and educational programs that build on the city's Circle of Promise program, which provides intensive resources to curb dropout rates, boost student improvement, and eliminate barriers to learning.

The rest of the grant will be used for neighborhood improvements, such as upgrades to parks, community gardens, and roadways.

"This development is an opportunity to transform the Quincy Corridor," said Jorge Martinez, executive director at Project RIGHT in Grove Hall. "There are a whole lot of pieces that go into redeveloping this neighborhood, so that it can be seen as a family community."

Martinez said the Quincy Corridor - bracketed by Blue Hill Avenue, Columbia Road, and Washington Street - has been afflicted by blight, crime, and a host of transportation challenges over the years.

Roughly 8,900 residents live in the neighborhood, and 38 percent have incomes below the poverty line, according to city officials. Thirty-eight percent of the neighborhood's 3,500 housing units are subsidized - twice the citywide percentage.

Four schools are located there, including the Jeremiah E. Burke High School, which the city has identified as one of its 10 turnaround schools.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino, who will announce the grant today, said hundreds of children live in the area, and he vowed to help them and their families.

"If we improve their lives, they improve their lives in schools," Menino said. "It all works together. This really can show how government really works for people."

The housing project, which will be renamed Quincy Heights, will preserve and upgrade nine of the original 11 buildings along Cunningham, Woodledge, Mascoma, Magnolia, and Dunkeld streets, said Jeanne DuBois, who heads the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corp., a co-recipient of the grant.

Seven buildings will be constructed along Quincy Street, she said.

The 129 units in the renovated and new buildings will be reconfigured to accommodate larger families. They will look like townhouses and have two courtyards with play areas, she said. They will also include a small-business center and a job-placement office.

Construction is to start next spring, and the buildings will be fully reoccupied in 2013, Menino said. City officials plan to relocate residents during the reconfiguration of the buildings.

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