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URBAN HOMESTEADING CONFERENCE

OPENING REMARKS

JUNE 26, 1975

I WANT TO WELCOME YOU TO HUD'S URBAN HOMESTEADING PLANNING CONFERENCE. THIS CONFERENCE MARKS HUD'S FIRST STEP IN IMPLEMENTING A PROGRAM WHICH I BELIEVE CAN PROVIDE A USEFUL TOOL TO COMMUNITIES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO STABILIZE AND PRESERVE URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS.

MANY AREAS OF OUR GREAT CITIES ARE BEING SACRIFICED TO OBSOLESCENCE AND DECAY. IN TOO MANY, THERE ARE ABANDONED, BOARDED UP HOUSES WHICH ARE A BLIGHTING INFLUENCE ON THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD AND RESIDENTS.

TOO MANY OF OUR CITY NEIGHBORHOODS CONTAIN HOMES WHICH ARE STRUCTUALLY SOUND BUT FOR REASONS HAVING NOTHING TO DO WITH THE QUALITY OF THE UNIT, THESE HOUSES ARE NOW ABANDONED, DETERIORATING, AND OFTEN VANDALIZED. WORSE, THESE ABANDONED UNITS TRIGGERS FURTHER ABANDONMENT AND ACCELERATES THE NEIGHBORHOOD'S DECLINE. AND, AS ABANDONMENT GROWS, SO DOES THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE CONIGNED TO NEARBY OVERCROWDED AND SUBSTANDARD DWELLINGS.



WE MUST FIND BETTER WAYS TO PRESERVE OUR EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING STOCK. WE CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO WASTE AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD, ITS HOUSING STOCK, AND ITS PEOPLE.

CITIES HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN PRESERVING URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS. THEY HAVE DONE SO WITH A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES. AREAS THAT WERE ONCE SLUMS HEADING FOR ABANDONMENT AND DEMOLITION ARE NOW BEING RESTORED. THESE ARE HOPEFUL SIGNS.

ONE OF THE TOOLS THAT CITIES HAVE UTILIZED IN REVITALIZING THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS IS URBAN HOMESTEADING. THE CONCEPT ORIGINATED SEVERAL YEARS AGO IN PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA AND WILMINGTON, DELAWARE. THE EXAMPLE SET BY THOSE CITIES HAS PRODUCED MODELS FOR MANY OTHER CITIES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES. HUD HAS TRIED TO BE SUPPORTIVE OF CITIES UTILIZING THIS DEVICE BUT WAS PREVIOUSLY HAMSTRUNG BY ITS INCAPACITY TO PROVIDE HOMES OF ANY SIGNIFICANT VALUE TO COMMUNITIES FOR USE IN THEIR HOMESTEADING PROGRAMS. OUR NEW DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM AUTHORIZED BY SECTION 810 OF THE 1974 HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACT PARTIALLY FREES US FROM THAT RESTRAINT. WE HAVE AVAILABLE DURING THE COURSE OF THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR UP TO 5 MILLION DOLLARS IN POSITIVE VALUE PROPERTIES TO CONVEY TO CITIES FOR USE IN URBAN HOMESTEADING PROGRAMS.



BUT HOMESTEADING WILL REMAIN A LOCAL AND NOT A FEDERAL INITIATIVE. HUD WILL PROVIDE HOUSES TO COMMUNITIES FOR USE IN THE PROGRAMS THEY DESIGN AND ADMINISTER. THAT IS THE REASON FOR TODAY'S CONFERENCE. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS DEMONSTRATION IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOU AND YOUR CITIES WITH AN ADDITIONAL TOOL FOR URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION.

THIS CONFERENCE IS INTENDED TO ENCOURAGE A TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION. WE WANT TO TELL YOU AS TO HOW WE INTEND TO IMPLEMENT URBAN HOMESTEADING. WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR IDEAS ABOUT HOW OUR PROGRAM SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED, AND HOW THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, WITH THIS NEW TOOL, CAN BEST ASSIST YOU TO PRESERVE YOUR NEIGHBORHOODS. BEFORE THE PROGRAM TAKES ITS FINAL FORM, WE WANT TO KNOW THE CITIES' VIEWS ON OUR CONTEMPLATED ACTIONS.

IN THE GROUP TODAY ARE REPRESENTATIVES OF SEVERAL CITIES WITH HIGHLY AMBITIOUS AND SUCCESSFUL HOMESTEADING PROGRAMS.



THIS CONFERENCE WILL BE AN OCCASION FOR AN INTERCHANGE OF IDEAS BETWEEN THOSE CITIES WHO HAVE URBAN HOMESTEADING PROGRAMS AND THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE A SINCERE INTEREST IN UTILIZING THIS DEVICE IN YOUR COMMUNITIES.

WE ARE AWARE, OF COURSE, THAT URBAN HOMESTEADING IS NOT A PANACEA TO THE ILLS OF DECLINING NEIGHBORHOODS. IT IS ANOTHER TOOL FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO USE IN NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION.

FIRST, HOMESTEADING WILL NOT REVITALIZE AN ALREADY BADLY BLIGHTED AREA. IT IS PRIMARILY USEFUL IN STABILIZING A BASICALLY STABLE BUT DECLINING NEIGHBORHOOD.

SECOND, IT IS NOT NEARLY AS SUCCESSFUL AS A MEANS OF PROVIDING HOUSING TO PEOPLE AS IT HAS BEEN IN PROVIDING PEOPLE TO ABANDONED HOUSES AND THEREBY STEMMING THE TIDE OF NEIGHBORHOOD DECLINE.



THIRD, IT REQUIRES REINVESTMENT CAPITAL. THAT MEANS AN ACTIVE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE COMMUNITIES' FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS. MANY OF THE CITIES HERE TODAY HAVE DEVELOPED SUCH CREATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR. I WOULD HOPE THERE WILL BE A MEANINGFUL EXCHANGE OF IDEAS TODAY ON THIS ESSENTIAL FEATURE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION PROCESS.

FINALLY, HOMESTEADING IS ONLY USEFUL AS PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE ATTACK ON NEIGHBORHOOD DECAY. FILLING A FEW EMPTY HOUSES WILL NOT TURN A NEIGHBORHOOD AROUND. THE CAUSES OF NEIGHBORHOOD DECLINE ARE VARIED AND ITS DYNAMICS COMPLEX. THE SOLUTIONS ARE EQUALLY VARIED AND COMPLEX. DEVELOPING SUCH A COORDINATED APPROACH TO NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT SHOULD ALSO BE A MATTER ON WHICH WE CAN ALL LEARN FROM EACH OTHER.

URBAN HOMESTEADING IS ONLY ONE WAY IN WHICH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION. BUT, IT IS A TOOL ABOUT WHICH I AM OPTIMISTIC. I AM PLEASED WITH YOUR PRESENCE HERE AND HOPE THAT WE CAN ALL WORK TOGETHER TO PRESERVE OUR CITIES USING ALL THE TOOLS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE. AND, I EXPECT THE SECTION 810 URBAN HOMESTEADING DEMONSTRATION TO SHOW THAT HOMESTEADING IS A VALUABLE PART OF THAT MIX TO REVITALIZE OUR URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS.

