



Disappearing act

Home Depot slated to occupy area plagued with violence

07:41 PM PDT on Monday, August 28, 2006

By DEVONA WELLS
The Press-Enterprise

San Bernardino city officials have a plan to clean up part of the troubled Arden-Guthrie neighborhood: Buy the remaining apartments, tear them down and build a Home Depot.

The city Economic Development Agency owns more than half of the 73 properties on the 17 acres that would go to the home-improvement store. Once the agency purchases what remains and clears the land, it would be sold to Home Depot, according to city records.

The plan, approved by a city committee last week, still requires the green light from the City Council acting as the Community Development Commission so the agency can negotiate exclusively with Home Depot. The company would take 11 acres for its store and agree to develop the remaining 6, according to city records.

Home Depot, which already has two San Bernardino locations, is considering putting in a 102,000-square-foot store, according to city records. In an e-mail response, a spokeswoman could not provide information Monday.

For decades, the agency has tried to remake Arden-Guthrie, spending about \$10 million as it attempted to bring in local buyers, spruce up properties and buy lots the agency already owns. But city documents label the neighborhood, known for drug dealing, violence and its collection of cheap stucco fourplexes, as "an inner-city slum."

Maggie Pacheco, the agency's executive director, said acquiring the needed properties, clearing them and arriving at a final development agreement with Home Depot could take up to two years. Last



Stan Lim / The Press-Enterprise

Trash lies in an alley near a boarded-up apartment building in San Bernardino. The city has a plan to level the apartments and replace them with a Home Depot.

month, the city finalized a \$7.5 million loan from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to buy and demolish the properties and relocate tenants. Appraisals are underway; an environmental review and zoning change also will be needed.

Before demolishing the remaining apartments, the agency would be required to pay to move residents and find them comparable housing.

Lucrative sales taxes are good motivation for trading a derelict neighborhood for a big-box retailer, said Steven Frates, a senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College. But finding plentiful, low-cost housing to replace what's demolished is always difficult, he said.

"That might be less a problem in San Bernardino than Santa Monica, but it's still an issue," he said.

The agency has not yet started to calculate the cost of relocating residents, which numbered 73 on a map compiled earlier this month, said project manager Colin Strange.

Arden-Guthrie resident Victoria Mirano Geronimo, 57, moved to her two-bedroom apartment, which would be torn down, in June. She pays \$725 and shares it with her two sons, a daughter and a husband, who she said is confined to bed.

"It's nice. It's quiet. It's better than some places I've lived," she said.

A tree shades her front door; empty dirt lots nearby collect litter.

Geronimo said leaving would be fine if she can get another apartment she likes for the same price.

Next door, 30-year-old Angie Matthews said the neighborhood gets rowdy in the summer and cockroaches periodically infest her apartment. Matthews, who had heard her building might be demolished, said she wouldn't mind being moved.

After attempting and failing to refurbish Arden-Guthrie fourplexes, the agency's policy today is to tear down what it buys. It's been about 10 years since a major push was made to acquire properties in the neighborhood, Strange said.

Online at: http://www.pe.com/business/local/stories/PE_Biz_D_homedepot29.29f3e41.html