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SCATTERED SITE PUBLICLY SUPPORTED HOUSING

Statement by Karl D. Gregory* representing Reverend Charles W. Butler,
President of the Greater Detroit Fair Housing, Inc.

To the Honorable Members of the Common Council:

My name is Karl Gregory. I have been asked by the Committee on Urban Housing of the Greater Detroit Fair Housing, Inc. to communicate to this Honorable Body the Committee's strongly held views in support of Scattered-Site, low income, publicly supported housing.

I shall begin my statement by expressing our appreciation for this opportunity to contribute to these deliberations on the very significant matter before us today. The outcome of these deliberations may well play a pivotal part in determining whether or not Detroit will succeed in assisting its least fortunate citizens to obtain decent, safe, and sanitary housing in an environment that promotes, rather than hinders, mobility from poverty into self-sufficiency.

The specific and narrow question before us is the action to be taken on the purchase by the city of 15 single-family houses in the Eight Mile-Wyoming area for rental to senior citizens. The position of the Urban Housing Committee of the Greater Detroit Fair Housing, Inc. is that this project is a minimal effort that makes a mockery of Detroit's image for progressiveness. It barely begins to meet the need. We understand that there is a waiting list of more than 500 persons for public housing. This list will expand significantly.

*Department of Economics, Wayne State University

In addition, 15 units are insufficient for evaluating the success of this new program direction which avoids isolating--almost incarcerating--the poor in a few self-contained geographic areas. Limiting the first proposal involving decentralized public housing to so miniscule a scale could make more difficult another approval of a subsequent and similar proposal. Opponents would then be armed with the perhaps attractive and seemingly plausible argument that Detroit has one effort underway; its merits are unproven; it will take a few years for meaningful evaluation; therefore, the city should wait before commencing another similar effort.

Further, although the proposal purports to be a Scattered-Site program, the geographic area involved is so extremely limited that one must question the appropriateness of the use of the term "Scattered-Site". At best this minute addition to public housing is decentralized, non-contiguous and single family housing, with the limits in which containment occurs being widened ever so slightly.

Despite these concerns, we find the need for low-income, quality-housing, particularly for large families, so compelling that we urge the approval of the proposal amended to expand substantially the number of families to be accommodated and to span a much larger geographic area.

The specific issue of the action to be taken on the Wyoming-Eight Mile proposal involves relatively minor implementation of a concept of great significance for the future of human relations in large central cities and for the alleviation of poverty. The concept of "Scattered-Site" publicly assisted housing is indeed, we believe, a most promising idea for the housing of low income groups. Large scale and meaningful implementation of this concept must be undertaken by any city that aspires

to be among the leaders in the nation in producing social change. Such change can only be achieved by injecting human values and social renewal in housing programs which have by tradition in Detroit been purely physical in nature. The costs of not doing so can be great.

Deleterious human relations have as one of their root causes the lack of communication ensuing from the publicly subsidized tendency towards homogeneous neighborhoods: purely non-poor or poor. Earlier in our history the railroad tracks, undesirable business sections of the cities in the northern United States, or areas close to the dump yards have been the depositories for the poor. For Indians, we reserved barren land until oil was found, and then we tried to move them to really barren land. The new look, as of a decade ago, was to relegate the poor to land adjacent to the expressway. Although this was new a decade or so ago, Detroit is rejuvenating this now somewhat aged "new look" in the Forest Park project.

The isolation of the poor from the non-poor through large concentrations of the poor in public housing in selected areas breeds ignorance of the other group on the part of both groups. Ignorance breeds suspicion. Suspicion breeds distrust. And distrust can bring alienation. The result is a deterioration of human relations and the foregoing of the blessings of cultural and other forms of diversity.

A major promise from Scattered-Site housing is the increase in the life-style of the least affluent segments of our community. A taste of better living through Scattered-Site housing would seem to raise aspirations, add hope and job opportunities, and lessen the cost on the public purse deriving from continued subsidies. It would also add to the Nation's output and tax yield.

On the other hand, concentrations of public housing units tend to rob parents and children of success models, deny parents jobs on the other side of the metropolitan area, and children after-school employment in lawn cutting, etc., perpetuates intergenerational successions of poverty by relegating children to substandard schools, and creates the impression that poverty may be an acceptable and unchangeable way of life, since so many other people in the same building--and most frequently in the same neighborhood--are also poor. It would be paradoxical for the city to spend millions of dollars for TAP to combat poverty while simultaneously declining to rearrange its additions to public housing, also to combat poverty.

If our recommendation to amend the proposal to include much more housing on a truly "Scattered-Site" basis were adopted promptly, Detroit would still not lead other cities in having the wisdom to implement this concept. As indicated in the attached appendix, New York, Washington, D.C., and Boston have already adopted the concept in various forms. New York's project will involve 600 families. Boston's project will involve 450 families and has already demonstrated an increase in "the social responsibility" of poor families. Washington, D.C. commenced an experimental program several years ago involving 50 families. A housing official there informed one of our Board members that the "Scattered-Site" project was very successful, and he wishes to have the application of the concept expanded.

In conclusion, we urge a favorable vote on a much larger application of a true concept of Scattered-Site Public Housing. Detroit, with its aspirations for being a "model city", should not maintain its position of being behind other cities in this regard. We hope that the defeat of this proposal by another Common Council will not lessen the willingness of this Council to put to a vote an amended and progressive Scattered-Site proposal.