



First Homes

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NEWS RELEASE

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Long overlooked house is newest 'First Homes' project

By Jeffrey Pieters

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From Rochester Post Bulletin

A house long considered among the worst-kept properties in Rochester's Kutzky Park neighborhood is under new ownership.

Neighbors hope the transaction is a first step in turning around the property, at 815 First St. S.W., and others nearby.

"First Homes -- hurrah!" said Lonnie Heimer, a neighborhood block captain.

Heimer's cheer was for the buyer, First Homes, a housing program of the Rochester Area Foundation. The nonprofit bought the property, a two-story house carved into five apartments, for \$125,000. The transaction closed Aug. 1.

The boarded-up building was a neighborhood eyesore, Heimer said, and a haven of criminal activity -- the location of 60 police calls between January 2004 and April 2005.

A second-floor apartment was damaged by fire last September and never fully repaired. The other units were vacated for a time, but later rented again.

The previous owner, Troy Seelhammer of Rochester, declined to comment.

First Homes, which has overseen construction of more than 650 affordable new homes and participated in renovating eight houses in Rochester's inner-city neighborhoods, has not decided yet what to do with the new acquisition, said Sean Allen, the nonprofit's executive director.

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Allen appointed a development team, made up of architects, nonprofit leaders and government leaders, that will consider whether the building can be restored or if it should be torn down. The site could be redeveloped with apartments or condominium units, he said.

Neighbors have said they're willing to support practically whatever development proposal First Homes brings, Heimer said.

Allen, with Shirley Lee, head of First Homes' Heritage Homes program, met with Kutzky Park neighbors at their National Night Out observance last Tuesday to announce the purchase.

"They were cheering," Allen said. "I've never seen anything like it. They were literally cheering. One of the neighbors volunteered to mow the lawn for us."

Stephanie Kilen, who heads a neighborhood revitalization program called Imagine Kutzky, said First Homes' project could transform one of the neighborhood's worst properties to one of the best.

That would, in effect, "tilt the market" -- serving notice to other nearby landlords and property owners that redeveloping their properties is not only desirable, but also feasible.

"It's going to take a few of these to change the direction," Kilen said.