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For Release: December 14, 2005

Milwaukee Earns 'World Leadership' Award
Housing Authority hailed for transforming neighborhoods

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett announced today the City of Milwaukee is one of nine cities worldwide to receive a 'World Leadership' Award for its model of affordable housing that transforms neighborhoods. The World Leadership Forum issued the award to the City of Milwaukee Housing Authority in a recent ceremony in London (UK).

Leaders in 400 of the world's largest cities were asked to submit synopses of their most successful projects. Cities earning an award this year include: Milwaukee; Madrid (Spain); Lagos (Nigeria); Salt Lake City (U.S.); Phnom Pehn (Cambodia); and Port Elizabeth (South Africa). Projects from around the world were submitted on the environment, urban renewal, housing, health, city planning, architecture, civil engineering, education, the economy and employment. The World Leadership Forum is a not-for-profit organization that promotes leadership internationally by highlighting the work of exceptional leaders and achievers in categories that make the greatest impact.

"I am thrilled that Milwaukee is being recognized worldwide as a leader in housing redevelopment," said Mayor Barrett. "We have a tremendous story to tell about our transformation of public housing developments into great neighborhoods. Together with our residents, we've linked physical revitalization with education, employment, and health care services—a winning combination in the war on poverty. "

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The Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM) currently provides affordable housing for more than 10,000 families and individuals in the city. This housing includes public units that are subsidized by the federal government, housing vouchers for low-income families to rent privately-owned housing units and non-subsidized affordable housing units.

Since 1993, HACM has transformed four welfare-dependent and isolated public housing developments (Hillside Terrace, Lapham Park, Parklawn, and Highland Park) with over 1,200 housing units into attractive communities of inclusion and economic independence. The changes were made possible by the federal Hope VI program. Former islands or 'superblocks' of public housing were re-knit into the neighborhood through the addition of streets and alleys. The housing was physically changed with the addition of porches and other enhancements that created a sense of pride and ownership among families. Market-rate apartments and homes were added, coupled with programs to help public housing residents learn employment skills, self-sufficiency and money management skills to move them into home ownership opportunities. As a result, there are waiting lists for a market-rate apartments at Townhomes at Carver Park (Lapham Park) and families are learning budgeting skills necessary to purchase new, single-family homes in Milwaukee's second largest family development, Parklawn. The sale of single family, market rate homes surrounded by 380 public housing units is a testament to the quality of HACM's public housing communities.

Employment increased by 32 percent among residents living in the revitalized public housing developments, according to a study issued this year by the Planning Council for Health and Human Services. Incomes for residents also increased by 35 percent and property values in the surrounding neighborhood increased by 36 percent.

"I'm proud of Milwaukee's accomplishments in providing affordable housing for families and seniors in a way that lifts up the entire community," said Common Council President and HACM Board Chair Willie Hines, Jr. "We are grateful to the World Leadership Forum for this distinguished award and share this honor with all of our residents in our public housing developments."

Finalists were required to make a presentation to the World Leadership Forum in London. HACM representatives were able to attend, thanks to a grant from the Bader Foundation.

The following is a summary of the revitalization, for which Milwaukee earned its World Leadership Award:

HILLSIDE TERRACE

Before

This superblock of 596 family units was isolated from the surrounding neighborhood both physically and socially. It was perceived as ‘housing of last resort’ as 49 out of 50 applicants refused to live at Hillside and would rather wait several years for the chance to live at another housing development. More than 80 percent of Hillside households were dependent on welfare. Gangs and crime were a problem but the superblock design offered no through-streets to provide access for police and other emergency vehicles.

After

Some units were demolished to create a neighborhood grid of streets and a neighborhood feel. Individual porch entrances and separate addresses were added to create a sense of home. Large porches with well-lit pedestrian friendly walkways encouraged more social interaction. A new family resource center was added to the development to include a Boys & Girls club, day care center, health clinic and computer lab. The center offers supportive services to residents in a number of areas, including employment and self-sufficiency. The result: more than half the families at Hillside now earn an income, and the rate rises annually by 18 percent. Hillside’s revitalization sparked residential and commercial development in nearby neighborhoods.

Lapham Park

Before

This dense development contained a 200-unit high-rise building for the elderly and several buildings that offered 170 family units. Problems similar to Hillside existed here at the family buildings. In addition, the elderly high-rise housed residents who were frail and most at-risk for nursing home placement. These seniors suffered from at least five major health care conditions and did not have access to health care services or assisted living facilities. Medical care was sporadic and based on emergencies. The low-income, frail elderly were added to a waiting list of 4,000 seniors for assistance from Milwaukee County with home health care or other home services. Elderly living at Lapham Park declined mentally and physically at a faster rate and it often resulted in eviction and placement into nursing homes. Services from Milwaukee County Department on Aging were fragmented, duplicative and costly, as numerous individual social workers, home health aids and health care providers were assigned to work with the elderly at Lapham.

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Lapham Park After

The Lapham Park high-rise became the Lapham Park Venture: the first public housing assisted living community in the U.S. The 'Venture' streamlines services for seniors by bringing together the resources of all the separate agencies under one roof in a coordinated, enhanced manner. Practitioners in gerontology, housing, medical arts, and social services offer on-site care, saving taxpayers \$1 million annually and boosting the lives of residents.

The family units of Lapham Park were demolished and rebuilt as Townhomes at Carver Park, a mixed-income community. The physical transformation incorporated many of the features at Hillside Terrace such as large front porches, public spaces, new sidewalks and lighting. HACM worked closely with Independence First, a local advocacy group for the disabled, to develop 14 fully-accessible and 101 visitable townhomes that now serve as a national model for handicapped accessible housing. Townhomes include 102 affordable housing units and 20 market-rate townhomes.

Parklawn

Before

Parklawn Housing Development is located in an area of deep poverty, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. More than 40 percent of the households lived in poverty and were headed by single females. Parklawn, one of the oldest public housing developments in the country, was deteriorated physically and socially. Gang activity and drug trafficking were problems. Few adult residents were earning a living and lacked any training. Of the high school students living at Parklawn, 65 percent were habitually truant and 52 percent of middle school students were truant.

After

HACM worked with Parklawn residents to plan for the transformation of a 518-unit public housing development into a new mixed income community with 380 public housing units, 20 single-family homes and a Family Investment Center. Physical changes were similar to Hillside Terrace-- streets were added and the area was reconnected with its surrounding neighborhood. Residents wanted to education to be a main component of the redevelopment and a state-of-the art Central City Cyberschool was added to the Family Investment Center. It was one of the first schools in North America to feature a wireless data network system. The school serves 380 students in grades kindergarten through eighth; 80 percent of the students are residents of Parklawn. The school provides each student with a laptop computer and access to additional technology. Teachers use the technology to expand the curriculum, creating an 'anytime, anywhere' learning school located within a public housing community. There is no poverty of information and learning at Parklawn, as Cyberschool staff use technology to establish patterns of

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learning and academic success. Tests show that this approach is working: all 8th graders are reading above their grade level. Students who were below grade level during the 2000-2001 academic year advanced 2.0 grade levels in reading.

Highland Park

Before

This 276-unit housing development was similar to Lapham Park, with two dense high-rises and a superblock of family buildings isolated from the neighborhood.

After

Highland Park was transformed into a mixed-income community that includes a 114-unit mid-rise, 56 single-family units and 24 market-rate homes. The centerpiece of this revitalization is the continuing emphasis on accessibility, the use of green technologies and the fact that homeownership is within reach for public housing residents.

The mid-rise, Highland Gardens, includes the largest residential green roof in the Midwest.

Homeownership Initiative

HACM's neighborhood revitalization activities include the development of homeownership opportunities for low-income families. The intent is to decrease the concentration of public housing and to create mixed-income communities. The home ownership program is an extension of HACM's efforts to promote self-sufficiency among its residents. Through a partnership with Wisconsin Women's Business Initiatives Corporation, residents are offered financial literacy classes and the opportunity to establish Individual Development Accounts for homeownership. Over the past nine years, HACM has helped 332 of its residents purchase homes: 231 through its subsidized housing programs and 101 through the private sector.

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