

# Feds given Granite Square tour in bid for fix-up funds

◆**Under stress:** Area has seen some improvements in crime, but landlords are being squeezed and Mayor Guinta says area is in need of revitalization.

By **BENJAMIN KEPPLER**  
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**MANCHESTER** — City officials and executives of a local non-profit group toured the West Side's Granite Square district yesterday, joined by officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, as they detailed their plans for revitalizing the distressed area.

Federal money will likely play a key role in boosting the fortunes of the district, a densely-populated residential area just west of the intersection of Granite and South Main streets.

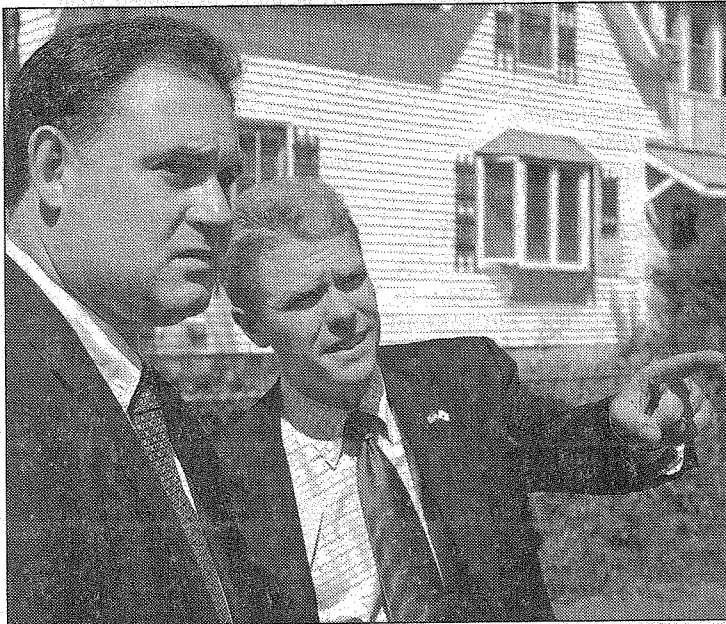
Both NeighborWorks of Greater Manchester, a local group devoted to neighborhood revitalization, and Manchester Mayor Frank Guinta consider revitalizing the area an important project.

"This is an area we want to focus on. I think it's a great part of the city and we want to revitalize it," Guinta said.

Yesterday, Guinta and NeighborWorks executive director Robert Tourigny took Taylor Caswell, HUD's regional director for New England, and other HUD officials on a walking tour of the area.

The Granite Square district is an area roughly bounded by Conant Street on the north, Clinton Street on the south, Dover Street on the east and Quincy Street on the west. Precarious may be the best word to describe the neighborhood's condition.

It is not a lawless center of urban blight — there are many well-maintained homes in it, and according to local resi-



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**Manchester Mayor Frank Guinta and Taylor Caswell of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, discuss properties that could benefit from a planned neighborhood redevelopment project as they tour the Granite Square area of the city yesterday.**

dents, the crime situation has improved over the past couple of years.

But troubles in the real-estate market have buffeted the neighborhood recently. Absentee landlords, who own about half the homes and apartments in the area, have especially been squeezed due to the downturn in the real-estate market, according to those familiar with the situation.

"Right where we're standing, there are half-a-dozen buildings for sale. A couple are actually bank-owned because they've been foreclosed upon," said Tourigny, as he stood at the corner of Granite and West streets.

"I've talked to an owner of a twelve-unit building on Douglas Street who can only keep five to seven units occupied at a time," Tourigny said. "It's very tough to rent."

The landlords aren't helped by vacancy rates that are far higher than elsewhere in the

city — about 15 to 30 percent, according to Tourigny, compared to a citywide average of 5 to 7 percent.

As vacancy rates in the area have increased, that's made it even tougher on those landlords to make their mortgage payments.

As a result, necessity forces them to become less selective about their tenants.

One way officials hope to boost the neighborhood's fortunes is to boost home ownership. That's because local owners — whether landlords or simply homeowners — tend to invest more in keeping up their properties.

"I'd like to see, really, more ownership," said Roland Bourque, a West Street homeowner who has lived his whole life in the neighborhood.

On one block of West Street, Bourque pointed to one side of the street where he said homes were owned by their residents, while the other side had homes owned by off-site landlords. The difference was stark.

"You can see the people who own their houses take care of their houses. The people who don't live there don't do nothing," Bourque said.

Tourigny said NeighborWorks has about \$1.5 million in private capital ready to go to help revitalize the neighborhood, but his group needs about \$500,000 to pay for demolition work and adding green spaces to the area. Right now, they have just a small fraction of that.

Caswell, the chief HUD official on the tour, pledged to work with city officials and NeighborWorks on the matter, and said HUD's Manchester office would form a team to work with the city.

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