

PARKS

CMHA plans park with splendid view

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The Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority could create within a year the first public park in Cleveland overlooking the Cuyahoga Valley and the city skyline.

For years, CMHA dreamed of building a mixed-income, high-rise apartment complex on the 17.3-acre property in question, located off West 25th Street in Cleveland's Ohio City neighborhood.

Aside from an address just south of the landmark Detroit-Superior (Veterans Memorial) Bridge, the land boasts the skyline view made famous in a 1928 photograph by Margaret Bourke-White, which shows a smoke-shrouded Terminal Tower under construction.

But having decided it would cost too much to stabilize the land, which is sliding slowly downhill toward the Cuyahoga River, the housing authority now wants to turn the site into a park.

"It's the best use of the land since we can't build housing," said George Phillips, the CMHA director. "There's a definite lack of open space in Ohio City. It offers some of the best unobstructed views of the skyline in Cleveland. I think it would be a fantastic park."

The property, now covered with grass and surrounded by a

chain-link fence, would be big enough for sports, picnicking and simple enjoyment, which planners call a "passive" use.

Phillips said planning and management of the park have yet to be determined. He said it will take up to a year to plan and install sports facilities, lighting, benches and other amenities.

In 2000, CMHA cleared 136 low-rise, subsidized apartments, just north of the high-rise River-view complex, and resettled the families that had lived there, Phillips said, in preparation to build a high-rise tower. But then, geological tests showed that poor soil conditions would have made construction too expensive.

The housing authority recently applied to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development for an \$8.5 million grant to build 267 new housing units at several locations in Ohio City and Tremont, some of which would replace the apartments removed earlier along West 25th Street.

That application signaled CMHA's formal decision to use the land as a park, Phillips said.

The authority's plans for new housing have stirred controversy. The nonprofit Flats Oxbow Association, which represents industrial interests, has said the new housing along Columbus Road would disrupt truck traffic passing between the industrial areas along the river and communities on high ground.

Phillips said he hoped the park would soothe bad feelings and unite the community. He said he would launch a planning process for the park that will involve community residents, city planners and Ohio City Near West Development Corp.

When asked if the agency would hold a competition to design the park, Phillips said he would consider it.

For now, the fence that surrounds the property will remain, because the housing authority wants to prevent illegal dumping, Phillips said sections could be removed for special events as soon as this summer.

The park would become the first on the rim of the Cuyahoga Valley in Cuyahoga County. The river and the valley run north about 10 miles from the Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Valley View.

A century of industrial development has left the high ground on both sides of the valley filled with parking lots, landfills, factories, highways and private homes.

Joe Cimperman, the Cleveland councilman who represents downtown and the area that would include the park, said he wants the city to collaborate with the housing authority to make the park a reality.

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