

# New federal initiatives for city revitalization

**Chester Smolski**

HARTFORD, Conn. — "We have never really had a comprehensive urban policy in this country... and in the absence of understanding and coordinated assistance among government leaders, many of our cities are caught in a vicious cycle, a downward spiral that can only be broken by new attitudes, new initiatives, and a new partnership."

Thus spoke Jimmy Carter, candidate for the United States presidency, on June 29, 1976. His words signalled a new partnership between the public and private sectors, new programs tailored to that partnership, and a coherent national policy.

Richard C.D. Fleming, general deputy assistant secretary in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, addressed the more than 300 representatives of the International Downtown Executives Association at its 25th annual meeting and gave the background to the development of a national urban policy, steps undertaken by the federal government to effectuate this policy, and proposed new actions to provide further assistance to America's cities.

Three principles govern present federal urban policy: targeting, leveraging, and management reform. Targeting is a means to focus federal resources to places most in need: These places are our cities. The Economic Development Administration, formerly a rural-oriented agency, now provides one-half of its loans and grants to cities. HUD's Community Development Block Grants go to cities and counties in greatest need, and within such communities program aid is targeted to benefit low- and moderate-income people. Targeting also means bringing government jobs to downtowns by directing construction of buildings for government use to city centers. The recent announcement by the General Services Administration that they will occupy a new building to be constructed in the Providence downtown well illustrates this federal role.

Leveraging is a means to require pri-

vate spending for money expended by government, best shown by the Urban Development Action Grant program and regarded as one of HUD's most successful ventures. Since its inception just 18 months ago, 427 projects were awarded \$818.8 million in Action Grants to which the private sector has committed \$5.04 billion. This means that for each \$1 of Action Grant money, \$6.20 of private money will be spent.

These public and private expenditures will create 133,000 new permanent jobs, retain 76,000 jobs, and provide \$80 million in net new real estate taxes to these distressed cities. Providence has a UDAG application of \$11.3 million for a new parking garage currently pending, and Pawtucket will receive \$5.9 million of UDAG money to develop its Narragansett Racetrack site.

The third principle of federal policy is management reform. Recognizing that some federal policies have added to city distress, e.g., interstate highways and government-backed home mortgages have encouraged suburban sprawl, the government is reviewing all federal programs to ensure that they work to the advantage of the city. A new Urban Community Impact Analysis will review program and policy initiatives before implementation in order to lessen the likelihood of further damage to cities.

Two new management initiatives will soon be forthcoming from the government, one dealing with regional shopping centers and the other designed to stimulate a greater involvement of private business, philanthropic and voluntary sectors with the public sector.

Regional shopping centers have killed downtown retailing, from Providence to Tampa to St. Louis. Now aware of this center-city loss, the government will act to prevent further retail decline. A HUD spokesman states that "if there is a viable downtown, we see no reason why federal actions should promote a suburban mall that may lead to the demise of the inner city."

To this end the White House Inter-agency Council will propose two measures: first, the government will pursue a variety of "pro-city" measures to stimulate downtown retailing, including techni-

cal assistance, adaptive reuse and historic preservation; and second, at the request of any city mayor, the government will trigger an analysis of any federal action which could hurt the center city retail base.

The second federal management initiative that will soon occur is the creation of a new office within HUD to focus attention on the involvement of public and private partners in HUD's portion of the urban revitalization process. This cooperative effort will bring together all parties whose goals are viable and better cities.

Such will be the role of government in city revitalization. But more than just a national urban policy, the President's "A New Partnership to Conserve America's Communities," which deals with those businesses, governments and organizations directly involved with the city must also be supported by suburban and rural areas alike because our depressed and sick cities are a reflection of our entire society.

Livable cities are not only for city residents; they are for all Americans.

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