—Battle continues

Continued from page 1

identification was offered. She claims they were tossed into the vestibule of her Mom's Callow Avenue home--though she never signed for them--and the person "ran back to their car."

The date appearing on the condemnation papers is March 27, 1986 and it states that she has 30 days in which to respond. They were officially served over 40 days after the date actually cited, she contends.

As for it's position in the Tutt condemnation proceedings, lawyers for the city are denying any wrong doing. They argue that based on local housing laws the city determined that the property had a "blighting influence" on the community and would likely remain in such a state, therefore, it went through the proper legal channels and began instituting the condemnation or "quick take" process.

"It really appears truthfully that it is a situation where she waited too long and did nothing. I'm saying this without knowing all the facts," City Solicitor Benjamin L. Brown remarked during a recent interview.

However, Tutt's attorney Liebmann says he feels the city compelled his client to fix-up the property and then stepped in to take it back once plans for a new residential redevelopment project, The North Avenue Terraces, were underway.

"They have compelled her to spend a fair amount of money rehabilitating the property with the thought that after she rehabilitated she could let it or live there...and now they are trying to take it by way of eminent domain.

"My feeling is they could either make her rehabilitate it or condemn it, but not to do both. It does seem to be unusual. It seems to be a case were the left-hand didn't know what the right-hand was doing.

As for what kind of relief he is seeking for his client, Liebmann said he wants a declaration that the property won't be condemned if they fail to obtain financial compensation.

"Basically, her desire is to be able to develop the property herself," he added.

Whether Rachel Tutt has received adequate time to rehab the four-story historic residence which contains, based on her count, somewhere in the vicinity of 28 rooms, is a matter for the local courts to decide.

However, housing officials at the Neighborhood Progress Administration and city lawyers, as well as the developer on the North Avenue Terraces project, Stuart Matz, all agree that she should have been able to complete renovations given the amount of time she has owned the property.

"Quite candidly, yes she should have completed it. Vacant buildings are a blight. It's not just that that building is not providing housing, as it should, and it's not paying its share of the tax base, but it creates a blight.

"There are plans for a lot of the vacant buildings on North Avenue (and) we've taken a lot of the owners of those vacant buildings to housing court," said NPA'S Director of Housing Inspections, John Huppert.

Actually, North Avenue has been the site of renewed interest since January when Mayor Schaefer made known his desire to have NPA spruce up the strip's physical appearance. That rehab began almost instantly along the five-mile stretch from the Baltimore Cemetery, East, to Leakin Park, West.

Roughly three million dollars will be spent to build mostly housing for families and to develop additonal commercial businesses along the entire North Avenue Corridor. That work is expected to be finished by 1987.

On North Avenue alone, some 39 owners of vacant properties have been successfully prosecuted in Housing Court for failing to raze or rehabilitate their properties, according to a knowledgeable source.

"The city has renovated a lot of them (houses) and torn others down," Huppert explained, "we're concentrating a lot of energy and monies on North Avenue."

In Rachel Tutt's case, he says, she was cited by his department for trash, debris and general sanitation problems related to refuse around the exterior of the building, and on more than one occasion for being a "vacant house"

Apparently, 327 E. North Ave., like many of the houses in the block where it stands, has had a history of vacancy which has inadvertently led to problems with vandalism and fires.

From 1978 to the time it was sold to Tutt in 1982 it was unoccupied and deemed unfit for human habitation and furthermore, was recommended for demolition, according to documents and information obtained through NPA.

It has passed through a number of hands, beginning with Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Calmer, who were listed as owners back on September 19, 1922. Rachel Tutt bought the building 60 years later.

Huppert claims that the city now has possession of the building, though he adds, "She probably still has the civil liability associated with it."

Still, the city wants to know why she didn't renovate 327 E. North Ave. or apply for the necessary permits to rehab it and lift the vacancy notice.

NPA officials say their records indicate that Tutt did in fact file for a rehab permit, as well as, a building and occupancy permit, but those requests were later voided when she failed to follow up on the procedure.

Said Deputy NPA Commissioner Joel Lee, "The truth of the matter is if between 1982 and whenever Rachel Tutt had rehabed the property we wouldn't have bothered with the acquisition of the property.

Since there were no signs of any major renovation effort NPA started the acquisition procedures on February 1 of last year, an official with the Land Resources Division reported.

"On Feb. 1, 1985, we sent a letter to the owner (Tutt) stating our intent to purchase the property. On February 10, a judge granted the city possession of the property based on our evidence to him that this was a vacant, blighted property and the owner had not rehabilitated," Ron Wilson, Director of Land Resources Division explained.

Despite the city's claim that she failed to manage the building's rehab responsibilities, Tutt insists that she did apply considerable time and money to fixing up her property.

"The years 1982-83 were spent repairing the roof, ceiling beams and rafters. You have to understand that this building has been vacant since 1978. You're talking about a four-story building with a total of 28 rooms.

"A building which for what I paid for it was totally dilapidated. The city basically sold me a frame," Tutt said. Tutt says she was unaware of the property's condition at the time of the purchase.

"The city had you ride by (but) the property was sealed. You just bought a pig in a poke. Thirty to 60 days later I realized the extent of the rehab problem."

She claims to have taken out loans totaling $12,000 shortly after she acquired the building and says she was turned down for a city housing loan because of the prior loan debts.

She also says she applied for $10,000 in matching grant funds from the National Historical Society. "They told me the minimum sum that they could match was $50,000, but I couldn't afford that. I have spent in excess of $20,000 on materials not including labor costs." She also says she has the receipts to prove it and will produce them in court.

But Deputy NPA Commissioner Lee isn't impressed with the account of her rehab efforts and says, "She showed me a stack of receipts totaling no more than $500. Mostly they were small items, most of which were not delivered to 327 and most of which were returned."

Lee says inspection of the building showed no evidence of work. Inspectors did discover holes in the roof and pigeons inside the property.

"Basically, the staff says this looks like a vacant house that's been vacant a while."

When the Tutt matter does finally land in court, two key issues will have to be settled. One, is the city's estimation of the fair market value of her property ($11,500) reasonable or unreasonable. Secondly, was it justified in condemning the property based on its alleged condition or had she done sufficient work to warrant her retaining ownership.

What does Rachel Tutt want?

"As I have said again and again for the 110th time I don't want the cash. I want to be left alone to move into my property."

—Shes angry over trash

Continued on page 1

middle of February. Just yesterday the city came and boarded up some houses on Whatcoat Street, but trash is still piled up behind houses in the 900 block Calhoun St." said a disgusted Mrs. Sanders Tuesday.

When the AFRO showed up in the 1400 block W. Lafayette Ave. last week, there was trash of all kinds on the lot enclosed by Lafayette, Calhoun, Mosher, and Stricker Streets.

While other area residents gathered curiously to see the reason for concern, none focused on the trash as a main issue.

Of those residents who gathered, many connected the trash problem with the lot, but few appeared bothered by it.

Afterwards, Mrs. Sanders told the AFRO, "These same neighbors are the ones who always complain, but when their landlords come around, they don't say anything."

Residents told the AFRO that a great deal of the refuse found its way to the lot after families moved from the area taking what they wanted and leaving the rest behind.

The AFRO found the lot to be an area of neglect, filled with discarded furniture, car parts, broken wood and dirty paper.

One neighbor, Daniel Perry, said, "I've been living around here for going on five years and during the time, I've only seen trash removed from the lot once and that was about three years ago.

Larry Wiggins, who lives in the 900 block N. Calhoun St., said, "Can't you see? That's the trash lot. When people have trash, they throw it there when nobody's looking or at night."

As the AFRO viewed the trash-filled lot, some of the residents who gathered raised the idea of collectively cleaning the lot. And as resourceful as they appeared, all were stumped at figuring how the trash would be removed once cleared from the lot.

"What bothers me is that at around this time of the year all of the politicians have plenty of time, especially the black ones, to go around asking people to vote for them, but when it comes to a simple problem like this, all we get is a runaround," Wiggins added.

As this reporter talked to the residents who gathered there, Mrs. Lavernne Taylor, of the 900 block Whatcoat St. walked up, stepped through the group and said, "I'm glad you came here to see this mess here in the middle of our neighborhood.

"It kills me! This lot hasn't been cleaned in ages. At night you can hear the rats and mice running across it. I'd never walk across it at night. There's just too many things for the rats and mice to hide in."

"Think about now. And it's the blacks who keep Mayor Schaefer in office. Term after term, they vote him in, yet they live in the middle of one of the nastiest areas in Baltimore and he can't get anyone over here to clean it up. He can do everything else.... jump in the Inner Harbor and all of that mess. Who cares about this trash in our neighborhood? And Schaefer's got the nerve to run for governor," Mrs. Taylor added.

Another sanitation problem cited by Mrs. Sander is that residents of the 900 block N. Stricker St. when setting their trash out for removal, tie it up with wire and hang it over the back fences.

"They say that they do this to prevent cats and dogs from getting into the bags, but at night all they (the cats and dogs) do is tear the bags open and trash goes everywhere. And where does it wind up at?. . . On the lot," Mrs. Sanders said.

When the AFRO contacted the Department of Sanitation Tuesday official acknowledged the trash problem at the West Baltimore lot, but said that a clean-up date has not been scheduled.

"Me and my husband are both retired city workers, but now that we've retired, how can we enjoy our home when we're surrounded by trash?

If we sit in the front, there's noise, and there's no way I'm going to sit on the back porch. The weeds are so high and they create dust. . . . . there's flying insects all around when it's warm. I can't stand it," Mrs. Sanders said.

"My neighbors will probably hate me for this. And because I'm a retired city worker, I hope this doesn't hurt me where my money comes from."

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George Murphy hospitalized

George B. Murphy, a member of the prominent Murphy family which owns the AFRO-AMERICAN Newspaper chain, suffered a stroke last week and is listed in critical condition at Howard University Hospital.

According to close family sources, the situation appears to be "grave."

Murphy helped start the Washington AFRO-AMERICAN in 1936 which later merged with the Washington Tribune.

AFRO will salute June graduates

June, the month of graduates, is just around the corner.

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Black culture center helping kids learn about their past and present

The Appreciating Black Culture (ABC) Learning Centers are now being developed to provide an opportunity for black children to learn their heritage through a supplemental program to augment their public school education.

Members of the Metropolitan Baltimore Alliance of Black School Educators, a group of concerned educators, have modified an existing curriculum that intends to promote self-esteem and individual self-pride within black school-age students.

Charles Thomas, president of the organization, said, "Black children do not know their heritage and they are not getting this in school. Hopefully, through the ABC Learning Centers, a strong sense of self-esteem will be established in the children. The dominant culture stresses its accomplishments, but there is no focus on black culture in the schools. Do black children know that Charlie Drew from Howard university developed blood plasma? I think not."

Dr. Warren Hayman, of Johns Hopkins University's School of Continuing Studies, stated, "Not only is this a learning opportunity, but this affords the opportunity for a true perspective on black history. Black children have been weak in the areas of mathematics and Science. By informing children that they have a heritage rich in mathematics and science areas they will do better. Children have to understand that they have a history that is strong in these areas. Our program will provide students the opportunity to challenge the myths that have been perpetuated."

According to Dr. Gwendolyn Cook, principal of Lemmel Middle School, the major reason that young people experience behavior problems, which later result in criminal activity, is because of a poor self-concept.

"A poor self-concept grows out of a lack of knowledge about one's self and history. These young poeople see themselves as losers and as nonproductive. We must let the children know that they are descended from kings, queens, scientists and mathematicians."

Dr. Cook said that these youngsters hopefully will be motivated to act differently. Instead of preying upon society they will be productive, contributing members of the community.

According to Annette Hall, member of the organization and assistant principal at Polytechnic High School, there is nothing like this being taught in the school system. There is the social studies curriculum, but that is all.

The ABC Learning Centers are based on the same premise that other ethnic groups have taken. The Jewish people, the Vietnamese, the Koreans, the Indians have alternative schools which are designed to teach their young about their culture.

Hall declared, "I intend to be a student myself, even if I am the only adult in the class. I think it is such an exciting opportunity to learn."

The ABC Learning Centers are tentatively scheduled to open in the fall and offer two classes per week. The program is being piloted right now in church, summer, and Bible schools. The feedback information from the churches will be used to polish the program.

According to Walter Dean, a professor in the Department of Social and Behavioral Science at Community College of Baltimore, the catalyst for the program came from a national conference on Saving the Afro-American Child, held last year.

A local conference was also held at Frederick Douglass High School in October and out of this and the earlier conferences came specific recommendations. The curriculum was modified from an existing program that is being piloted in Portland, OR.

Dr. Rebecca Carroll, who is also a member of the Metropolitan Baltimore Alliance of Black School Educators, and an author of the curriculum, could not be reached for comment.

MIDSHIPMEN (left to right) Byron Williams, Lester Phillip, and Thomas Parham were graduated from the United States Naval Academy on Wednesday, May 22. Williams, a physical science major, the son of Mrs. Betty Williams of 143 47th St., NE, Washington, D.C., will become commissioned as an ensign in the navy and serve as a supply officer, Phillip, an economics major, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Randolph (Elvina) Phillip of 4151 The Alameda, Baltimore, will be commissioned an ensign and serve in the capacity of a surface line officer. Parham, an English major, the son of Navy Capt. T. David and Marion Parham of Portsmouth, VA, will be commissioned an ensign and serve as a surface line officer.

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