

With an infusion of \$250,000 announced by Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-MD) Nov. 18, the Renaissance Square project in Hyattsville can now make a major step forward.

The money will go towards the construction of 44 units of affordable housing in Hyattsville's first major arts-related development.

The city selected Housing Initiative Partnership Inc. (HIP) to purchase and redevelop the 1.7-acre property at 4307 Jefferson St. that contains an abandoned seven-story office building.

"This is terribly good news and really will do a lot for that Route 1 corridor," said HIP Executive Director Mosi Harrington.

Harrington anticipates construction would begin in the fall of 2006.

The funds announced by Hoyer were included in the FY 2006 Transportation, Treasury and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia Appropriations Conference Report in which he took a leading role in securing.

"Building affordable housing for the artistic community, coupled with the planned full-service YMCA on the site, will strengthen Hyattsville's economy," Hoyer said.

"It will make Renaissance Square a focal point for activities of all kinds, including a gallery, entertainment, health and exercise facilities, daycare and urban living."

Although Hyattsville has been an integral part of the Prince George's County Arts and Entertainment District since its inception, the building will provide tangible evidence of that involvement, Harrington said.

"This will bring Hyattsville firmly into that district with a brick and mortar project related to the arts."

He described the funding as the last piece needed to put the project together, presuming Gov. Robert Ehrlich announces the \$5 million in tax credits HIP will receive for the project over a 10-year period.

"The federal grant is an important milestone because it means the artists' housing is now fully funded," said Councilman Chris Currie (Ward 1.)

"The remaining challenges are financing structured parking and getting the YMCA's signature on a lease," he said.

"HIP has done a great job so far in moving this complicated project forward and we all hope they can put the remaining pieces together soon."

Councilwoman Paula Perry (Ward 4) said she was hopeful the housing would help attract more artists into the city.

"It's going to do a lot to enhance that area," Perry said. "There was been a lot HIP wanted to do but it was just a matter of getting that funding."

Perry cites the Mount Rainier HIP site at 3801 33rd St. as a good example of how establishing artist housing has reinvigorated the community and hopes the same dynamic will also be sparked in Hyattsville.