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## A Voice in the Wasteland

By JAMES A. WECHSLER

Amid the bleak diagnoses of this city's allegedly terminal ailments, some men tenaciously refuse to give up. A valiant example of the breed is 35-year-old William Hubbard, who heads the Center for Housing Partnership. It is a "not-for-profit corporation dedicated to rehabilitation of decayed, abandoned buildings in the wastelands of the South Bronx, as well as some other blighted areas.

His breakthroughs thus far have been admittedly modest and largely unheralded. His venture has so far renovated about 400 housing units out of the shambles of discarded structures ("more than any other developer, but just a small beginning").

The advent of the Carter Administration and more responsive signals at the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development have heightened his expectations. Hubbard's efforts have won warm endorsement from, among others, Congressman Herman Badillo, a longtime advocate of a major offensive to convert hollow shells into new havens of hope.

Hubbard bears no resemblance to the stereotype of speculator, nor are there any windfall private profits in his design for reconstruction.

He grew up in affluent Darien, attended Williams College and was graduated from Virginia Law School in 1967.

He spent a year thereafter as a VISTA volunteer in East Harlem, chiefly working as a lawyer for a group sponsoring renovated housing. It was a rough educational exercise. The experience also convinced him this was the realm in which he wanted to invest his energies.

When Congress enacted a new housing statute offering special tax advantages for housing rehabilitation, he joined with local community figures in establishing the Housing Partnership program.

And since that time Hubbard, who might have retained a comfortable refuge in a flourishing law firm, has been laboring in the ruins striving to build some new foundations.

There are two key elements in his vision. One is active community participation in renovation that essentially opens new doors to present area residents. The other is federal assistance to sustain a solid fiscal base for the enterprises. In his words:

"HUD mortgage insurance is a way of bringing large amounts of money into New York City with no outlay of the city's budget revenues. Because the insured programs are sold to investors all over the country, the HUD programs are sold to investors all over the country, the HUD programs encourage capital investment here with outside dollars.

"The investment of these mortgage dollars translates into jobs, decent housing and upgraded neighborhoods. If you were to renovate 50,000

apartments per year in the city - the target set by Lindsay in his first Administration - that would create 50,000 jobs and pump \$1.5 billion into the city's economy. Such an infusion would provide hundreds of millions in tax revenues for the city."

Hubbard's endeavors are a clear challenge to the notion of "planned shrinkage" in the city, a formula advocated by some respectable analysts who argue that such desolate territories as the South Bronx are beyond rejuvenation.

"The people who formerly lived in housing that was bulldozed do not disappear, and they certainly do not leave the city," Hubbard points out. "They simply move to new neighborhoods where the contagion continues."

In that process, as Rep. Badillo has repeatedly warned, the fugitives from the destroyed areas also tend to displace those in the already dwindling middle class who can finance flight to the suburbs.

Hubbard's rehabilitation blueprints are more than a matter of brick and mortar. As he sees it, the most promising situation (for which one model has already been created) is the rebuilding of units in a single street.

In so concentrated an area, Hubbard has found he can use the maintenance staff - superintendents, handymen and porters - to provide something more than routine services. In effect they also act as auxiliary police, fire and sanitation men. They are part of an island that acquires both pride and self-sufficiency.

It is "their block", and they will not let it become a playground for vandals and arsonists (many of the latter being fully occupied anyway serving landlords clutching for insurance on their deserted, disintegrated slums).

The newly reiterated willingness of the unemployment-ridden construction unions to lower their scale for "rehab" projects should give new impetus to Hubbard's quest for tangible support in Washington.

About three years ago William Hubbard, describing his own life's journey, told a reporter that a crucial turning point occurred in high school. He read John P. Marquand's novels and concluded that a business career would be "dreary and directionless". His ambition was to "find an area of work in which you could make a living and combine it with something that is socially significant."

There will be no vast dividends for him in the often frustrating, rehabilitation field, no matter how many bureaucratic barriers he breaks down. But he has endured rebuffs and obstructionism without any loss of spirit. Talking with him might even inspire some of those jaded characters who write and rewrite New York's obituary.