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# Seed 'planted' for housing plan

## Neighborhood renewal the aim

By JANE MARCHAM

"With only a few exceptions, housing programs have been a failure. The Neighborhood Housing Services program is one of the few exceptions."

In that tone of confidence, Margaret Jones, board chairman for the Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, introduced the budding corporation to 125 civic leaders and downtown residents at the Women's Community Building Thursday.

The new program will help downtown homeowners repair their property. It expects to open an office early in 1977. It was founded through joint efforts of city officials, local banks, and neighborhood residents.

"We're a private, non-profit corporation, not a governmental program," said Arthur Pearce, the executive director. "We're not bound by governmental red tape, and we should be able to be flexible, sensitive to the community, and move quickly."

Pearce said the program will be able to help "all homeowners," regardless of their means, in identifying the work that needs to be done, getting bids from contractors, financing through banks or its own loan fund, and monitoring actual renovation work.

Work in the eight-block target area on the city's South Side will start by early February, he said, when the first block will be chosen. Homeowners will be called upon, and the block-by-block regeneration should be as apparent here as it is in other cities, he said.

Ithaca is the smallest city in the U.S. to attempt an NMS rehabilitation program, which was a point of special pride at Thursday's lunch session.

The program now operates in 27 cities nationally and has been started in 14 more, according to Nathan Nichols, a consultant from the Urban Reinvestment Task Force who helped organize the program here. The Washington D.C. task force is an offshoot of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board.

Larger cities are impressed by Ithaca's high level of support from city government and the community, said Nichols, who predicted, "This program is going to be one of the best in the entire country."

Mrs. Jones, who became board chairman when the corporation elected its first officers this fall, introduced some 40 others who were involved in planning sessions for nearly a year. "Whenever more than one individual undertakes a task of this kind, many stars begin to shine," she said.

Mrs. Jones, administrative assistant at St. James AME Zion Church, also serves on the boards of the Southside Community



Margaret Jones

Center and the Tompkins County Economic Opportunity Corp.

Returning here to act as master of ceremonies was James Cirona, an Ithaca banker who was a member of the planning group who moved recently to Rochester. The NHS represents Ithaca's third attempt to start a home rehabilitation program, he said.

"The seed has now been planted," Cirona said. "I'm glad to be here, knowing you're doing something before real problems develop. This is bringing citizens, government and business together for a healthier city."

Operation of the Neighborhood Housing Services will be financed by city allocations of federal Community Development aid, plus donations from banks, employers and other local institutions.

# A n gift