

## For Near Northside, a 'blood' promise

Mayor and a councilman sign a deal to bring affordable new houses to area

By ARMANDO VILLAFRANCA  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

To the cheers of hundreds of Near Northside residents, Mayor Bill White and Councilman Adrian Garcia signed off on a three-part plan to bring affordable housing to a long-neglected neighborhood.

"They signed in blood so I hope it happens," said Mike Valle, a lifelong resident of area.

Valle was referring to a comment made by Garcia, who said it was fitting for him and the mayor to sign their names with a red-ink pen.

"I'm glad that this thing is in red because it symbolizes that I'm signing in blood," Garcia said. "If this doesn't happen, somebody's blood is going to spill."

About 200 people gathered Sunday at Holy Name Catholic Church to support The Metropolitan Organization's plan to preserve the

Please see TMO, Page B3

character of the working class community.

In recent years, residents and organizers have fought efforts by developers to build condos and other projects that would have raised property values, property taxes and forced residents out of their homes.

Because of its location within minutes of downtown Houston, the community was viewed as prime real estate in the ever-growing gentrification of inner-loop neighborhoods.

White, who sprinkled his speech with Spanish, said he will put his full support behind the effort to maintain the cultural and historical diversity of the neighborhood and ensure its residents are not left out of the effort.

"The promise is more than a dream," White told the crowd in Spanish.

### 60 affordable homes

TMO's plan calls for \$2 million to build 60 affordable single-family homes, a down-payment assistance program to keep mortgage payments between \$700 and \$850 a month, and another \$1 million to buy land for future homes.

The city's housing committee already has approved the plan and forwarded its recommendation to the City Council.

Garcia said the plan is a "huge step" in the right direction to preserve the community.

"It is a done deal by virtue of this particular phase, but it is really a drop in the bucket of what needs to happen, and so I am hoping that by demonstrating success and progress in this issue, it would make the city much more comfortable to do more," Garcia said.



RELATED: Justina Gonzalez, 81, a Near Northside resident for 60 years, and others cheer Sunday at Mayor White's announcement of a city commitment to prevent displacement of the neighborhood's residents.

JESSICA KOURKOUNIS FOR THE CHRONICLE

The money will be used by Avenue Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit that already has developed 42 new homes in the area.

Mary Lawler, Avenue CDC executive director, said developing new housing has become difficult as interest rates and property taxes continue to rise. The infusion of new cash, she said, can pave the way for up to 100 new housing units.

According to TMO, property

values in the area have increased by more than 26 percent between 2004 and 2005, and have increased an average of 12.4 percent each year since 2000.

Father Oscar Cantu of Holy Name said the plan was structured to make housing affordable to families with incomes between \$25,000 and \$30,000. Though the mortgage pay-

ments may appear high, he said the amount includes principal, interest and all taxes in a single payment.

avillafranca@chron.com