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Last spring, the US government launched a housing relief program, designed to help 7-9 million homeowners, but so far only 85,000 homeowners have used the program to refinance.

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## EAST SIDE

# Resource center planned for former bank site

By Deidre Williams

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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Several months after HSBC Bank closed its Fillmore-Glenwood branch, there are plans to reopen the building as a community resource center.

However, some residents are skeptical that trading a bank for a community center will be a net gain for the neighborhood.

The Community Action Organization of Erie County today announces plans for the building — now the Masten Resource Center — which include a senior citizens program and a crime-prevention initiative that was successfully implemented in Chicago.

“The whole idea is to give us a base in the community that allows us to do outreach and to try to help people see themselves as a community,” said CAO Executive Director L. Nathan Hare.

WHEN HSBC closed the branch at 1423 Fillmore Ave. on Nov. 20, it donated the building to the CAO.

Now, the resource center will be the headquarters for the Martin Luther King Jr. Better Schools/Better Neighborhoods collaborative — a partnership of various agencies — to help turn the struggling neighborhood around. HSBC also provided \$50,000 to subsidize the cost of a coordinator at the resource center, Hare said.

A state-sponsored program called SNUG (“guns” spelled backward) will operate out of the site. It is based on CeaseFire, a Chicago program that promotes alternatives to violence.

A major focus at the center also will be code enforcement, motivating homeowners to upgrade their homes and connecting them with funding resources.

Leon Holland, a former HSBC customer who lives on nearby Woeppel Street, said he is encouraged,

particularly if the programs help youth in the community.

“We sure need it, anything that can help people get jobs around here,” he said.

One critic, Glenwood/Fillmore/ Kehr Block Club President Larrone B. Williams, who fought the bank closing, remains skeptical.

“It looks good on paper,” said Williams, a member of BSNB’s board of directors. “It’s a great document. It reads like the Declaration of Independence, . . . like ‘All men are created equal.’ But when [the Founders] put it all together, we end up becoming [three-fifths] of a person. In the end, I don’t want this to become [three-fifths] of a neighborhood.”

Others, including Raymond Barr, still are angry over losing the bank, especially since a check-cashing operation opened nearby.

“We kind of miss [the bank]. We wish it could have stayed,” said Barr, an HSBC customer and a Glenwood Avenue homeowner for the last 36 years.

Judson T. Price, a longtime Winslow Avenue resident, and Williams were among neighbors who attended several community meetings late last year with CAO and BSNB about what kinds of services residents want there.

Williams wants a book program for elementary school children, and he would like to see the BSNB collaborative work with some young filmmakers.

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