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Camden to get \$11 million in housing grants

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The Camden Housing Authority will receive \$11 million in federal stimulus money to build public housing and expand assisted-living services, officials said.

The grants, announced last week, come from competitive Recovery Act money awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Of the total, \$10 million will go toward building 68 rental units in Branch Village in anticipation of the city's applying for a HOPE VI grant this fall, said Victor Figueroa, Camden's deputy executive director of housing.

HOPE VI grants are federal funding to improve severely distressed public housing.

If the grant is secured, the new units - most of them duplexes - will house residents of Branch Village, in the Centerville section, while the city demolishes and rebuilds the homes there.

If the grant is not secured, the village will have more available public housing.

A \$35 million HOPE VI grant let the city raze the crime-ridden Westfield Acres in 2000 and replace it with Baldwin's Run, now one of the city's prized development areas, Figueroa said.

More recently, a \$20 million HOPE VI grant went toward demolishing and rebuilding Roosevelt Manor, he added.

The additional \$1 million in stimulus money will be used to add 3,650 square feet to the multipurpose community room in the John F. Kennedy Tower for senior citizens at 2021 Watson St.

It also will expand the office space of assisted-living service employees who help the authority's elderly or disabled residents. Thirty employees now share three desks in two offices, said Housing Authority spokeswoman Reba Hicks.

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Camden's was one of seven New Jersey housing authorities to benefit from federal stimulus grants announced last week, according to state HUD spokesman Alan Gelfand. Newark edged out Camden with \$11.2 million. Vineland got \$656,000.

Figueroa said the city was "very excited" about the stimulus funding. Though the Housing Authority already had planned to apply for a HOPE grant, he said, the new money will clear up where the city could relocate residents to if it is able to renovate Branch Village.

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