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HUD secretary to visit Muncie

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Mel Martinez will help to break ground for the next stage of Millennium Place construction.

MUNCIE -- The new Millennium Place housing development has caught the attention of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development secretary. Mel Martinez, a native of Cuba, will be in Muncie on March 31 to inspect the current Millennium construction and to break ground for the next project.

During a press conference Monday, Congressman Mike Pence and Mayor Dan Canan welcomed the national exposure. Muncie recently obtained a \$12.3-million federal HOPE VI grant to build 244 units of affordable housing. Millennium will replace aging Munsyana Homes near downtown Muncie. Local officials plan a senior citizens housing project, Howard Square, and a new community center and urban grocery store. 'We really needed this 2 or 3 years ago,' said Lillian Dunn, a member of the Muncie Housing Authority board of commissioners. 'I hope this works out.'

The MHA will hire a coordinator to oversee the Millennium project and HOPE VI funding for it. Getting HUD's agreement to proceed could take at least 6 months. The process for spending the money 'will be done right,' Canan said. Muncie was the only Indiana city to receive HOPE VI funds from HUD this month. Twenty-eight cities nationwide -- many of them medium-sized and smaller communities -- shared \$494 million in funding. Pence lobbied on behalf of Muncie and urged federal consideration of communities other than large metropolitan housing authorities.

The MHA began building a portion of Millennium Place last year to demonstrate its ability to complete a larger project.

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