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GARDEN CITY

Nassau faces discrimination lawsuit

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Nassau County and the Village of Garden City were charged with housing discrimination against minorities in a federal lawsuit filed yesterday by a group of county residents and the Long Island chapter of a national community organization.

"We can spend our money here in Garden City, but we're not allowed to live here," said Edwina Greene, 53, of Roosevelt, a spokeswoman for the local chapter of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, or ACORN, outside the county's Department of Social Services complex in the village. "The county continues to shut us out of certain communities — those with good schools, safe

streets and decent housing," she said.

Greene said the county supports creation of new housing that minorities more easily could afford only in communities already heavily populated with blacks and Hispanics, "not in mostly white places like Garden City. That's government-sponsored segregation."

The controversy stems from the cash-strapped county's bid to sell the 25-acre Social Services office complex for about \$30 million for "luxury housing," rather than affordable housing as initially proposed.

Fred Brewington, a Hempstead lawyer for petitioners who seek to stop sale of the property for anything inconsistent with the first proposal, said Nassau, through County Executive Tho-

mas Suozzi, folded on the affordable housing option after community opposition. "The county executive has been outspoken in acknowledging Long Island's racial segregation, yet, when he has a chance to do something to reduce it, he is blind to a golden opportunity," Brewington said.

Under the initial plan, 311 affordable housing units would have been built on the site. Under a plan the village adopted in June, a smaller number of luxury single-family houses and townhouses would be built, with maybe 36 units of high-end multiple-family housing, said the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court.

Suozzi could not be reached, but Chief Deputy County Executive Anthony Cancellieri said in a statement: "Unfortunately, the sale of 101 County Seat Drive has

always been a question of dollars. . . . For every dollar we receive from the sale of this building, it's a dollar we can use to keep taxes down, which will benefit all of our County residents." Garden City Village Administrator Robert Schoelle said he had not received papers on the petition.

Although the 2000 census says 266 African-Americans are among the village's 22,000 population, the court papers said there are only 23 black households and average cost of a home is about \$650,000. One of the four individual petitioners in the lawsuit, Vic Devita, 71, of Garden City, who is white, said he joined the legal action because "I think it is of exceptional benefit to live with and learn about other peoples."