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GARDEN CITY VILLAGE

Housing lawsuit to begin Monday

BY AISHA AL-MUSLIM

aisha.al-muslim@newsday.com

The Village of Garden City will defend itself against accusations of housing discrimination against minorities in a long-awaited trial on a federal lawsuit set to begin Monday.

The 8-year-old lawsuit stems from an allegedly discriminatory and exclusionary zoning enactment adopted by Garden City on Nassau County-owned property. The trial is scheduled to run through July 8 before U.S. District Court Judge Arthur D. Spatt in Central Islip.

The case dates back to a plan in 2004 by former Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi to sell the old 25-acre Social Services office complex in Garden City for about \$30 million to a developer to build 311 affordable housing units. But Garden City Village officials changed the zoning to allow development of 90 single-family homes or 150 town houses.

"They changed their zoning for one purpose: to thwart the sale and construction of affordable housing in Garden City," the plaintiffs' civil rights attorney, Frederick Brewington of

Hempstead, said at a rally yesterday on the steps of Garden City Village Hall. "We're looking for the court to make a ruling that they did intentionally subvert the building of affordable housing through discrimination."

The failed housing plan — the property was never sold and the complex remains shuttered — was challenged by the Long Island chapter of the now-defunct group ACORN, which argued the site should be used for affordable housing. It filed suit in 2005 against Garden City and Nassau County alleging violations of the Fair Hous-

ing Act and Civil Rights Act.

"We don't comment on pending litigation," village trustee Dennis C. Donnelly said.

The nonprofit affordable housing advocacy groups New York Communities for Change and MHANY Management Inc. took over the suit when ACORN ceased operations. In February, Spatt dismissed claims that the county's housing practices toward minorities were discriminatory but allowed the lawsuit to proceed against the village.

"We want to know what Garden City is going to do?" said Mimi Pierre Johnson, a commu-

nity organizer for New York Communities for Change. "Are they going to stand and do the right thing, or are they going to continue to do what they did 10 years ago?"

A group of about 20 Communities for Change members, Hempstead Village residents, clergy, and officials from the Freeport-Roosevelt NAACP and Long Island Caribbean American Association took a "Freedom Ride" bus trip from Hempstead Village through Garden City before the rally to highlight the lack of affordable housing in the affluent and predominantly white village.