Council targets crime in City Heights

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The San Diego City Council, troubled by persistent violence and drug use in City Heights, Monday approved a pilot crime-fighting program for the troubled neighborhood.

On an unanimous vote, the council backed Councilman John Hartley's call for a coordinated effort by several city departments to reclaim the area from criminals.

"It's probably the most devastated area in my district," said Hartley, whose District 3 includes Normal Heights, Oak Park and Kensington.

Frank Gormlie, chief of the City Heights Community Development Corp., also supported the program, saying the area is "on the verge of becoming a real ghetto."

City Heights is in East San Diego, within an area bounded by University Avenue, Interstate 805, Euclid Avenue and Home Avenue.

Police officials said violent crime has dipped slightly in City Heights compared to the same period last year, but it has twice the violent crime as the city average.

From January to May of this year, there were 22.81 violent crimes per 1,000 residents in City Heights, compared to 10.35 per 1,000 citywide.

Hartley and others said the program could serve as a model for other troubled neighborhoods. The program will include:

- Removal of abandoned homes on 40th Street that are serving as havens for drug dealers and other criminals. Bulldozers are expected to sweep the area within a few months. State officials are considered funding the removal of the houses.

- More regular contact between the Police Department and Neighborhood Watch programs.

- Creation of a $146,686 after-school recreation program in an effort to draw children away from drug use and gangs.

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