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Paul J. Wolgin, Community Development Block Grant Advisory Board

Clergy's business skills questioned by city panel

Funds requested to buy retail center

BY ALLEN HOWARD

The Cincinnati Enquirer

A city advisory board Tuesday questioned the business expertise of a group of ministers planning to buy the Avondale Town Center.

Paul J. Wolgin, chairman of the Community Development Block Grant Advisory Board (CDAB), suggested the ministers expand the coalition to include more than four churches because the ministers did not have expertise in running a business. The suggestion came during a presentation before Cincinnati City Council's Finance Committee.

The coalition has joined with Cincinnati to obtain loans to buy and renovate the 13-year-old shopping center at Rockdale Avenue and Reading Road.

The city will apply for a \$1.3 million loan from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to refinance an existing bond on the development and pay off the developer's equity balance.

The coalition, a non-profit group, would buy the center with \$350,000 from the city's Community Development Block Grant Program and \$350,000 it plans to raise from private contributors. "The group is coming in with a lack of equity and lack of business expertise," Mr. Wolgin said. "It is our responsibility to advise the

city about use of the block grant funds. We merely suggested that they broaden the constituency of the coalition to provide for more longevity and stability."

The Rev. James Milton, chairman of the coalition, said it has hired CB Commercial Management to run the center.

The ministers agreed to expand their coalition, but Councilman Dwight Tillery said he was outraged that the board assumed that authority.

"We need to examine the authority of this board," he said. "Never in the seven years I have been on council has this board questioned the expertise of a group. This is meddling."

said, pointing to studies of retail recruiting across the country of grocery stores carrying healthy foods and fresh produce and pharmacies in low-income communities of color

Drug stores in the newer, more affluent suburbs.