

Lake County Land Bank seeks initial funding to tear down blighted homes (video, document)

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The Lake County Land Bank has submitted its first application to the Ohio Attorney General's Office Moving Ohio Forward Program to receive funds to help the county deal with blight.

In total, Lake County has been allocated \$1.5 million — a \$500,000 grant, and a \$1 million grant with a 50/50 local match. The funding is part of the Ohio Attorney General's \$75 million settlement with mortgage companies.

The Land Bank, known formally as the Lake County Land Reutilization Corp., initially applied to receive a \$500,000 grant with a \$150,000 local match. More funding could be applied for at a later time.

County Deputy Treasurer John Rogers, who is the Land Bank's secretary, said the application should be officially approved next week.

"We hope to utilize that as we proceed in this program and communities see what we can do," Rogers said.

When putting together the application, communities submitted lists of properties that would be prime candidates for demolition and 84 were initially identified.

Rogers said when the first \$500,000 is utilized, the Land Bank will begin to apply the local match.

Exactly how the local match will be funded has not been formalized, he said, but communities likely will pitch in and proceeds from penalties and interest on delinquent property taxes could be utilized.

Rogers estimated it will cost about \$8,000 per home that is demolished, but before that happens a property will need to be condemned by the community or a court order issued to tear it down.

“Most of these homes have been vacant for 90 days or more and they could be in foreclosure, vermin infested, have water damage and a lot of other criteria,” Rogers said.

After demolition, eyesores would be eliminated and streets should become more attractive, he said.

Officials say the immediate economic impact from eliminating these blighted structures will be to help stabilize, if not improve, the property value of the homes adjacent to the targeted structures.

“It will certainly make a difference to the property owners who live next door and the homes on the street,” Rogers said. “If you live next to one of these houses, statistically, you’re property value goes down by 10 percent.”

It is anticipated that the values of homes on a given street, their neighborhoods, the community in which they are located and ultimately the county on the whole would be positively affected.

Potential end uses of the properties include side lot expansion, urban gardens, storm water management areas and long-term land banking for infill development. In extreme cases, the land may be occupied with a new single-family home and placed back on the tax duplicate.

Perry Village submitted five parcels on Main Street to include on the Land Bank’s application. Mayor Vicky Stevens said it doesn’t mean they will be torn down without the owners’ approval. She said the homes aren’t livable and that’s why they were selected.

“We went through and picked five that are not being taken care of,” Stevens said. “It doesn’t mean they will be selected, it just means there are possible targets.”

She said homes around these blighted properties are very nice.

“It’s not fair to them to have these next door,” Stevens said.

If these homes are dealt with appropriately, it will help the community, she said.

“It’s a win-win situation for us, we get the nastiness taken care of and the village residents are happy, Stevens said.

Eastlake Mayor Ted Andrzejewski believes the Land Bank and Moving Ohio Forward Program should be helpful.

“Occasionally you will get homes that are so far gone that you can’t do anything with them but tear them down,” he said.

About two homes per year on average are torn down in Eastlake after a condemnation notice is granted in court, the mayor said. Many of these are not worth the cost to fix or are beyond repair.

“It is better for the neighborhood to tear down these homes than to leave a vacant home,” Andrzejewski said.