

# Ohio Attorney General extends statewide demolition program

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Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine has announced a six-month extension to its statewide home demolition program as Lake County prepares to take down its first set of houses in the next two weeks.

The Moving Ohio Forward program, launched in 2012 to demolish homes blighted by the housing bust, was set to expire Dec. 31. Because of requests from several counties, the program has been extended to May 31.

"By extending the deadline through late spring, we hope that counties will continue to take advantage of the funds available to them to get rid of abandoned homes that have attracted crime and are community eyesores," DeWine said in a statement.

The program is funded with \$75 million from the National Mortgage Settlement, which sued five of the nation's largest mortgage servicers: Ally, Bank of America, Citi, JP MorganChase and WellsFargo.

Each county receives money from the fund depending on the number of homes foreclosed during the housing bust. Lake County receives \$500,000 and another \$500,000 as long as the Lake County Land Bank matches the funds.

To date, more than 4,700 housing units have been demolished statewide, costing more than \$36.6 million, according to the Attorney General's office.

None of that money has been spent demolishing homes in Lake County, but state Rep. John Rogers, D-Mentor-on-the-Lake, who is working with CT Consultants to administer the program here, said that will soon change.

Several blighted homes are slated to be taken down sometime in the next two weeks - one in Mentor, one in Madison Township, three in Wickliffe and two in Mentor-on-the-Lake. Another blighted home in Fairport Harbor is likely to be added to the list because of additional damages sustained in the July 20 flash flood, which damaged or flooded many homes across west and central Lake County.

Rogers said he expects more homes from the list of 72 units to be taken down later in September, October and, if weather permits, November.

"It's nice to hear the extension is coming, but we want to get all of these done before the end of the year," Rogers said.

He said even after blighted homes are added to the county's demolition list, the owner of the property still has the opportunity to contest the demolition in front of his or her board of zoning appeals.

Those legal protections, in addition to other challenges such as contacting the property owners, have caused delays in the demolition process, he said.

Rogers said the list of homes is constantly changing, with some homes getting taken off and new ones being added. And because of the extension, those new properties have a better chance of getting completed.

Rogers said he's meeting with officials from the Attorney General's office to learn whether certain types of blighted commercial properties can be included to the county demolition list.