



Report to the Joint Committee on Government and Finance

West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative Update

Submitted Dec. 19, 2017 by Erica L. Boggess, Executive Director, West Virginia Housing Development Fund

The West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative (WVPRI) (House Bill 2810) mandates that the West Virginia Housing Development Fund allocate \$1 million per fiscal year for five years beginning July 1, 2015 and ending July 1, 2019 for a revolving loan program available to counties and municipalities for identification, purchase, removal and rehabilitation of dilapidated properties. Additionally, the WVPRI provides technical assistance to communities to acquire and/or remove dilapidated properties from their communities.

To be eligible, cities and counties must have the authority to acquire and/or demolish the property and the structures to be razed must constitute a health and safety hazard. Assistance is provided in the form of a loan.

As of Nov. 30, 2017, the Fund reports the following activity:

- July 1, 2015 - \$1 million deposit to PRI account
- July 1, 2016 - \$1 million deposit to PRI account
- July 1, 2017 - \$1 million deposit to PRI account
- WVPRI loans approved as of Dec. 31, 2017 total \$1 million

2017 Highlights - The Kanawha County Commission is using the fund's allocated by the WVHDF and an additional \$475,000 of their own funding to demolish an estimated 111 properties. To date, 25 dilapidated structures have been addressed, according to Steve Neddo, the county's planning director.

The city of Parkersburg repaid their outstanding WVPRI loan. During their utilization of the program, the city razed 13 dilapidated properties. City officials have said they will use their own funding to continue the program, but noted the WVHDF's technical assistance contributions have been important, particularly a rubric that helps determine priority level for taking down targeted buildings. In a letter to the Fund, Mike Reynolds, chair of the Urban Renewal Authority of the City of Parkersburg, wrote that WVPRI "was an invaluable resource in helping us get a program structure in place to assess and demolish

slum and blighted property. (WVPRI) has and will continue to help people rejuvenate their communities across the State of West Virginia.”

2017 Technical Assistance - Technical assistance has been provided through a contracted partnership with The WV Community Development Hub (The Hub), Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center (NBAC), and WV Land Use & Sustainable Development Law Clinic (Law Clinic) to conduct outreach efforts to promote the WVPRI and provide guidance to communities. Please see attached report.

Media mentions – WVPRI received positive coverage in the following media outlets: Charleston Gazette-Mail, The Parkersburg News and Sentinel, The Wheeling Intelligencer, WOWK, WCHS, WSAZ and the Herald-Star.

Online engagement – The Fund devoted a page on its website to WVPRI. Visitors can read an overview of the program, download the WVPRI program guide and program application and find links to agencies we partner with to help carry out this initiative. Licensed contractors, developers, nonprofit organizations, disposal companies and landfills who want to be considered for demolition opportunities can also fill out a web form to register as a resource to assist communities and municipalities. The page has been visited more than 26,000 times since it was created in July 2015.

Technical Assistance Report

The WV Community Development Hub (The Hub) and the WVU Northern WV Brownfields Assistance Center (NBAC) are providing technical assistance support to the WV Housing Development Fund (WVHDF) to assist the WVHDF in meeting the goals of the West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative (PRI).

The technical assistance performed by The Hub and NBAC allows for the WVHDF to overcome the significant barrier of engaging, educating, and assisting West Virginia communities in their efforts to address vacant, abandoned, and dilapidated properties by accessing and utilizing PRI loan funding. Specific technical assistance is provided in the form of community coaching, technical expertise to implement the necessary tools to legally address dilapidated buildings, and public engagement through individual outreach, statewide educational events and media outreach. Additionally, The Hub and NBAC coordinate this technical assistance through a project management program that is also included in the scope of work.

The purpose of this Technical Assistance Program Report is to provide the WVHDF with the status of tasks, illustrate metrics accomplished, and provide information received from potential PRI loan applicants to coordinate programmatic and community specific strategies.

Status of Task Deliverables

The status of the 2017 project deliverables for each task are provided below.

Statewide BAD Buildings Summit

The BAD Buildings Summit took place on Tuesday, November 14th, at the Erickson Alumni Center in Morgantown. The day was broken into two separate participation tracks: standard and special topics.

The following is a list of the standard topics:

- Why Can't I Just Knock Down a Building? Site Control, Management, & Reuse
- First Things First: How to Build a Team & Inventory Problem Properties
- What You Need to Know About Code & Enforcement
- Show Me the Money: Financing Property Reuse

The following is a list of the special topics:

- Site Reuse: The Case Against Parking & Parks
- Showcasing Your Vacant Properties
- Policy Solutions to Vacant, Abandoned, & Dilapidated Property Challenges
- Real Estate Crowdfunding: A Game of Redevelopment

The NBAC and Hub utilized their mailing lists to conduct significant outreach. The Hub's mailing list includes approximately 7,432 recipients and the NBAC's mailing list includes another 1,855 recipients. In advance of the Summit, 5 email blasts were sent to NBAC's list and 2 were sent to the Hub's list.

The 100 Summit attendees included participants from 34 municipalities:

Bluefield	Madison
Bridgeport	Martinsburg
Charleston	Matewan
Danville	Milton
Elkins	Morgantown
Fairmont	Princeton
Fayetteville	Ripley
Glenville	St. Albans
Grafton	Summersville
Grantsville	Thomas
Hinton	Wayne
Huntington	Weirton
Kearneysville	West Union
Keyser	Weston
Kingwood	Wheeling
Lewisburg	White Hall
London	Whitesville

The Hub's Community Development Policy Coordinator has served as the principal community coach for the PRI program. A small amount of contract coaching work was provided additionally but not to the degree originally anticipated. This program change is necessitated by the limited availability of trained community coaches available, and the success The Hub has found in leading community coaching through the organization's own staff activities. The Coordinator undertook the majority of the outreach to initiate coaching; organize, plan, and facilitate a series of small stakeholder meetings; and transition the outreach relationships to the technical assistance support provided by NBAC and the Law Clinic.

Hub Staff Engagement + Assistance

Hub staff assisted the Coordinator by serving as community liaisons for the PRI program. The role of Hub staff was to listen for dilapidated building challenges in their place-based work, discuss the offerings of the PRI technical assistance on a basic level, and connect the Coordinator with community contacts. The Coordinator kept in weekly contact with Hub staff to be informed of any contacts or other information they have gathered relating to dilapidated building challenges. A 1-hour PRI training for Hub staff was held at a staff meeting in July. Finally, the Policy Coordinator participated in The Hub's two-day community coaches training program on July 13-14 to gain tools and understanding about The Hub's approach to community coaching.

Outreach Activities: Initiating Relationships with Communities + Partners

The Policy Coordinator and partner organizations used a combination of direct and indirect outreach to initiate relationships with communities. Direct outreach was conducted to communities flagged by Hub staff as having an interest in addressing problem properties. Indirect outreach through phone calls and in-person meetings with various stakeholder groups, such as the Municipal League to increase knowledge of the PRI program and solicit ideas for potential participant communities. Articles were placed in the Municipal League's newsletter, the NBAC newsletter, and the Hub's Director of Network Communications placed articles about the program in organizational newsletters. Outreach also included tabling at events where stakeholders might be in attendance.

This strategy generated a number of potential participants and resulted in initial contact with 31 communities to begin participation in technical assistance during 2017. These municipalities include:

Alderson	Kanawha County
Bath	Matewan
Boone County	McDowell County
Bradshaw	Mercer County
Cowen	Middlebourne
Charleston (Southside)	Milton
Danville	Moundsville
Friendly	Montgomery
Gassaway	New Martinsville
Glen Dale	Paden City
Grafton	Point Pleasant
Hamlin	Raleigh County

Randolph County

St. Albans

Ravenswood

West Union

Sistersville

Wellsburg

Smithers

Stakeholder Meetings

Once a community contact is interested in the PRI technical assistance, the Coordinator organizes, plans, and facilitates a series of small stakeholder meetings. The Coordinator will complete a screening phone call with community contacts. During this call, the Coordinator will learn about existing efforts to address problem properties, opportunities for participation in technical assistance, and potential challenges to create a sustainable program in order to determine if the community would be a good fit for PRI technical assistance. The Coordinator will explain the PRI technical assistance services and process. These Stakeholder meetings were held with 11 communities:

Bath

Paden City

Danville

Point Pleasant

Friendly

Ravenswood

Mercer County - Law Clinic

Sistersville

Middlebourne

St. Albans

New Martinsville

Ongoing Coaching and Transition to technical assistance:

Of these communities, four have successfully transitioned into the technical assistance provided by NBAC during 2017. This does not include any communities which were sent a retainer by the Law Clinic or were transitioned into the technical assistance provided by the Law Clinic. The municipalities are Bath, Point Pleasant, Ravenswood and St. Albans

In addition to communities which have successfully transitioned to technical assistance, the Hub is currently providing ongoing coaching to communities which have not yet been able to transition to technical assistance. These communities include: Alderson, Grafton, McDowell County and Randolph County.

Communities Engaged in BAD Buildings Program Technical Assistance

Currently, there are 9 communities are engaged in the technical assistance provided through NBAC and their BAD Buildings Program. It should be noted that many of the communities listed above are in the process of being transitioned into technical assistance and it is likely that several more will be added early in 2018. They include Bath, Berkeley Springs, Danville, Davis, Point Pleasant, Ravenswood, St. Albans, Thomas and Weston.

Loan Applications

There are two communities currently moving to complete a loan application and two communities which have completed a loan application.

Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic, WVU College of Law

The primary activity of the law clinic relates to reviewing ordinances, drafting ordinances and other legal documents, and addressing specific legal questions to promote the effective demolition of properties under WVPRI. In July of 2017, the state statute governing the regulation of unsafe buildings was amended. Attorneys at the Land Use Clinic spent significant time working with attorneys in the Association of Municipal Attorneys to understand and explain changes to Chapter 8, Section 12 of the West Virginia Code.

Benefits of this new legislation include an opportunity for communities that cannot afford a building inspector to have a process to address severely dilapidated properties while providing robust due process protections to property owners. The law clinic worked with a number of communities to address dilapidated buildings and update or review existing property ordinances. Those communities included Marlinton, Smithers, Beverly, Bradshaw, Charleston, Cowen, Davis, Gassaway, Madison, Moundsville, Ravenswood and White Sulphur Springs.

Summary

The PRI technical assistance partners see the PRI program as a useful mechanism to address dilapidated property challenges in West Virginia communities. PRI has the potential to serve as major catalyst for dilapidated property mitigation if program remains responsive to identified improvement needs and technical assistance partnership remains intact.

