

Report to the Joint Committee on Government and Finance

West Virginia Property Rescue Initiative Update

Submitted December 20, 2019 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 (the 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 November 30, 2019, the Fund reports the following activity:

- July 1, 2015 - \$1 million deposit to the PRI account
- July 1, 2016 - \$1 million deposit to the PRI account
- July 1, 2017 - \$1 million deposit to the PRI account
- July 1, 2018 - \$1 million deposit to the PRI account
- July 1, 2019 - \$1 million deposit to the PRI account

2019 Technical Assistance has been provided through a contracted partnership with 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. These outreach efforts have included community meetings, presentations at conferences and workshops, outreach support from partner organizations and direct calls with municipalities.

Four organizations were awarded help with code enforcement and technical assistance services to help take down blighted and dangerous buildings through WVPRI. The Fund allocated technical assistance grants below in fiscal year 2019.

Borrower	Award
The Upper Kanawha Valley Strategic Initiative Council	\$10,000
The Randolph County Commission	\$10,000
The City of Parsons	\$10,000
The City of Hinton	\$10,000
Total	\$40,000

To be considered an eligible borrower for the technical assistance grants, the applicant must have met the following criteria:

- Populations of up to 20,000 (cities) and 50,000 (counties)

- Receiving technical assistance as part of the Property Rescue Initiative Program
- Identified by the Fund or its contracted partners under the technical assistance portion of the Property Rescue Initiative Program as an entity with a feasible code enforcement strategy
- Compliance with all applicable state and local laws relating to the adoption of the code or ordinance (An opinion by a licensed attorney is required when a community is requesting funds to adopt a new code or ordinance)
- Have the authority to enter into a binding debt obligation for the term of the loan (cities or counties may authorize other organizations to apply for a Program loan on their behalf)

The Kanawha County Commission, which received a \$475,000 WVPRI loan in 2017, razed 25 properties in 2017, 33 properties in 2018 and 64 properties in 2019. Steve Neddo, who serves as the county's planning director, noted that the total number of properties affected by the loan was higher. Neddo said upwards of 20 additional properties that were slated to come down were either rehabilitated or demolished by the owner or owners.

In 2019, the Woodlands Group received a \$120,000 WVPRI loan through the program. The group is partnering with the city of Elkins and has already demolished one building.

Media and Online Engagement- The Fund continues to promote its Impact Video to reflect its partnership with Kanawha County. This video is posted on our YouTube channel and has been shared many times through the Fund's Facebook and Twitter channels. The Fund continues to maintain a page devoted to WVPRI on its website. Visitors can read more about the program, download the program guide and program application and find links to agencies the Fund partners 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 and a resource to assist communities. The page has been visited more than 45,000 times since it was created in 2015. This year, the program was also featured in the Inter-Mountain, the paper of record in Elkins.

Status of WVPRI in 2019

Law Clinic Activities

Significant time was dedicated to the community of Bradshaw to conduct title opinions. The Law Clinic finalized title opinions for 9 properties with potential for demolition with the Town of Bradshaw.

Review of Ordinances with the following communities:

- Bath
- Gauley Bridge
- Hillsboro
- Keyser
- Montgomery
- Oceana
- Pax
- Randolph County
- Richwood
- Romney
- Smithers
- Wellsburg

Presentations:

- Mountain State Land Use Academy , May 15, 2019
Leveraging Tax Liens and Land Banks
- West Virginia Housing Conference, September 18- 20, 2019
Revitalization – Introduction to Property Tax Lien Sales
Affordable Housing and Community Planning
Different Roles for Different Entities in the World of Dilapidated Buildings
- Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference, October 2-4, 2019
Lessons from Rural America to Inform Urban Revitalization

Northern West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center (NBAC) Activities

Community Meetings Facilitated:

- McMechen
- Davis
- Danville
- Mullens
- Ripley
- Piedmont
- Sistersville
- Hinton
- Wardensville
- Huntington
- Sistersville 6
- Paw Paw
- New Martinsville
- Pineville
- Oak Hill
- Mineral County

Presentations:

Community Educational Presentations – 16

Conference Presentations

- Community Leadership Academy – May 2, 2019
- Solid Waste Authority Conference – October 21, 2019
- WV Brownfields Conference – September 11, 2019

Partnership Formed:

- WV Municipal League

BAD Buildings Teams Formed:

- New Martinsville
- Ripley

- Sistersville
- Hinton

BAD Inventories Completed/Prioritized:

- Ripley
- Sistersville

BAD Redevelopment Plans Completed:

- Ripley
- Piedmont
- McMechen